Film Music - Musial 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* **ACCELLERANDO** – *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*

LIVEWORKSHEETS

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.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

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 *(major/ minor)*	
DIFFERENT MOODS CREATED	

LIVEWORKSHEETS