

Leitmotif in Star Wars

Williams' Use of Leitmotif and Wagnerian
Techniques in the Star Wars Saga

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In John Williams' film score for the initial *Star Wars* trilogy, Williams created multiple leitmotifs that repeat throughout the trilogy. In the manner of a Wagner opera, Williams repeats and varies these musical ideas according to the dramatic situation at hand. In the essay I plan to identify and analyze five of the major motives used by Williams throughout Episodes IV, V, and VI. More particularly, I will discuss Williams' variation techniques used with these leitmotifs as various characters and ideas develop throughout the work.

According to *The New Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, a leitmotif is "a theme, or other coherent musical idea, clearly defined as to retain its identity if modified on subsequent appearances, whose purpose is to represent or symbolize a person, object, place, idea, state of mind, supernatural force, or any other ingredient in a dramatic work, usually operatic but also vocal, choral, or instrumental." The term was first used to describe the 1871 opera, *Carl Maria von Weber in seinen Werken*, but Richard Wagner was the first to legitimize the technique as a significant symphonic developmental device. *The New Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians* continues in its description of leitmotif with:

"With the weakening of the closed form of the da capo aria, greater importance began to pass to other forms, such as arioso, recitative and scene; and the association of motifs with characters and events began now to provide not only a useful system of illustration but, gradually, by the means of applying formal control through quasi-symphonic techniques."

Richard Wagner, best known for his opera works, rose to fame from the mid to late 1800's. With stage works like *Tristan und Isolde*, *Siegfried*, and *Die Walküre*, Each had their own leitmotifs that united the opera. The *Tristan und Isolde* Overture (which premiered two years before the opera), resonates a melody that is overly chromatic and sensual that is left unresolved. This theme is repeated and altered throughout the entire work, creating a sense of

unresolved desire. The use of this leitmotiv creates a sense of dramatic tension on stage that the audience would not see otherwise. In this case, the *Tristan und Isolde* motif represents a feeling and is indirectly associated with the two protagonists. Wagner's technique carried over into other great composers such as Hector Berlioz, Franz Liszt, Karl von Weber, and Robert Schumann. Further, the use of Wagnerian techniques and leitmotiv continued to be the basis for a majority of film music. Max Steiner once said, "If Wagner had lived in this century, he would have been the Number One film composer" (quoted in Thomas, 1997, 157).

With the development of silent films in the late 1870's, music in movies began to play a pivotal role in programmatic music. Mervyn Cooke comments: "Music may initially have been supplied at film screenings simply because it has always been an inevitable adjunct to almost all forms of popular entertainment." (4). In the beginning, music was played for aesthetic purposes. It was not designed for the film or even played simultaneously with the film, but as the silent film reached its peak (c. 1912), music began to hold a pivotal place in programmatic music. The earliest appearances of film music can actually be seen in animated shorts from the early 1890's, such as Emile Reynaud's *Pantomimes lumineuses*. Kathryn Kalinak writes that: "Silent film accompaniment, after all, was produced by live musicians whose presence lent credibility to the images themselves. The sight of live performers actually producing music transferred to the silent images a sense of here and now..." (Kalinak, 1998, 44). Although, Thomas Edison and other great minds worked to invent a way to combine sound and visuals as early as the pre-recorder, synchronized, and visual enhancing tool that we recognize as film scoring would not be developed until the early 1920s.

The use of Wagnerian techniques and leitmotiv continued to be the basis for a majority of film music. Claudia Gorbman describes leitmotiv in filmic music "like the caption, anchor the

image in meaning, throws a net around the floating visual signifier, assures the viewer of a safely channeled signifier,” (Gorbman 1987, 58). Adorno and Eisler write:

Cinema music is still patched together by means of leitmotifs. The ease with which they are recalled provides definite clues for the listener, and they also are practical help to the composer in his task of composition under pressure. He can quote where he otherwise would have to invent... They have always been the most elementary means of elucidation, the thread by which the musically inexperienced find their way about.

