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Research in Context (Music and Film Cluster)

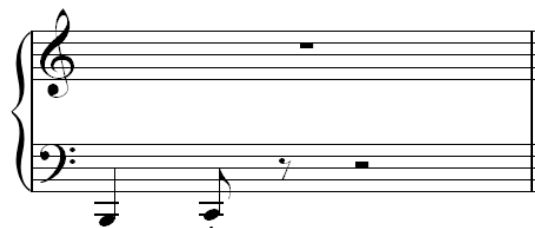
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Question 2: Using at least three examples, consider how storytellers have utilised film and/or music/sound design to explore at least one of the following: sublime, weird & eerie, transformation conflict, the self, silence, leitmotifs, symbolism, archetypes.

"You never write a theme for a movie thinking, 'This will live forever'." - John Williams

Leitmotifs are a collection of musical phrases which are repetitive and short and can follow a mood, atmosphere, idea or be associated with a person (in Disney's case a character). Leitmotifs can be manipulated to suit different circumstances and themes by having their pitch, rhythm or instrumentation altered as well as the key to accommodate for moods (i.e., major or minor key) therefore allowing the leitmotif to evolve with the character/idea it's representing. The words *leit* and *motif* come from German meaning 'leading' and 'motive' and stems from Wagnerian opera. It is important to note that leitmotifs are not only used within opera or music/film, the use of the leitmotif in recent years has stemmed as far as Broadway musicals, TV (considerably television series where there are reoccurring characters) and in video game music. Bethoven used the first four notes of his Fifth symphony as a leitmotif on multiple occasions throughout the symphony. Leitmotifs can be their own individual sound or be adapted from a song/score already in a film/production. Potentially the most recognised leitmotif is John Williams' shark leitmotif in the Jaws film series as well as the James Bond leitmotif which was originally used in Dr.No (1962) and has been used in many James Bond films since being wrote in 1962. Leitmotifs such as these are instantly recognisable but also differ. The Jaws leitmotif keeps true to itself and consistent with its key whereas the James Bond leitmotif alters key and pace throughout use in the James Bond films to allow the leitmotif to suit the scene, atmosphere and mood whilst always remaining orchestral. I have included these two examples due to them showing two different sides to leitmotifs. John Williams's Jaws leitmotif is made up of just two notes, F and F sharp which are played at a low octave on a cello in succession, John Williams utilised the suspense of the incoming shark to push forward this leitmotif which adds an audio suspense aspect to something that is currently approaching and unknown visually, this leitmotif was created to induce suspense and warn of a threat for the viewer.



Jaws leitmotif score by John Williams

John Williams is also responsible for (and as well as being known as possibly the master of leitmotifs) the Star Wars score and creating the widely recognisable Imperial March. The Imperial March is the leitmotif that gives life to Darth Vader and his troops life before they are even visible on screen. The imperial March leitmotif has been used for Darth Vader during every appearance of

his since 1977. It works in a similar way to the Jaws theme in the fact that the leitmotif is used before the character is present on screen therefore setting a warning sign that Darth Vader and his troops are approaching. Due to different viewers taste 's in film or the characters, and because of how popular the Star Wars film franchise is, this leitmotif has also evolved with the viewing and can set excitement instead of what would previously been fear due to this leitmotif indicating action is approaching and potentially a big movie scene with a villain.

John Williams approach with leitmotifs was to assign a character with presence without the character being present yet which allows the viewers/listeners mind to run wild with thought of suspense and anticipation, especially upon first viewing.

John Williams has previously spoke about his desires regarding themes he writes for different characters and speaking about Star Wars he said *"When we see Rey, we want to hear Rey's theme, and when the Force is referred to or felt, we want to hear the Force theme, and so on. We hope that these references make sense to the fans and make the aural connections that we want them to have."* therefore admitting himself that his use of leitmotif is to engage the audience and make connections with the characters and music.

