

Film music

You may not realise how important the music is in films and TV. If you watched a film without the music the tension, excitement and comedy wouldn't be there because the music is composed carefully to fit with the mood of the film and enhance what is on the screen.

There is a common compositional technique used when film composing called:

LEITMOTIF – this is a musical theme created to represent an idea, character or place. A good example of an iconic leitmotif is 'Jaws'. The theme of the sharks, 2 notes, creates tension which matches with the anticipation of seeing the sharks in the film!

Many composers add in things like **sound effects** on instruments to emphasise movements and actions if it can be done on an instrument. Such as flourishes of virtuosic and exciting moments of 'magic' in Fantasia's 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice'. There are other sound effects composers may choose to use such as using a choir, this sometimes makes it sound magical and other-worldly. This is used a lot in Harry Potter and Lord of the Rings.

When composing, they need to compose along with watching the film. And when recording with a live orchestra, the conductor uses a '**click track**' which has a regular **pulse** throughout the film so that the music lines up with the screen. **John Williams** and **Hans Zimmer** are two very key film music composers, having written Harry Potter, Star Wars, Jurassic Park, Jaws, Inception, Pirates of the Caribbean, Madagascar and many more...

Musical hide and seek!

Here is one of the most famous pieces of film music, which you should all recognise, from Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone 'Hedwig's Theme' written by John Williams. Here is a video of a performance of it at the BBC Proms: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GTxBLyp7_Dw.



BBC's Proms Hedwig's Theme from Harry Potter

Have a listen and watch it and see how many times you can hear or see the following film compositional techniques being used. If you want to you can write the time that it happens in the video or simply do a tally of how many times they happen:

Violins playing fast waving melodies	
Use of different sounding instruments e.g. celeste which is the metal sounding, magical instrument at the start	
Harp glissandos for transitions	
Using brass instruments to sound majestic	
Change of feel in themes: mysterious, reminiscent, mischievous, are there any others?	
Sound effects from percussion section	
How many times Hedwig's theme (initial melody at beginning) is used	
Accelerating of speed	

When you next watch a film, have a listen to the music and think about the compositional techniques the composer has used!