(Adorno and Eisler 1994, 4-6)

In this way, leitmotif makes listening and composition an easy and enjoyable process, but

Adorno and Eisler go on to say that a true form of the leitmotif process may not be possible for film:

The reasons for this are first of all technical. The fundamental character of the leitmotif – its salience and brevity – was related to the gigantic dimensions of the Wagnerian and post-Wagnerian music dramas. Just because the leitmotif as such is musically rudimentary, it requires a large musical canvas if it is to take on a structural meaning beyond that of a signpost... This relation is entirely absent in the motion picture, which requires continual interruption of one element by another rather than continuity... Cinema music is so easily understood that it has no need of leitmotifs to serve as signposts and its limited dimension does not permit of adequate expansion of the leitmotif.

(Adorno and Eisler 1994, 6)

These two even go as far as to say that leitmotif in filmic music “leads to extreme poverty of composition” (Adorno and Eisler 1994, 6). Cooke, who comments on in opposition to Adorno and Eisler, says:

There is nothing inherently wrong about providing a ‘thread by which the musically inexperienced find their way about’ if it is recognized that commercially successful narrative films have to be ‘based on the premise that they must be easily understood’; these is of course a subtext at work here, shown by the authors’ comment that ‘Cinema music is so easily understood that it has no need of leitmotifs’, which stems from their rigid belief that such music should aspire towards a state of modernist originality that is inherently more difficult for the average movie-goer to comprehend.

(Cooke 2008, 82-83)

As music approached the twentieth century, common practice music became less romantic and grandiose. At the same time, film approached a golden age. One composer, by the

name of John Williams, began to combine twentieth century techniques with the grandiose, symphonic sounds of the romantic period.

John Towner Williams is one of the most influential of the twentieth century film composers. He was born on February 8, 1932 in Floral Park, NY. Son of a jazz percussionist, a young John Williams fell in love with the music in his blood. When Williams entered high school, his family moved to Los Angeles, California where he attended North Hollywood High School. After high school, he attended the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) where he studied composition under Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco. Shortly after college, Williams was drafted into the U.S. Air Force, but instead of serving on the field, he served with his musical talents. For three years, Williams arranged, composed, and conducted pieces for the U.S. Air Force Band. After making a name for himself in jazz and band composition, Williams applied to Julliard school of Music in New York where he completed his masters in composition. After playing piano at a jazz bar to put himself through the rest of college, he quickly found a position as one of the staff composers for 20-Century Fox. And thus his career as a TV and movie composer began.

Williams is credited with forty-one Oscar Nominations and five wins. In addition, he has an extensive collection of awards, including Gold and Platinum Records, Emmys, Golden Globes, Grammys, and many more. He composed music made for film for over sixty years and at age 82, a collection of his scores go down in history as some of the most recognizable melodies in today's pop culture; *JAWS*, *Close Encounters*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Harry Potter* and *E.T.* Matessino says:

By the time noted jazz musician Johnny Williams appeared on the feature film scene in the early 1960's, the full symphonic score was a rarity and the composer was usually

called upon for light but sophisticated comedies. By the time he composed the score for *The Reivers* in 1969, “Johnny” had become “John” and a distinctive musical voice had emerged. After winning his first Academy Award for adapting the Bock/Harnick score for *Fiddler on the Roof* (1971), the Wagnerian technique became pronounced in Williams’ music for *The Cowboys* (1972) and *The Towering Inferno* (1974). Its effectiveness gained a new level of awareness when his music for *JAWS* drove crowd out of the cinemas in 1975.

(Matessino 1997, 5-6)

According to *The American Film Institute’s 25 greatest film scores* (last updated in 2005), *E.T.* ranks at number 14 and *Jaws* at number 6. And finally, at number one is *Star Wars*. George Lucas first hired Williams for his pipe dream project after seeing his previous success with movies like *Jaws*. Williams’ jumped on the project without the expectation of writing music for another five *Star Wars* movies, but *Star Wars* is significantly different from the rest of his works. Traditionally, Williams never reads the script or visits the set before composing, but in order to write for such an “out of the world” concept he broke those rituals. He also looked to more modern composers like Holst and Dvorak for his inspiration. George Lucas approached *Star Wars* with the hope of creating a new universe, but incorporating enough humanistic qualities in the world to make it familiar to the audience. Because of this, Williams decided that a 19th century, Romantic and Wagnerian approach would help connect the audience to the universe through familiarity, but he also realized that a full symphonic score for a Science-fiction film was something that had never been attempted before. But by the end of recording on March 16th, 1977 and the movie’s premier on May 25th of the same year, it was clear that Williams had made the right decision. This began a new era of film music that incorporated elements from a long history of “classical” and modern music that helped the audience and the film. Matessino writes:

Hearing the complete score for *Star Wars* in the sequence of the film adds a unique, organic dimension to the listening experience. Very few scores so vividly paint musical pictures of such accessibility and precision that one becomes aware of the narrative through the music alone. In any given moment there is no mistaking desert for detention

block or spaceport for sand-crawler. The plight of Princess Leia, the coming-of-age odyssey of Luke Skywalker, and the final quest of Obi-Wan Kenobi all exist as much in the music as they do on the screen. John Williams weaves these various characters and storylines into a unified musical whole through his use of specific moods and distinct thematic material.

(Matessino 1997, 5)

As I did extensive research, I got to experience what Matessino wrote. Williams' score for *Star Wars* is marvelously united. Kalinak comments:

There are also important structural characteristics which bind Williams to the classical model: the use of music to sustain unity; a high degree of correspondence between narrative content and musical accompaniment; the use of music in the creation of mood, emotion, and character; the privileging of music in moments of spectacle; a dependence on expressive melody and the use of leitmotifs; and the careful placement of music in relation to the dialogue.

(Kalinak 1992, 190)

With special attention to detail, one can even identify a repetitive triplet rhythm that appears in almost every major theme. In order to examine Williams' use of leitmotif in the *Star Wars* trilogy, I have compiled a list of appearances of five of the major leitmotif including: *Main Theme*, *Binary Sunset*, *Leia's Theme*, *Darth Vader's Theme/Imperial March*, and *Yoda's Theme* (see Tables 1-5). Images 1.1-5.1 are all simplified transcriptions of the melody from John Williams' *Star Wars (Suite for Orchestra)*. While all the themes I wish to address do not appear in each film, Williams' makes great use of these leitmotifs and other Wagnerian techniques.

The first theme that I will address opens each of the films and is probably the most recognizable melody from the trilogy. The *Main Theme* is always the first element of *Star Wars* that the audience is introduced to. It accompanies the signature title roll which sets the scene for the story ahead. The theme is characterized by an abrasive entrance from the horn section (which act as melody and percussive elements), the repetitive, syncopated triplet rhythm, and an iconic Perfect Fifth interval from tonic to the dominant (see Image 1.1). The *Main Theme* is easily

divided into two parts; *Luke's Theme* (Image 1.1) and *Rebel Fanfare* (Image 1.2). Each of these themes are included in Table 1 under Appearance of *Main Theme*. Matessino writes and quotes:

The first theme in *Star Wars* is the theme associated with Luke Skywalker. “When I thought of a theme for Luke and his adventures,” Williams says, “I composed a melody that reflected the brassy, bold, masculine, and noble qualities I saw in the character. When the theme is played softly, I tended towards a softer brass sound. But I used fanfarish horn for the more heraldic passages. This theme, in particular, brings out the full glow of the glorious brass section of the London Symphony Orchestra.” This now-classic *Star Wars* theme perfectly conveys the heroism at the heart of the saga with the economy of its open fifth (reaching upward), descending triplet (gathering strength for another try), and triumphant lift to an octave to the opening note (attainment of the goal). The note is savored and then the last four notes are repeated (reassurance of achievement). The phrase then rounds out simply and effectively (task completed).

(quoted from Matessino 1997, 11)

