

Film Music

Area of study 3 - WJEC GCSE Music

Some film **SOUNDTRACKS** include specially composed **SCORES**, either for orchestra (e.g. composers like John Williams, Ennio Morricone) or songs written especially for the film (e.g. Disney films). Other films use pre-existing music e.g. popular songs from the era/place in which the film is set.

STRINGS

- Violin
- Cello
- Viola
- Double bass
- Harp

WOODWIND

- Flute
- Clarinet
- Oboe
- Bassoon
- Saxophone

BRASS

- Trumpet
- Trombone
- French horn
- Tuba

KEYBOARDS

- Piano
- Electronic keyboard
- Harpsichord
- Organ
- Synthesizer

PERCUSSION

- Bass drum
- Snare drum
- Triangle
- Cymbal
- Drum kit (untuned)
- Timpani
- Glockenspiel
- Xylophone (tuned)

OTHER

- Electric guitar
- Bass guitar
- Spanish/classical guitar
- Traditional world instruments

Musical elements

Film composers use the **MUSICAL ELEMENTS** (tempo, texture, dynamics, timbre, tonality, rhythm, melody, harmony) to create mood and atmosphere to help to tell the story and enhance the action.

For example:

In a **sad, reflective scene**, a composer might use slow tempo, minor tonality, soft dynamics, legato, homophonic texture, long sustained notes, and a conjunct melody.

An **exciting car chase scene** in a thriller might have a fast tempo, busy, polyphonic texture, dissonant chords, loud dynamics, syncopated rhythms, a disjunct melody and short riffs.

A scene where the **superhero 'saves the day'** might use a major tonality, brass fanfares, loud dynamics, accents, 4^{ths} and 5^{ths} (intervals).

Composers will often use **CONTRASTS** to create effect (e.g. using a wide range of pitch from very high to very low).

Intervals

Film composers often use intervals to create a particular effect (e.g. a rising perfect 4th sounds 'heroic', and a semitone can sound 'menacing').

An **interval** is the distance between two notes.



Rising interval: moving upwards (ascending)

Falling interval: moving downwards (descending)

Specific instrumental terms

Pizzicato	Plucking the strings.
Divisi	Two parts sharing the same musical line.
Double stopping	Playing two strings at the same time.
Arco	Using a bow to play a stringed instrument.
Tremolo	A 'trembling' effect, moving rapidly on the same note or between two chords (e.g. using the bow rapidly back and forth).
Tongued	A technique to make the notes sound separated (woodwind/brass).
Slurred	Notes are played smoothly.
Muted	Using a mute to change/dampen the sound (brass/strings).
Drum roll	Notes/beats in rapid succession.
Glissando	A rapid glide over the notes.
Trill	Alternating rapidly between two notes.
Vibrato	Making the notes 'wobble' up and down for expression.

Composers also use:

Theme	The main tune/melody.
Motif	A short musical idea (melodic or rhythmic).
Leitmotif	A recurring musical idea linked to a character/object or place (e.g. Darth Vader's motif in Star Wars).
Underscoring	Music playing underneath the dialogue.
Scalic	Melody follows the notes of a scale.
Triadic	Melody moves around the notes of a triad.
Fanfare	Short tune often played by brass instruments, to announce someone/something important; based on the pitches of a chord.
Pedal note	A long, sustained note, usually in the bass/lower notes.
Ostinato/riff	A short, repeated pattern.
Conjunct	The melody moves by step.
Disjunct	The melody moves with leaps/intervals.
Consonant harmony	Sounds 'good' together.
Dissonant harmony	Sounds 'clashy'.
Chromatic harmony	Uses lots of semitones/accidentals that's not in the home key.
Minimalism	A style of music using repetition of short phrases which change gradually over time.