

FACTFILE:

GCSE

MUSIC

FILM MUSIC



Film Music

Background

The idea of music as an accompaniment to film came about in the silent film era. Originally it was used as a way to cover the sound that the projector would make when watching a silent film and as a way to create a particular mood or atmosphere for the action taking place. Often in house pianists or an orchestra would play at the venue either improvising or reading from a score. Silent films soon became obsolete as production and technology allowed for recorded sound to be synchronised with the film. These types of films were called sound films, talking picture or 'talkies'. In the beginning, the music used was often western classical compositions (e.g. Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries* in *Birth of a Nation*, 1915) but in the 1930's the role of the film composer was emerging and original compositions were made as part of the film's narrative (e.g. Max Steiner's score to *King Kong*, 1933). Choice of instrumentation is very important in film music as it contributes to the style and genre of the film, changing throughout the decades.

Film Music Chronology

1900s – 1920s

The silent movie era. Music was introduced to accompany film by live performances by a pianist or orchestra.

Late 1920s

Introduction of the 'talking picture' and the use of the late Romantic idea of the leitmotif.

1930s – 1960s

The 'Golden Age' of film music begins. Use of 'mickey mousing' technique to synchronise what is happening on screen with the music.

E.g. *Mickey Mouse – The Mad Doctor* scene

1933

– Max Steiner composed one of the first original film scores in *King Kong* using themes and leitmotifs.

E.g. Max Steiner – *King Kong* chromatic theme, 1933

1940s

Film Noir became popular in this decade. Composers began experimenting with dissonance and atonality

E.g. David Raskin – theme from *Laura*, 1944

1950s and 1960s

Henry Mancini composed the theme tune for the TV show *Peter Gunn* (1958) with use of jazz elements, which was to become quite commonplace in orchestral film compositions over the next decade or so.

The Western Film was at its peak during this time.

E.g. Elmer Bernstein – *The Magnificent Seven*, 1960; Ennio Morricone – *The Good the Bad and the Ugly* theme, 1966

War films were at their peak during these two decades

E.g. Eric Coates – *The Dam Busters*, 1954; Elmer Bernstein – *The Great Escape*, 1963

1960s

Experimental film music was becoming more popular during this decade. Film composers would often use orchestral instruments in unusual ways such as playing the strings with the back of the bow (*col legno*).

Composers would use dissonance to create an eerie atmosphere.

E.g. Theme from Alfred Hitchcock's film *Psycho* – Bernard Herrmann

1970s

Classical orchestral scoring returns with the use of themes and leitmotifs.

E.g. John Williams – *Jaws* theme (1975) and *Superman* theme (1978).

1980s

Introduction of the use of synthesisers to orchestral scoring.

E.g. Danny Elfman – *Beetlejuice* theme, 1988

Early 1990s

Introduction of software programmes such as Cubase and Pro Tools aids in the compositional process for film composers – music is now being composed on a computer before being performed and recorded by an orchestra.

2000s – present

Orchestration for films is very dependent on genre. Ranging from symphonic orchestras to minimal electronic instruments, film composing is more experimental and less restricted.

Non classical composers begin to score orchestral music for films.