Image 1.1

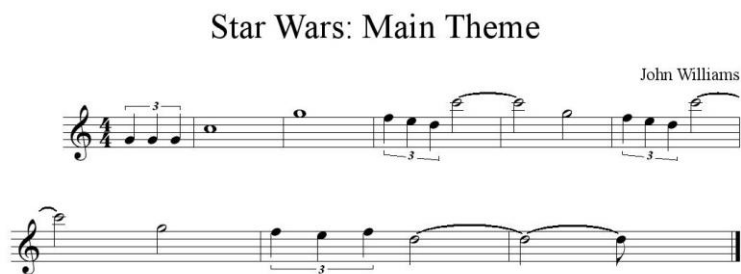


Image 1.2

Score

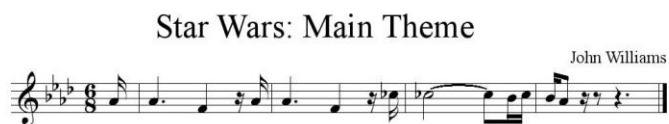


Table 1

Appearances of the *Main Theme*

- a. Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope
 - a. Main Title/Rebel Blockade Runner
 - b. Imperial Attack
 - c. The Moisture Farm
 - d. The Hologram/Binary Sunset
 - e. Landspeeder Search/Attack Of The Sand People
 - f. The Millennium Falcon/Imperial Cruiser Pursuit
 - g. The Death Star/The Stormtroopers
 - h. Wookie Prisoner/Detention Block Ambush
 - i. Shootout In The Cell/Dianoga
 - j. The Tractor Beam/Chasm Crossfire
 - k. Ben Kenobi's Death/The Fighter Attack
 - l. The Battle Of Yavin (Launch From The Fourth Moon/X-Wings Draw Fire/Use The Force)
 - m. The Throne Room/End Title
- b. Star Wars: Episode V – Empire Strikes Back
 - a. Main Title/The Ice Planet Hoth
 - b. The Wampa's Lair/Visions Of Obi-Wan/Snowspeeders Take Flight
 - c. The Battle Of Hoth (Ion Cannon/Imperial Walkers/Beneath The)
 - d. Jedi Master Revealed/Mynock Cave
 - e. The Training Of A Jedi/The Magic Tree
 - f. Yoda & The Force
 - g. Lando's Palace
 - h. Betrayal at Bespin
 - i. Carbon Freeze; Darth Vader's Trap; Departure of Boba Fett
 - j. The Rebel Fleet; End Title
- c. Star Wars: Episode VI – Return of the Jedi
 - a. Main Title/Unexpected Visit
 - b. Return Of The Jedi
 - c. Rancor Dungeon Fight
 - d. The Pit Of Carkoon
 - e. Return Of The Jedi
 - f. Death Of A Jedi Master
 - g. Rebel Briefing
 - h. Campfire Stories
 - i. Into The Trap
 - j. A Jedi's Fury and Destroying The Shield
 - k. Into The Death Star
 - l. Through The Flames
 - m. End Title

The second major theme that appears in the film series is *Imperial March* or otherwise known as *Darth Vader's Theme*. Kalinak writes on the theme:

One motif that is not reprised from *Star Wars* is the musical tag for Darth Vader, the rebel's archenemy, in his flowing black robes and Nazi stormtrooper headgear, Vader is the embodiment of evil. With his amplified heavy breathing and distorted speed, Vader unsettles aurally as well as visually. Not surprisingly, his motif in *Star Wars* plays off musical conventions for suspense: its short passage in chordal harmony accompanied by various combinations of timpani, celli, trombones, bassoons and basses playing low in their register. There is a hint of dissonance in the accompaniment which is a kind of *ostinato*, a single repeated note in a rhythmic pattern driven by triplets with a distinctive descending major third at the end of some phrases.

(Kalinak 1992, 193-194).

While there is no complete statement of this leitmotif in *Episode IV*, scholars like Matessino have called the timpani and lower strings that accompany the *Rebel Fanfare in Imperial Attack* an undeveloped statement of the *Imperial Theme*. This pattern is repeated throughout the film. The theme was composed especially for *Empire Strikes Back*. *Imperial March* (see Image 2.1) was strategically not introduced in *Episode IV* because Lucas wanted to keep the whole of the Empire a secret. After *Episode IV*, there was much about the Empire was left in the dark. *Episode V* was the sequel that was created to unveil those secrets and intimidate the audience. The theme first appears in *Imperial Probe*, where the theme is partially stated by a solo piccolo and again by a muted trumpet. As *Imperial Probe* continues, tensions rise (with the ample use of dissonance and syncopation) until the brass section enters with a complete statement of the March.

The structure of the melody and its accompaniment leads the listener to believe that it is in a minor key, when in reality, Williams is actually outlining a major triad. This was to create the impression of a nationalistic "anthem". This subtle statement is representative of the

propaganda components of nationalism. Since the rise of the Empire was highly inspired by the Nazi revolution, Williams used to technique to show that things are not always as they seem.

