

**From Alberich to Gollum:
Hollywood's Transformation of the Leitmotiv**

by

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ABSTRACT

In nineteenth-century opera, it was very common for composers to utilize a unifying system of musical themes to act as signs representing different characters or concepts in the often-convoluted world of opera. The leitmotiv technique, which grew from this operatic tradition, is often attributed to Richard Wagner. In Chapter One, I examine the difference between the reminiscence motive and the leitmotiv, two similar motivic concepts from the nineteenth century, and ultimately discuss the misattribution of the leitmotiv technique to Wagner. However, there are several important elements of Wagner's style and use of themes which are foundational to the leitmotiv technique that thrives in film music today.

This technique of using musical themes was popularized in the "Golden Age" of Hollywood films of the 1930s. My second chapter tracks the use of musical themes in the films of the prominent composers of the time, namely Joseph Breil, Max Steiner, and Erich Korngold, noting both similarities and differences in the use of themes as compared to opera, and documenting a very brief history of film music through the aforementioned composers.

This style was mostly phased out during the 1950s and 1960s, where Alfred Hitchcock and thriller films became more popular, along with the rise science fiction films. This time is notable for the growing use of sound effects, sometimes using

musical instruments, like the famous Hitchcock strings, and those effects gained more prominence than the musical score during this time do the emergence of these new genres. However, the “Golden Age” technique experienced a revival in the 1970s, thanks to the *Star Wars* trilogy scores, composed by John Williams. These films embrace the Wagnerian concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, engaging with myths and archetypes. Additionally, Williams uses his themes to summarize events of the plot after they unfold, giving the audience time to reflect and understand before moving forward.

Similarly, *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, loosely based on the same myth as Wagner’s famous *Ring* cycle, uses leitmotifs to summarize action onscreen. However, Howard Shore’s scores for these films are more dramatically advanced, using musical ideas to foreshadow events, acting as a source of dramatic irony for one familiar with the trilogy and its themes.

INTRODUCTION

Howard Shore's (b. 1946) music for *The Lord of the Rings* films is immensely popular today, and widely recognized by audiences around the world. Shore employed the leitmotiv technique, a unifying system of musical signifiers that originated in nineteenth-century opera, which resulted in tremendous popularity. His music has attained several awards, including Grammys for Best Score Soundtrack Album, Academy Awards for Best Original Score, an Academy Award for Best Original Song, and a World Soundtrack Award for Best Original Soundtrack. Shore's themes for main characters and dramatic concepts act as signposts for the audience, helping to keep straight a fantasy land filled with several races and many characters, as well as subtly acting as a musical version of literary devices, with musical foreshadowing at the forefront. Given the overwhelming complexity of Tolkien's story, it might not be too much to say that without Shore's sophisticated use of leitmotifs, the trilogy might not have been so successful. But how has the use of this technique of musical themes changed and developed over time, especially within the context of Hollywood films?

In this project, I examine the reasons for the widespread acclaim of this music, starting with a literature review of the use of musical themes in nineteenth-century opera. In particular, many have attributed the creation of the leitmotiv

technique to Richard Wagner (1813-1883). However, drawing upon scholarship by Jörg Riedlbauer, Carolyn Abbate, and Curt von Westernhagen, I will prove that this attribution is false; Wagner's use of themes does not satisfy the modern definition of the leitmotiv. Riedlbauer argues that while Wagner did use a system of musical themes to unify his operas, his use truly falls under the concept of the *Erinnerungsmotiv*, or “reminiscence” motive, rather than the leitmotiv. The difference between these two terms is the crux of the first chapter, and Riedlbauer's scholarship forms the framework of my methodology moving forward in this project, informing my analysis of musical motives from nineteenth-century opera to contemporary film music.