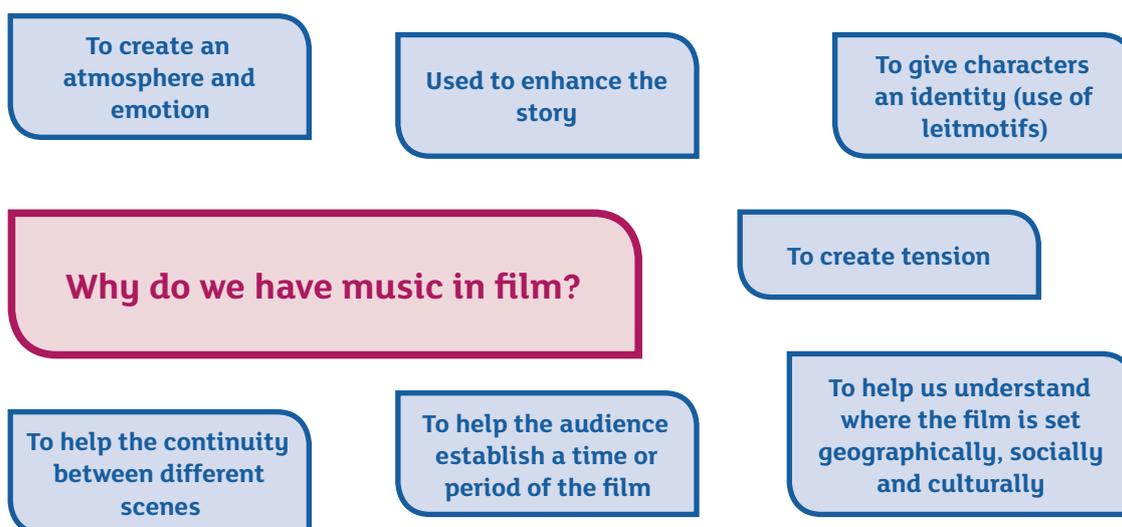
E.g. Daft Punk – *Tron: Legacy*, 2010; Trent Reznor – *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, 2011

Musical features of Orchestral Film Music

Melody:	leitmotif, ostinato, chromaticism, repetition, chromaticism, major, minor, modal, sequence
Harmony:	diatonic harmony, consonance, dissonance, tone clusters
Tonality:	major, minor, atonal
Timbre:	standard playing techniques, vibrato, glissando, col legno, arco, pizzicato, flutter-tonguing, adding electronic instruments to orchestral scoring
Texture:	unison, monophonic, homophonic, polyphonic, contrapuntal, imitation

Film Music Glossary

Mickey Mousing:	a technique used in film that synchronises the music to what is happening in the scene
Leitmotif:	a musical theme that recurs throughout a film to represent a particular character, place or situation [e.g. <i>The Imperial March</i> (Darth Vader Theme) – <i>Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back</i> , 1980]
Orchestration:	The choice of instruments used in a film
Pedal:	A note that is sustained or repeated throughout the music
Ground Bass:	A short phrase played in the bass that is repeated many times
Ostinato:	A repeated pattern or phrase
Repetition:	used in film music as a way of establishing a motif or idea
Silence:	used for dramatic effect
Dissonance:	lack of harmony, clashing notes. Often used in film music to make the audience feel uneasy.



The second *Dam Busters* theme – theme (b) – played by violins



Analysis

Time	Content
0.00	The music begins quietly with a sustained dominant pedal (G) on low brass.
0.05	A sense of excitement is created by the following means: (i) a fragmented version of the main <i>Dam Busters</i> theme is introduced in diminution, (ii) this is treated in an ascending sequence, moving from lower strings into the violins, (iii) the pedal point continues and there is a dramatic <i>crescendo</i> to <i>fortissimo</i> .
0.12	Cymbal crashes and trumpet fanfares emphasise the feeling of an announcement as the harmonies alternate between G major and F major over the G pedal. The two-semiquaver pattern anticipates the rhythm of the quick march theme which follows.
0.20	The first quick march theme (in C major) begins with a chromatic semiquaver upbeat. Its main features include falling and rising triadic movement and a repeated auxiliary note idea in dotted rhythm. The melody is played by strings and woodwind with a <i>pizzicato</i> countermelody in the cellos and a prominent triangle part.
0.27	The middle section of this tune contains a descending sequence and modulates to the dominant (G major). The glockenspiel is introduced.
0.35	The first phrase (0.20) returns but goes off in a different direction (F minor) ending with a series of rising thirds which are used in a descending sequence. The perfect cadence which ends this theme is followed by a single stroke on a suspended cymbal.
0.50	The first half of the <i>Dam Busters</i> theme is played <i>legato</i> by strings with countermelodies supplied by woodwind and horn. The key is now F major (the subdominant) but a modulation to its dominant (C) occurs at the end of this section.
1.06	The second part of this theme returns to its tonic key via D minor.
1.21	A trumpet fanfare – again containing the two-semiquaver motif – leads to a fully scored repeat of the A and B sections with brass to the fore and punctuated by cymbal crashes.
1.52	The first 28 bars of the quick march theme are repeated in its original key.
2.18	The end of this theme is fragmented and extended upwards while the bass moves down in contrary motion.
2.26	The introductory material (0.05) returns but this time concludes with an impressive <i>rallentando molto</i> .
2.43	The <i>Dam Busters</i> march is now given a stately, full orchestra treatment marked <i>Grandioso</i> which is enhanced with cymbal crashes and snare drum rolls. The key is now the tonic (C major) rather than the subdominant (F major).
3.23	An interrupted cadence causes a momentary diversion and further tension is created through the use of augmentation at the end of the phrase.
3.42	The expected perfect cadence is further delayed by a brief coda where the opening bars of the <i>Dam Busters</i> theme occurs with F major and then F minor harmonisation. This is eventually resolved in the final C major chord in which the timpani accentuate the tonic and dominant.