Image 2.1



Table 2

Appearances of *Darth Vader's Theme/Imperial March*

- a. Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope
 - a. Partial Appearances – Never Fully Stated
- b. Star Wars: Episode V – Empire Strikes Back
 - a. The Imperial Probe/Aboard The Executor
 - b. The Battle Of Hoth (Ion Cannon/Imperial Walkers/Beneath The)
 - c. The Asteroid Field
 - d. Han Solo And The Princess
 - e. The Training Of A Jedi Knight/The Magic Tree
 - f. The Imperial March (Darth Vader's Theme)
 - g. Imperial Starfleet Deployed; City In The Clouds
 - h. Betrayal At Bespin
 - i. Deal With The Dark Lord
 - j. Carbon Freeze; Darth Vader's Trap; Departure Of Boba Fett
 - k. The Clash Of Lightsabers
 - l. Rescue From Cloud City; Hyperspace
- c. Star Wars: Episode VI – Return of the Jedi
 - a. Main Title/Unexpected Visit
 - b. Rancor Dungeon Fight
 - c. Inspecting The Death Star
 - d. Shuttle Tydirium Approaches Endor

- e. The Emperor's Throne Room and The Ewok Trap
- f. Campfire Stories
- g. Father And Son
- h. Brought Before The Emperor
- i. Into The Trap
- j. The Dark Side Beckons
- k. Attack Of The Ewoks And The Death Star Fires
- l. Anakin Skywalker's Death

Thirdly, I'd like to address Princess Leia's Theme. This leitmotif, like *Main Theme*, is easily separated into multiple parts (see Image 3.1 and 3.2). While Williams uses more than these two examples, I will not discuss every variation. Mattesino describes the theme as a:

...beautifully constructed work in which the graceful purity of the theme emerges in all its fullness as it is played in turn by horn, flute, and violins, with wind interludes before and after each verse. The final crescendo and solo violin perfectly express Leia's inner strength and yearning for the innocence of a time long past.

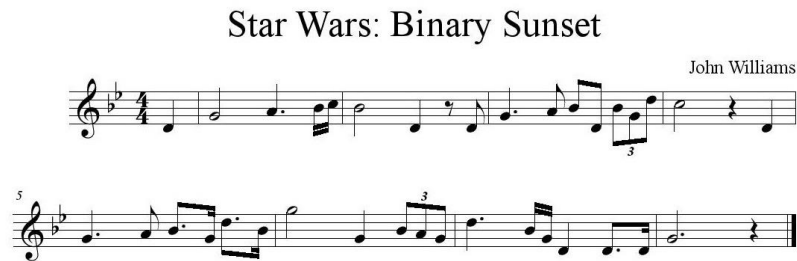
(Matessino 1997, 19)

Biologically, Leia is the daughter of Anakin Skywalker, the infamous Darth Vader, but she grew up as daughter of Bail Organa - a member of the royal family of the planet Alderaan. From the very beginning, the Organa family has secretly opposed the Empire and her rebel upbringing shows through. Princess Leia leads the Rebel Alliance as a sort of "rebel princess". Williams' challenge with creating *Leia's Theme* was combing elements of a pure fairytale princess and a sensual rebel leader into one. The theme is easily identified by the lifting jazz inflections and sweeping melodies.

- i. The Rebel Fleet; End Title
- c. Star Wars: Episode VI – Return of the Jedi
 - a. Han Solo Returns
 - b. Twin Sister
 - c. The Emperor’s Throne Room and The Ewok Trap
 - d. Campfire Stories
 - e. Brother And Sister
 - f. Leia Is Wounded And Father Vs. Son
 - g. Leia’s News

The fourth leitmotif that I will address has been called many different names including, *The Force*, *Ben Kenobi’s Theme*, and *Binary Sunset*. Because of the discrepancy over the title, I have decided to call it *Binary Sunset* because that is the first and most complete statement of the leitmotif. Like *Main Theme*, *Binary Sunset* follows the same “reaching” and “trying again” format (see Image 4.1). The first phrase reaches a C for a short sixteenth note before it falls (first try). The second phrase reaches the dominant on the last note of the triplet before settling on C (second try – this time closer to the goal and for a slightly longer duration). The third phrase uses the dotted eighth/sixteenth pattern as the final leaps towards the G (third try – goal attained as tonic is held for a full two beats at an octave higher). The third phrase elides into the fourth phrase, but instead of going straight back to tonic like in *Main Theme*, Williams prolongs the dominant for an entire measure as if it were one last attempt at the goal, but is now too exhausted to push through. This creates an intense emotional reaction from the listener because through the tension, they are all longing for tonic again. When G returns in the last measure, there is a powerful sense of exhaustion and relief that creates an emotional response.