The second chapter documents a very brief history of film music from silent film through the “Golden Age” Hollywood films of the 1930s, focusing on composers Joseph Breil (1870-1926), Max Steiner (1888-1971), and Erich Korngold (1897-1957) and their synthesis of opera and symphonic works. Drawing upon the scholarship of Mervyn Cooke, I argue that the structural form of much of this film music repertoire centers on the idea of musical themes, borrowing the technique from nineteenth-century opera and using some symphonic ideas for unification. This transformation of classical music and the leitmotiv technique into film scores began most notably with the music of Erich Korngold. Korngold composed classical music in a more traditional context, publishing everything from string quartets, piano sonatas, and song cycles to concertos, symphonies, and operas. Additionally, however, many regard Korngold as one of the founders of contemporary film music, noting in particular his musical score

for *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938), for which he won the Academy Award for Best Original Score. This chapter tracks the use of musical themes in the films of the prominent composers of the time, noting both similarities and differences in the use of themes as compared to opera.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the genres of science fiction and the psychological thriller became very popular in the United States. During this time, the musical score itself became less important due to the more outlandish nature of sound effects required by the genres. Suspenseful, spooky sounds were needed to enhance the viewer's experience, and things such as Hitchcock strings, as in the horrifying shower scene of *Psycho* (1960) where high-pitched, percussive and abrasive strings parallel the stabbing, became substitutes for more traditionally scored music. However, John Williams (b. 1932) revived the leitmotiv technique in the 1970s by advancing the operatic tradition of musical themes as signs, and combining this technique with saturation scoring and nineteenth-century romanticism. Williams was instructed by George Lucas to draw heavily upon romantic music, as the director was concerned that his aliens and robots in *Star Wars* would need grounding in more accessible music. For this reason, much of the music of *Episode IV: A New Hope* (1977) is closely related to the music of Gustav Holst and Igor Stravinsky. Williams accomplished this particularly well, using some classical themes but with modern orchestration and editing up to the standards of film music of the 1970s. This chapter also explores the postmodern pastiche film style employed by George Lucas for his original *Star Wars* trilogy, borrowing not only standard Hollywood conventions for

editing, but also pasting together particular elements or even entire scenes from other films. I compare Lucas' dramatic endeavor to *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a Wagnerian concept that uses several forms of art in its dramatic expression. In particular, I highlight the music's ability to aid in the telling of these mythic stories. Moving to specific musical examples as they relate to Wagner, I compare some key themes from each composer in these stories, pointing out similarities in these musical objects that could be indebted to some greater field of mythic and archetypal characteristics.

Other scores for films in the epic tradition of *Star Wars* have come to follow the template of Williams, perhaps the most famous being Howard Shore's scores for *The Lord of the Rings* films. These scores have not only become Shore's most popular works, but they are currently some of the most famous film scores in history. These scores are filled with thematic fragmentation and development—over ninety separate leitmotifs have been identified—transforming into a more musically sophisticated version of the use of themes in the 1930s films and even in *Star Wars*.

In this chapter, I explore one particularly fascinating similarity between opera and the *Lord of the Rings* films: the overture. I show that Howard Shore uses the time from when the film starts until the title of the movie appears onscreen to introduce all of the important musical themes for that film, in a manner very similar to that of the main title music of some classic Hollywood scores, and before them, the overtures of operas. Howard Shore takes this concept a step further, not only introducing all of the important thematic material, but also making the themes interact in a dramatically informing manner, acting as a dramatic microcosm for the entire

film. In this final chapter I also explore Shore's unique ability to use his powerful themes as dramatic tools throughout all three movies, taking the reader on a journey through the development of the *Fellowship* theme and the *History of the Ring* theme.

Today, film music is an integral part of our culture—the entertainment platform of film would be significantly less interesting without a score. I argue that the success of contemporary film scores today can be attributed to the use of the one distinct musical element that has proven popular and successful throughout the last two hundred years: the leitmotiv. This project is intended to uncover the link between the evolutions of symphonic and operatic music and how these genres have fused, assuming a commanding position in the industry of film. This research is important to the field for a variety of reasons, the most important being that we must understand the historical roots of the leitmotiv in order to truly understand and appreciate its use in a contemporary setting.

Chapter 1

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SEMANTICS IN SYMPHONIC OPERA

George Lucas wrote the plot of his epic *Star Wars* saga somewhat backwards, starting with *Episode IV: A New Hope*. While he did have some general ideas about his iconic characters and their troubled beginnings, these were incomplete sketches that simply served as a starting point for the development of each character. As is well known, over two decades later, Lucas went back to the drawing board and completed these sketches, which materialized into Episodes I–III.