Further listening:

Coates: *London Suite*

Walton: *Orb and Sceptre*



John Williams: *Superman*, Main Theme

Background:

John Williams (b. 1932) is a classically trained pianist and composer who has been responsible for the iconic scores for many of the greatest box office hits of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Having already enjoyed great success with the music for *Jaws* and *Star Wars*, Williams cemented his position as one of the great film composers of all time with the score for *Superman* in 1978.

Features:

- Melody:** An essential skill of the film composer is the ability to come up with a theme which encapsulates the personality of a character and helps to identify them throughout the story. This *Leitmotif* technique was pioneered by Richard Wagner in his massive music dramas and is also evident in *Superman*, e.g. the heroic fanfare-like theme which occurs at the beginning. Based around the notes of the tonic triad and concentrating on the intervals of the fourth and fifth, it is comparable to the main themes of other John Williams scores such as *Indiana Jones* and *Jurassic Park*.
- Harmony:** Williams draws on many Romantic and modern styles and the influence of composers as diverse as Richard Strauss, Walton and Prokofiev is evident in his music. Although his harmonies are essentially tonal, he avoids predictability by adding unprepared or unresolved dissonances. The cadence which occurs at the end of the first statement of the march theme is an illustration: the F major chord on the last beat of the bar (b. 25) is contradicted by G in the bass. Sometimes chords are constructed using fourths (G, C, F) rather than thirds (G, B, D) or major 7^{ths} are added to ordinary chords (C, E, G, B). The use of quartal harmony and dissonance is a characteristic feature of modern music.
- Orchestration:** This piece is scored for an extended modern symphony orchestra including additional instruments such as piccolo, bass clarinet, glockenspiel and harp. Prominent use of brass and percussion is a feature of the film scores by John Williams.
- Tonality:** C major (ends in G major)
- Time signature:** 4/4 alternating with 12/8
- Ostinato:** When a rhythm or pattern of pitches is repeated throughout a passage of music.

Principal themes:

Opening fanfare – theme (a)



March – theme (b)

Musical notation for the March theme (b). It consists of two staves of music in treble clef. The first staff begins with a 3-measure rest, followed by a triplet of eighth notes (G4, A4, B4). The time signature is 12/8. The melody continues with quarter notes (B4, A4), eighth notes (G4, F4), and quarter notes (E4, D4). The second staff continues the melody with quarter notes (C4, B3), eighth notes (A3, G3), quarter notes (F3, E3), and quarter notes (D3, C3).

Love theme – theme (c)

Musical notation for the Love theme (c). It consists of a single staff of music in treble clef. The number 10 is written above the first measure. The melody starts with a half note (G4), followed by quarter notes (A4, B4), a half note (C5), and a quarter note (B4). The melody continues with quarter notes (A4, G4), eighth notes (F4, E4), quarter notes (D4, C4), and quarter notes (B3, A3). The piece concludes with a series of eighth notes (G3, F3, E3, D3, C3, B2, A2, G2).

Analysis:

N.B Although the bar numbers refer to the piano score, this is for illustrative purposes only as the piano copy does not match the orchestral concert version.