Although leitmotifs are heard throughout film, they are non-diegetic. This means that us, the viewers/listeners, can hear this music but, for example, the characters of the film this music cannot be heard of it as it is not a part of their world but rather added post-production for the viewer and to enhance story telling without interrupting the characters world. This is in comparison to diegetic sound which is 'actual' sound within a film, such as footsteps or voices on screen.

An incredibly clever use of a leitmotif was used in The Wizard of Oz (1939). Leitmotifs are predominantly used to associate the audience with a character/idea, but the Wizard of Oz uses a leitmotif to connect two characters of the same actor within one film. The characters Mrs. Gulch (only introduced at the start of the film as a villain figure briefly) and the Wicked Witch of the West are both portrayed by the same actor, that being Margaret Hamilton, and these characters are linked in film using music. A leitmotif introduced Mrs. Gulch to the viewer and then as the story progresses the same leitmotif follows the Wicked Witch of the West therefore linking the two characters together musically for the viewer to notice and make the connection between the two who are a part of Dorothy's two world during the film, Kansas and Oz.

Film makers don't just utilise their films to explore leitmotifs, but also utilise leitmotifs to create continuity within a film franchise (think lord of the rings, Harry Potter). The same leitmotifs that are used in the first film Harry Potter and Philosopher's Stone (2001) are used throughout the whole film franchises 8 films. Not only does this give a sense of continuity but it also reminds the viewer of the previous film they have watched and will bring back whatever feelings the viewer had when they viewed the film.

"There's a terrific power to music. You can run any of these pictures and they'd be dragging and boring, but the minute you put music behind them, they have life and vitality they don't get any other way." -**Walt Disney**

Disney scores accommodate for a whole film, whether you're listening or not there is always music there with rare use of silence and as shown in the quote from Walt Disney himself the use of music in Disney productions range from the film's score, key characters songs, music that follow movement and leitmotifs. Whatever is happening in a Disney film there is always music to accompany it, think 'Disney Princess running down a set of stairs' and one can automatically imagine piano keys being hit in a descending order, or a character falling accompanied by some messy drums. Music being at the forefront of Walt Disney's film came from the musical success of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), this title being Disney's first full length animated film and the first ever film to release a full feature length soundtrack to accompany a film's release.

Disney tends to utilise movement, emotion and circumstance in their characters/scenes to drive forward sounds/music. Disney uses music to assist in their story telling, using a score from start to finish of a film and marking key characters with leitmotifs. Possibly a more recognisable use of this, especially in more recent Disney films, is the use of leitmotifs in *Frozen* (2013). One of the main characters Elsa has a 'fear motif' which is made up of 4 different notes and appears, albeit ever so subtly, more than 10 times throughout the first *Frozen* film. The producers utilise Elsa's fear to drive this leitmotif. It's not consistent through the film ranging from a quiet tone in some uses to a much louder and stand out way, in one scene the leitmotif even evolves with Elsa's fear by matching her movements and emotions by getting louder and faster, whereas if we compare it to the same leitmotif used at the start of the film, where Elsa is a child, the tune you hear is of higher pitch and softer on the ear even though it's the same notes and structure of every other time it is used throughout the film, for example, if Elsa's magic is being used for good, or she is happy whilst using said magic, the leitmotif is in a major key whereas the leitmotif is in a minor key when there is negativity surrounding Elsa's magic. This example shows Disney utilising the emotions of their character to explore the many variants of a leitmotif.

Many Disney film main characters tend to have a 'key song' they perform in a film. *Snow White's* would be 'Someday my prince will come' or *Ariel's* (*The Little Mermaid*, 1989) would be 'Part of your world). These key songs throughout Disney productions allow the creators to utilise, what they intend on being, big movie moments to explore leitmotif as more often than not a few notes or chords are extracted from these songs and become that character's leitmotif. An example for this is *Hercules* (*Hercules*, 1997). *Hercules* sings, in a bid to build his strength to prove himself to be a God, a song called 'Go the distance' and subsequently this song became his leitmotif which allows the viewer to make a link with the character and the use of music in the film but also recognise the character musically by memory.