Richard Wagner’s famous *Ring* cycle was composed in a very similar manner. In 1848, Wagner began to write an opera called “The Death of Siegfried,” based on the German epic poem *Nibelunglied*. However, as he started writing the libretto for this opera, he realized that the complexity of the story was overwhelming; the tale needed more explanation. Therefore, he began writing another libretto that would precede *Siegfried*, only to realize that this prologue-of-sorts required more explanation as well. Finally, Wagner finished his story, which resulted an epic four-opera set of libretti entitled *Der Ring des Nibelungen* that combined Norse mythology with the *Nibelunglied*. Upon circuitous completion of the libretti, Wagner finally began composing the music for his opera saga. This was no easy task, and the overall process lasted an arduous twenty-one years.

The length of time required to write these masterpieces can be partially attributed to the sheer complexity of the story itself. For this reason, Wagner sought to create a musical tool through which he could aid the audience member in following these complex dramas. Additionally, Wagner's musical style reacted against the prominent Italian and French operas of the time, because he believed these styles devalued dramatic integrity and muddled the text.¹ To achieve a unified musical expression of text, Wagner utilized a system of interlocking musical themes and motives that either expressly or indirectly related to the text of the operas. The commonly used musical term "leitmotiv" is attributed to Richard Wagner for his use of this method, and as we will see, this musical concept still exists today, most prevalently in film music. However, as time has gone by, many people have forgotten about the history of operatic motives, and where the authorship of this concept should be placed, if at all. In this chapter, I will examine the literature on the nineteenth-century leitmotiv, exploring the complicated, even controversial, history of operatic motives.

¹ Scott D. Paulin, "Wagner and the Fantasy of Cinematic Unity," in *Music and Cinema*, ed. James Buhler, Caryl Flinn, and David Neumeyer (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2000), 60.

Leitmotiv versus Reminiscence motive

John Warrack, who wrote the Grove Dictionary entry on the “Leitmotiv,” defines leitmotivs as “themes for symphonic development.”² The German translates to “leading motif,” with the word “leading” meant in the sense of guidance; the motive is used to help the listeners to orient themselves to the story, and the thematic material develops throughout the course of the story. In contrast, he defines the *Erinnerungsmotiv*, which translates as “reminiscence” or “remembrance” motive, as something that encompasses the return of the same music *without* much alteration.³

Jörg Riedlbauer, in his article “*Erinnerungsmotive* in Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*,” highlights the differences between the leitmotiv and the *Erinnerungsmotiv*.⁴ Here, he explains that the *Erinnerungsmotiv* existed prior to the development of the leitmotiv, defining the reminiscence motive as the idea of a musical gesture reappearing every time a certain poetic moment is repeated.⁵ For example, every time Alberich’s ring is seen or spoken of in Wagner’s *Das Rheingold*,

² John Warrack, “Leitmotiv,” *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* 10 (1980): 644-646, from Riedlbauer, 19.

³ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴ Jörg Riedlbauer, “*Erinnerungsmotive* in Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*,” *The Musical Quarterly* 74, no. 1 (1990): 19.

⁵ Max Seiling, “Das indirekte Leitmotiv,” *Bayreuther Blätter* 40 (1917): 29, from Riedlbauer, 18.

one particular musical phrase is played verbatim. The *indirekte Leitmotiv* contrasts with this idea—early twentieth-century scholar Max Seiling defines it as “when the dramatic situation regarding the leitmotiv is not directly expressed in the text.”⁶ As an example, this could mean that while the text does not specifically speak of Alberich’s ring, there could be a dramatic allusion to its might, or perhaps of another concept related to the ring, such as the sacrifice of love for the use of power.⁷ While these definitions do differentiate the two distinctive motivic ideas, the line is often blurred today. For example, once people began to associate the term leitmotiv with Wagner, all of his motives were then termed leitmotifs, despite the fact that several are only reminiscence motives. Due to the popularity of Wagner’s music, the term leitmotiv, according to Siegfried Scheffler, developed an association with an incomparable level of sophistication and perfection, while the motivic ideas of earlier composers were deemed “unplanned products of the musical instinct.”⁸ To disprove Wagner’s use of the leitmotiv, Jörg Riedlbauer writes that such “symphonic developments” (as Warrack put it) occur only in moderation in the *Ring*, and that “what is novel about

⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁷ One can compare this to the memorable *History of the Ring* theme in Howard Shore’s scores of “The Lord of the Rings,” as this theme is played when people discuss the temptation of the Ring and its power, or when the Ring begins to overtake the mind of any character.