Bar	Time	Content
1	0.00	A tonic pedal point is provided by a timpani roll over which the fanfare theme (a) is played by trumpets and horns. A cymbal crash coincides with the highest note (E) which falls by step to the note below.
5	0.13	The fanfare is repeated with trombones added an octave lower. Syncopated rhythm and an <i>accelerando</i> at the end lead into the faster march section.
8	0.22	The rhythmic ostinato on lower strings, bass clarinet and tuba anticipates the 12/8 time signature of the march. This ostinato, which moves from the note C to F and eventually G, creates suspense. A trumpet fanfare consisting of rising fourths (0.34) also generates a feeling of anticipation.
10	0.43	The march theme (b) is linked to the opening fanfare in so far as the rising fifth also features prominently. It is played by trumpets and is punctuated with full orchestral chords, cymbal crashes, triangle rolls and fragments of the ostinato rhythm (0.22) in lower strings and timpani. The first 8 bars finish with a rapid rising scale in the violins.
18	0.59	Theme (b) is repeated with the added brightness of the glockenspiel and scales in the woodwind which are doubled by the piccolo.
26	1.14	The next part of the theme (cellos) begins with three two-bar phrases which all start the same but then develop the falling second and triplet rhythm of the fanfare in different ways.
34	1.30	The horns are added when the same three phrases are repeated this time interspersed with cymbal crashes and references to the ostinato rhythm in the trumpets.
40	1.41	Rising arpeggios on the trumpets are combined with the dotted rhythm from the march theme. The harmonies are mainly major triads (Db, C and F) to which dissonant major sevenths have been added. Brilliant woodwind scales are also featured.
45	1.52	The harmony changes suddenly to Db major over Gb in the bass thereby producing further tension.
48	1.57	Resolution of this clash is further delayed by the quartal chord G, C, F which could also be interpreted as a G7 chord with the third suspended.
50	2.01	The opening fanfare – theme (a) returns with full orchestration including rising woodwind scales.
	2.16	A new section (not in the piano version) begins in F major. The rising legato melody in the horns is the love theme – theme (c) -though the ostinato rhythm is still present in the string background.
	2.35	The continuation of this theme in the woodwind (oboes and clarinets in octaves) is an ascending sequence while the violin countermelody imitates fragments of the melody. Harp arpeggios form part of the orchestral accompaniment.
	2.47	The falling seconds which were part of themes (a) and (b) are developed using syncopation, repetition and descending sequence.
	2.51	The ostinato rhythm (first heard at 0.22) now returns on the note Bb.
	2.54	The march – theme (b) – is brought back in the key of Bb major i.e. a tone lower than before. It has a new ostinato accompaniment made up of a four-note descending scale in the lowest instruments of the orchestra.



James Horner: *The Amazing Spider-Man*, Main Title – ‘Young Peter’

Background:

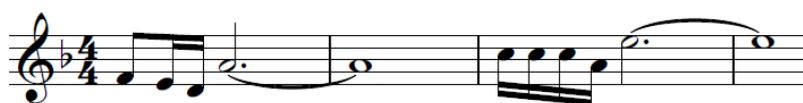
Like John Williams, James Horner (1953–2015) had a productive relationship with the film industry composing theme songs and scores for a succession of movie blockbusters including *Star Trek II* and *III*, *Apollo 13* and *Titanic*. *The Amazing Spider-Man* was one of his last films (he died in a plane crash in June 2015) and the main title captures both the loneliness of the teenage Peter Parker and also hints at the strangeness of his transition to Spider Man.

Features:

- Melody:** Although the key signature suggests D minor, the principal melody has a modal feel due to the presence of C natural rather than the raised leading note C sharp.
- Harmony:** The harmonic language is basically tonal but dissonance is also included (e.g. the opening bars) to create a mood of apprehension. There are many sudden deviations to unrelated chords and modulations to remote keys. One progression which Horner uses several times (e.g. bb. 8–9) involves moving between two unrelated triads (in this case E minor and Eb major) which have one note (G) in common.
- Orchestration:** Horner is typical of many modern film music composers in that he combines conventional instruments and voices with electronically generated effects and digital samples. This has been made possible by advances in music technology in recent years.
- Tonality:** D minor/ Dorian mode on D
- Time signature:** 4/4, irregular and changing changing metre in the faster section (3.17).

