

Film Music - Musical Concepts

MELODY/ PITCH

The MAIN TUNE in a piece of music.

In films, rising melodies are often used for increasing tension, falling melodies for defeat. Westerns often feature a BIG THEME. Question & answer melodies can represent good versus evil.

PITCH refers to how high or low the notes are.

TEMPO

The SPEED of a piece of music.

ALLEGRO – fast speed **MODERATO** – medium speed **ADAGIO** – slow speed
RALLENTANDO – gradually getting slower **ACCELERANDO** – gradually getting faster

DYNAMICS

The VOLUME of a piece of music.

f (loud) dynamics to represent power; ***P*** (quiet) dynamics to represent weakness/ calm
CRESCENDOS used for increasing threat, triumph or proximity and
DIMINUENDOS used for things going away into the distance. Horror film soundtracks often use **EXTREME DYNAMICS** or **SUDDEN DYNAMIC CHANGES** to 'shock the listener' or hint at imminent danger.

TONALITY/ HARMONY

The KEY and chords in a piece of music.

MAJOR – HAPPY, BRIGHT SOUNDING **MINOR** – sad sounding
ATONAL – no key, chaotic and clashing sounding **DISCORD** – chords with clashing notes
MODULATION – change of key (e.g. go to the minor from the major or go up a key)

TIMBRE / INSTRUMENTATION

The INSTRUMENTS and their effects/ techniques

TRUMPETS and SNARE DRUMS for military, patriotic and heroic films/scenes (Apollo 13, Superman, Indiana Jones. **VIOLINS and STRINGS** often used for romance or sadness e.g. Schindler's List. **VOCALS** – often with religious connotations or cult associations or hymns e.g. The Omen, 'A Knife in the Dark' from Lord of the Rings. **SOLO PIANO** – used for nostalgic or eerie scenes e.g. The Piano. The use of low pitch brass and strings to provide a "dark sound" e.g. Darth Vader, Jaws

PIZZICATO – plucked strings **ARCO** – bowed strings
GLISSANDO - rapid scale patterns create a frantic mood and a feeling of unrest & urgency
TREMOLANDO - rapid repetition of a note. Literally 'trembling' - creates tension

ARTICULATION

The way a note is played.

STACCATO – short & detached **LEGATO** – smooth/flowing

ACCENT (>) – played forcefully

e.g. **LEGATO** for romantic/ happy scenes, **STACCATO** for 'icy' wintery or suspense scenes.

ACCENTS for violence or shock.

TEXTURE

The different layers of sound within the music

Texture can be **THICK** (lots of different instrumental/ vocal parts playing together) or **THIN** (hardly any parts playing together). Layers of sound are the different things which are happening at the same time in a piece of music. e.g. There could be a guitar playing, a voice singing, drums playing and a piano playing a chordal accompaniment. What they are doing will determine the **TEXTURE** of the music created by these different layers.

STRUCTURE

The DIFFERENT SECTIONS in a piece of music.

This could be a verse and chorus with an instrumental or middle eight section.

This could be **TERNARY** form (**ABA** with a contrasting middle section)

RHYTHM/ DURATION

The note values and time signature of a piece of music.

2 beats in the bar for marches (battles), 3 beats in the bar for waltzes, **IRREGULAR TIME SIGNATURES** used for tension (e.g. 5 beats in the bar in *Mission Impossible*).

LONG notes are often used in Westerns to describe vast open spaces and in Sci-Fi soundtracks to depict outer space; **SHORT** notes used to depict busy, chaotic scenes.

OTHER MUSICAL FEATURES

OSTINATO

An ostinato is a rhythmic or melodic pattern that repeats. A repeated **OSTINATO** pattern can show action and tension (e.g. *Davy Jones* middle section)

PEDAL NOTES

Long, held or repeated notes often in the bass line

e.g. *Chariots of Fire*, *2001 Space Odyssey*

REVERB, PHASER, DISTORTION

Use of effects (e.g. **REVERB**, **PHASER**, **DISTORTION**) change and manipulate electronic and sampled sounds.

Musical concepts in Star Wars

Listen to the main title music of Star Wars and follow the music as it plays. Try and pick out some of the key musical features that we have looked – many of the concepts are labelled in the sheet music as it is being played.

Fill in the box below with concepts that you notice.

MELODY/ PITCH	
TIMBRE/ INSTRUMENTATION	
DYNAMICS	
ARTICULATION	
RHYTHM/ TEMPO	
TONALITY (<i>major/ minor</i>)	
DIFFERENT MOODS CREATED	