Image 4.1



Binary Sunset, although debatably the most important leitmotif from the entire film series, is one of the last of the major themes to be introduced. Matessino quotes Williams saying:

“I think of Ben Kenobi’s theme as reflecting both him and also the Jedi Knights and the Old Republic that he remembers,” comments Williams. “It also serves to represent the Force, the spiritual-philosophical belief of the Jedi Knights, and the Old Republic. Like the Princess’ theme, it has a fairy tale aspect rather than a futuristic aspect. There is a lot of English horn in Ben’s theme, which is often heard under dialogue. At other times, the melody becomes the heroic march of the Jedi Knights.”

(quoted from Matessino 1997, 12)

Ben Kenobi, or Obi-Wan Kenobi as he was originally called, is a first look at the Jedi Knights – the order of peacemakers and warriors who clung to the will of the Force. As one of the sole survivors of the Great Purge, “Old Ben” carries a tragic sense of nobleness in his character. Likewise, *Binary Sunset*, is supposed to carry the romantic mysticism and valor of the Jedi Knights. This leitmotif is most often used in sentimental scenes to create a sense of distant fantasy, or romanticism. It serves to represent a time of peace that has since been lost. In other appearances, it is used in contrast with *Luke’s Theme* from the *Main Theme* when Luke joins with his primal connection to the Force. For example, it is used in scenes like the Battle of Yavin when Luke decides to rely on the force instead of a computer to destroy the Death Star.

Table 2

Appearances of *Binary Sunset*

- a. Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope
 - a. Imperial Attack
 - b. The Hologram/Binary Sunset
 - c. Landpeeder Search/Attack Of The Sand People
 - d. Tales Of A Jedi Knight/Learn About The Force
 - e. Burning Homestead
 - f. The Millennium Falcon/Imperial Cruiser Pursuit
 - g. The Death Star/ The Stormtroopers
 - h. Ben Kenobi’s Death/ The Fighter Attack
 - i. Battle Of Yavin (Launch From The Fourth Moon/X-Wings Draw Fire/Use The Force)
- b. Star Wars: Episode V – Empire Strikes Back
 - a. Main Title/Ice Planet Hoth
 - b. The Wampa’s Lair/Visions Of Obi-Wan/Snowspeeders Take Flight
 - c. The Battle Of Hoth (Ion Cannon/Imperial Walkers/Beneath The)
 - d. Arrival On Dagobah
 - e. Jedi Master Revealed/Mynock Cave
 - f. The Training Of A Jedi/The Magic Tree
 - g. Yoda & The Force
 - h. Imperial Starfleet Deployed; City In The Clouds; Departure Of Boba Fett
 - i. Lando’s Palace
 - j. Rescue From Cloud City; Hyperspace
 - k. The Rebel Fleet; End Title
- c. Star Wars: Episode VI – Return of the Jedi
 - a. Bounty For A Wookiee
 - b. Rancor Dungeon Fight
 - c. Death Of A Jedi Master
 - d. Shuttle Tydirium Approaches Endor
 - e. The Levitation
 - f. Campfire Stories
 - g. Joining The Tribe
 - h. Brother And Sister
 - i. Father And Son
 - j. Leia Is Wounded And Father Vs. Son
 - k. A Jedi’s Fury And Destroying The Shield
 - l. Vader’s Redemption
 - m. Funeral Pyre For A Jedi

The fifth and final theme that I wish to address is not considered a major theme like the others I have discussed, but still plays a pivotal role (especially in *Episode V*). Yoda’s theme is a short

playful melody that is usually identified by a pure and simple melody. This leitmotif is heavily associated with Yoda's character and Luke's training. It is most often used in contrast to the *Imperial March* to emphasize the battle between good and evil. Some scholars would even go as far to as to say that this theme represents the light side of the Force.