Principal themes:

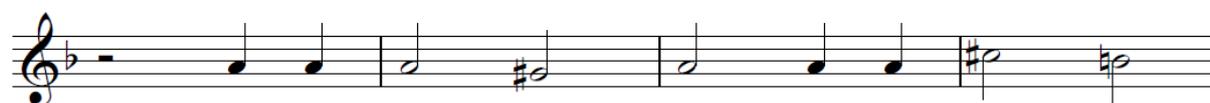
Trumpet solo – theme (a) – 0.16



Treble solo – theme (a1) – 1.48



Piano solo – theme (b) – 4.10



Analysis:

N.B. Although the bar numbers refer to the piano score, this is for illustrative purposes only as the piano copy ends at 2.52.

Bar	Time	Content
1	0.00	The opening discords on high strings evolve via a <i>glissando</i> effect into wordless male vocals.
3	0.13	These vocals continue against a background of synthesised sound which produce a continuous semiquaver rhythm. The piano starts an ostinato pattern based on falling D minor arpeggios.
4	0.16	As the electronic and vocal sounds fade in and out, a solo trumpet enters with the main melody – theme (a). This uses the quaver/2 semiquavers rhythm of the piano ostinato as passing notes between the third and root of the D minor triad. Effects such the mark tree contribute to the otherworldly atmosphere.
9	0.33	The music sidesteps to Eb major and a transposed version of the trumpet melody is developed upwards.
15	0.52	The electronic material becomes more prominent and a roll on suspended cymbal highlights the return of D minor and the arpeggio ostinato.
17	0.58	A sudden shift of tonality to Ab major sees the return of the trumpet melody (0.33) now a fourth higher.
21	1.12	Another unforeseen change of key – this time to Cb major. The electronic effects are still present while the trumpet has a new ascending triadic phrase in dotted rhythm.
25	1.24	The harmonies in the strings alternate between Bb minor and Gb major as the dotted rhythm is taken up by horn and then returns in the trumpet.
31	1.42	A <i>diminuendo</i> on a held A major chord prepares for the return of D minor.
33	1.48	The piano resumes its arpeggios (0.13) which now form the accompaniment to a solo boy treble who sings (wordlessly) a version of the melody originally given to the trumpet at 0.16 – theme (a1). The semiquaver passing notes are replaced by dotted rhythm and high register violins add a countermelody.
38	2.05	A hint of descending sequence is present and the music diverts to Eb major as before (0.33). A scale in the voice rises to high A which coincides with the return of the tonic key.
41	2.15	<i>Crescendos</i> and <i>diminuendos</i> accentuate the oscillation between the unrelated triads of D minor and Db major.
45	2.31	A three-bar progression (Ab major – C minor – Cb major) is used in a descending sequence while the three-note motif in the violins is developed by sequence and inversion.
	2.52	The piano has a falling chromatic passage and the male vocals return – the downward <i>glissando</i> acting as a transition to the next section.
	2.56	The string texture, consisting mainly of the three-note figure in strings (2.31) becomes very dissonant. The tempo increases as the abrupt motif in the cellos is extended upwards.
	3.17	A suspended cymbal roll marks the beginning of a new section which, although in a much faster tempo, is still basically in D minor. The irregular and changing metre is driven by a prominent percussion section (including hi-hat and synthesised drum sounds) and the continuous quaver movement in the piano.

Bar	Time	Content
	3.33	Dissonances are caused by the overlapping of different ostinato patterns in piano and strings.
	3.43	The violins have a syncopated motif in octaves while constant quaver movement is maintained in the piano part.
	3.53	A brass <i>crescendo</i> leads into the next section which starts in G# minor. The repeated semiquaver rhythm in the strings is a distinctive motif as a regular pulse is restored.
	4.00	A gradual <i>diminuendo</i> and <i>rallentando</i> finishes on the note D.
	4.05	The arpeggio ostinato (0.12) returns in the piano with left hand harmonisation.
	4.10	Rather than returning to theme (a) a new expressive melody – theme (b) – is presented by solo piano in octaves accompanied by lower strings.
	4.39	Violins and keyboards using synthesised string tone sustain a D minor chord while the repeated arpeggios persist in the piano. Long <i>diminuendo</i> and fade to end.

Further listening:

James Horner: *Titanic*

James Horner: *Apollo 13*