Leitmotifs within film also do not have to be these few notes pulled from another piece of music in the film, leitmotifs can be their own individual sound. All that matters is how they are used and that they represent a theme or idea. *Woody* from *Toy Story* (1995), as a cowboy character, has a leitmotif like that of old western style music to accompany the type of character he is.

The James Bond film franchise also has a highly recognisable leitmotif which is the James Bond Theme. Although, it is widely recognised as a 'theme song' rather than a leitmotif. This is due to the leitmotif being three chords pulled out of the theme song. The James Bond theme was written in 1962 by Monty Norman for the James Bond film *Dr. No*. This piece has been heavily used

in the James Bond film franchise ever since and has been used and adapted for seven different James Bond actors since the songs release in 1962 as far as the most recent James Bond actor Danie Craig. The theme song is most definitely one of those pieces of music that is recognised all around the world and the listening is likely to sway the listener to the thought of James Bond. But the film franchise had the theme adapted to not only being the introductory music to the films (or in some cases only played in its entirety during the end credits) but also a leitmotif that follows the lead character James Bond around during the films as an orchestral leitmotif of the 3 chords. This leitmotif is woven through the films during key moments of the character it's following. The orchestral sound can be heard when James Bond is preparing for something substantial such as a fight or encounter with enemy. The use of the leitmotif in this way informs the audience that something is going to happen, not so much as a warning (like John Williams Jaws Theme) but more as anticipation of the inevitable because the audience, at this point in the film franchises history, always know there are going to be big action scenes and fight scenes, so this leitmotif induces excitement and anticipation for the viewer who is waiting for this big movie moment.

From researching and learning about multiple composers, their approach with leitmotifs and investigating what exactly a leitmotif is and its purpose within film, I can make a conclusion based on my chosen question. Storytellers utilise film to explore leitmotifs in a very broad way but what seems to be mainly for the audience. Leitmotifs give this sense of 'something is happening' even when your screen is empty. Imagine watching a film and quickly going to make a cup of tea and suddenly you hear The Imperial March coming from your living room, you know exactly what is about to happen and that Darth Vader and his troops are about to appear. Leitmotifs have a way of telling a story when there could be lack of going's on screen, they build suspense, get the viewers hopes up and links us with this idea that different characters all have different themes. These are themes that resonate with the viewer and connect us to beloved characters whether that's in film, tv, Broadway or video games. When it comes down to it, I feel as though the composers have the viewers at heart when giving characters leitmotifs, especially in big franchises such as James Bond and Star Wars as they can be perceived as iconic (a notion which is completely down to opinion), but these leitmotifs have become just as iconic as the films they drive the story forward in. A composer uses a leitmotif to help drive and tell a story, sometimes on its own, there can be lack of dialogue happening within a film or lack of character engagement and yet these small bursts of music talk to the listener without having to use words and help us understand the story and appreciate that a story needs music, films would be empty without it and that's the beauty of music being a driving force in a film.

Beethoven, L., 1808. *Symphony No. 5*. [Orchestra].

Frozen. 2013. [film] Directed by C. Buck. United States: Walt Disney Productions.

Hercules. 1997. [film] Directed by R. Clements. United States: Walt Disney Pictures.

The Wizard of Oz. 1939. [film] Directed by V. Fleming. United States: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. 1937. [film] Directed by D. Hand. United States: Walt Disney Productions.

Norman, M., 1962. *James Bond Theme*. Liberty Records.

Jaws. 1975. [film] Directed by S. Spielberg. United States: Universal Pictures.

Williams, J., 1975. *Jaws Theme*.

Williams, J., 1980. *The Imperial March*. RSO Records.

Dr. no. 1962. [film] Directed by T. Young. United Kingdom: Eon Productions.