⁸ Siegfried Scheffler (publisher), *Richard Wagner-sein Leben, seine Persönlichkeit und seine Werke* (Hamburg, 1928), 34, from Riedlbauer, 18.

Wagner is merely how frequently he uses them [motifs].”⁹ Riedlbauer’s scholarship forms the framework of my methodology moving forward in this project, informing my analysis of musical motives from nineteenth-century opera to contemporary film music.

Riedlbauer critiques the scholarship of Karl H. Wörner, who distinguishes between Wagner’s compositions and those of his predecessors by identifying both a direct and indirect function of the *Erinerrungsmotiv*, and attempting to prove that Wagner’s music is more advanced than both of these ideas. Wörner defines the direct function of the reminiscence motive as something whose repeated occurrence serves to recreate a former situation of the plot, while the indirect function is defined as something which reminds the listener that there is a specific meaning that should be associated with the musical motive that is not directly expressed in the libretto.¹⁰ He then defines Wagner’s musical motives as something else entirely, calling the leitmotiv a *Tonsymbol*, or something that is more sophisticated due to its musical symbolism.¹¹ However, as Riedlbauer points out in his critique, if we look at Wagner’s music with all of these definitions in mind, we notice that several motives from the *Ring* adequately satisfy the definitions for *direktes* or *inderektes Erinnerungsmotive*, rather than being *Tonsymbole*. These include the “*Waldvogel-*

⁹ Riedlbauer, “*Erinnerungsmotive in Wagner's Der Ring des Nibelungen*,” 19.

¹⁰ Karl Wörner, “Beiträge zur Geschichte des Leitmotivs in der Oper,” *Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft* 14 (1931/1932): 151-172, from Riedlbauer, 19.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 159.

Motiv” from Acts 2 and 3 of *Siegfried* and the “*Walhall-Motiv*” in Act 1 of *Die Walküre*.¹² For example, the *Walhall-Motiv* has an indirect function in its allusion to Alberich’s ring—it alludes to the literary theme that love must be renounced to truly exercise power. This same literary theme is associated with the ring, and this association is mirrored musically by the intervallic relationships within each musical motive, as well as the rhythmic pattern.

The History of Themes

Riedlbauer identifies several composers who used signifying musical motives before Wagner. For example, Bernard Lapepède recommended the use of “musical phrases that remind one of some important situations of the plot that the spectator had seen before” in 1785.¹³ Another example is André Grétry who claimed in 1797 to be “the first to abolish the instrumental piece called *entracte* [interlude] and replace it with another one that musically communicates a past scene or a future situation of the drama,”¹⁴ noting one character’s aria music which plays shortly before the character’s arrival onstage in Grétry’s opera *Richard Coeur de Lion*. Karl Spazier, a contemporary

¹² Jörg Riedlbauer, “*Erinnerungsmotive* in Wagner’s *Der Ring des Nibelungen*,” *The Musical Quarterly* 74, no. 1 (1990): 19.

¹³ Bernard Germain Lapepède, *La poétique de la musique*, 2 vols. in 1, (Paris, 1785), vol. I, 129f, from Riedlbauer, 20.

¹⁴ André E. M. Grétry, *Mémoires ou Essais sur la musique* (Paris, 1797), vol. I., 371, from Riedlbauer, 20.

of Grétry, supported that claim, writing that the opera's finale contains "the basis of an orchestral theme that one can hear during the entire piece in various connections."¹⁵

It is unknown if Wagner had contact with those specific pieces or operas. However, Riedlbauer, through use of Cosima Wagner's diary, writes that Wagner praised "above all 'Joseph' von Méhul,"¹⁶ whose operas contained several examples of *Erinnerungsmotivs*, where the orchestra played an instrumental signal for a character who was not yet onstage.¹⁷ Additionally, he uses diary entries to inform us that between directing the choir in Würzburg and conducting in Riga, Wagner came into contact with many other works that were full of *Erinnerungsmotivs*, most notably Weber's *Der Freischütz* (1821), Beethoven's *Fidelio* (1815), and Weber's *Preziosa* (1821).¹⁸

Therefore, the question still remains as to how leitmotivs came to be so closely associated with Wagner. To answer this, Riedlbauer takes us into nineteenth-century scholarship on the use of musical themes. He delves into the writings of Friedrich Jähns, a notable music scholar and composer,¹⁹ who in 1871 wrote that Weber was the

¹⁵ Grétry's *Versuche über Musik*, abridged, with critical and historical additions, published by Karl Spazier, (Leipzig, 1800), 230, from Riedlbauer, 20.