Image 5.1

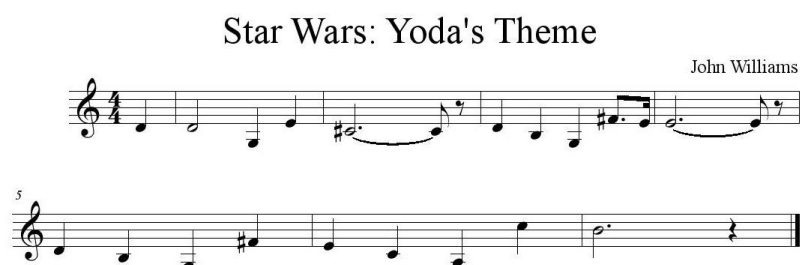


Table 5

Appearances of *Yoda's Theme*

- a. Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope
 - a. No Appearances
- b. Star Wars: Episode V – Empire Strikes Back
 - a. Luke's Nocturnal Visitor
 - b. Jedi Master Revealed/Mynock Cave
 - c. The Training Of A Jedi Knight/The Magic Tree
 - d. Yoda's Theme
 - e. Attacking A Star Destroyer
 - f. Yoda & The Force
 - g. Imperial Starfleet Deployed; City In The Clouds
 - h. Lando's Palace
 - i. Carbon Freeze; Darth Vader's Trap; Departure Of Boba Fett
 - j. The Clash Of Lightsabers
- c. Star Wars: Episode VI – Return of the Jedi
 - a. Death Of A Jedi Master

While each of these themes is important individually in all of its variation, *The New Groves Dictionary for Music and Musicians*, say that these themes are even more effective in combination: “The leitmotif may be musically unaltered on its return, or altered in its rhythm,

intervallic structure, harmony, orchestration or accompaniment, and may also be combined with other leitmotifs in order to suggest a new dramatic condition” (644). The combination of these leitmotifs is what takes Williams’ score to the next level.

Burning Homestead is a particularly interesting piece from *A New Hope* that combines a collection of major leitmotifs to create the proper mood. Matessoni writes:

Burning Homestead begins with a sad solo trumpet and strings as Ben and Luke find the slain bodies of the Jawas who sold C-3PO and R2-D2. The tempo quickens as Luke realizes that his family is in jeopardy and bolts to his landspeeder. Ben’s theme is played by the trombones as Luke returns home, with strings and French horn climbing to the discovery of the remains of his aunt and uncle. The theme is played again by cello leading once again to the Death Star motif. In the battle station’s detention block, Darth Vader approaches Senator Organa’s cell with both character’s themes occurring in succession.

(Matessino 1997, 16).

Like Matessino stated, the *Burning Homestead* cue begins as Ben and Luke have discovered the slaughter of the Jawas. In this instance, *Binary Sunset* is played resolutely and forcefully as Luke makes his way back to the place he calls home, desperate to save his family. The theme is then repeated by a section of melancholy cellos as he discovers his aunt and uncle’s body. The theme stays suspended at the second phrase and the horns begin to play the Death Star motif (which was not covered in this paper). This tells the audience that Luke is upset and he blames the Empire for their deaths, but it also tells them that, internally, he has made a decision to do something about it. After the Death Star motif is played, there’s a transition to the Death Star where Darth Vader is about to torture Leia in hopes of uncovering the location of the rebel base. Their themes are layered in a way that the audience knows exactly what is about to happen. With the use of suspense elements, this portion of the piece makes the audience severely uncomfortable as they worry about Leia’s safety and cower at Vader’s presence.

Williams' use of leitmotif as a center structure point in his filmic score for *Star Wars* is credited with taking Lucas' pipe dream science-fiction to an entirely new level. Individually and in combination, these leitmotifs have brought a universe from "a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away" a little closer to home. The success of these box-office record breakers and family classics can greatly be attributed to John Williams' work on the music. Had it not been for Williams use of leitmotif, a large portion of the series magic would have been lost, and our beloved heroes could have possibly just been forgettable characters. Because of the impact Williams made, leitmotif in filmic music became an absolute standard for movies in the future. While other techniques are still employed, Wagnerian leitmotif reigns as the greatest storyteller in film music.

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