¹⁶ Cosima Wagner, *Die Tagebücher*, published by M. Gregor-Dellin and D. Mack in 4 volumes, (Munich, 1982), vol. I, 552 (July 22, 1872), from Riedlbauer, 21.

¹⁷ Francois Henry Joseph Blaze (Castil-Blaze), *De l'opéra en France*, in 2 vols., (Paris, 1820), vol. I, 107f, from Riedlbauer, 20.

¹⁸ Richard Wagner, *Mein Leben* (Munich, 1963), 91, from Riedlbauer, 22.

¹⁹ Jähns is most famous for his thematic catalogue of the works of Carl Maria von Weber.

first to use a planned system of leitmotifs,²⁰ noting Weber's genesis of "strict realizations of all individual characters."²¹

Critical Reception from the Nineteenth Century

By this point in history, several people had already written of Wagner's use of the leitmotiv. For example, Theodor Uhlig, a music critic and friend of Wagner, writes of Wagner's use of *Erinnerungsmotivs* in *Tannhäuser*, and mentions Wagner's use of motives in *Lohengrin* by saying "the most significant musical thoughts are woven like main threads throughout Wagner's opera," going on to say that Wagner "elevated this procedure into a planned system."²² Riedlbauer points out that Uhlig's writings were published in 1850—history had already spoken of Wagner's planned use of themes in this manner for more than two decades. Additionally, in 1870, Friedrich Stade, an influential conductor and composer of the time, wrote of "*Leitthemen*" in Wagner's music, which came to be one the first terms synonymous with the leitmotiv.²³ These

²⁰ Friedrich Wilhelm Jähns, *Carl Maria von Weber, Eine Lebensskizze nach authentischen Quellen* (Leipzig, 1873), 49, from Riedlbauer, 24.

²¹ Friedrich Wilhelm Jähns, *Carl Maria von Weber in seinen Werken* (Berlin, 1871), 2, from Riedlbauer, 24.

²² Theodor Uhlig, *Musikalische Schriften* published by Ludwig Frankenstein, (Regensburg, 1913), 334f, from Riedlbauer, 23.

²³ Friedrich Stade, "Zur Wagner-Frage. Mit Bezug auf Dr. K. A. Pabst's Schrift: 'Die Verbindung der Künste auf der dramatischen Bühne,'" *Musikalisches Wochenblatt* 1 (1870), 529ff., 560ff., 580ff., 593ff., 563a, from Riedlbauer, 24.

writings proved very influential, placing Wagner on a pedestal of motivic development that would influence the popular view of leitmotifs for the rest of history.

Wagner did not always appreciate the public's attempted analysis of his work, as evidenced by his conscious effort to distance himself from the scholarship of Hans von Wolzogen.²⁴ Wolzogen was a biographer of Wagner and an editor of his letters and poems as well as an author, known primarily for his interpretations of *Parsifal* and other Wagnerian dramas. He was one of the first to take action in naming specific motives in the music of Wagner and even in numbering the motives, both of which were met with denial and criticism from Wagner.

Riedlbauer draws upon Cosima's diary to explain Wagner's use of themes, proving that Wagner was critical in his rejection of this naming and numbering that stemmed from Wolzogen's work, especially in his naming of motives in *Götterdämmerung*.²⁵ Wagner wanted his music to be an emotional, bordering mystical, experience, rather than an intellectual one, and felt that Wolzogen's scholarship discredited the creativity of the operas.²⁶ Wagner did not want people to

²⁴ Richard Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, 10 vols. in 5, (Leipzig, 1897-1898), vol. X, 185, from Riedlbauer, 25.

²⁵ Cosima Wagner, *Tagebücher*, vol. IV, 772 (August 1, 1881), from Riedlbauer, 25.

²⁶ Richard Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, vol. IV, 232, from Riedlbauer, 25.

be conscious of the ways in which the musical themes tied the story together—he wanted the music to subconsciously aid in the cohesion of the drama as a whole.

Wagner's Compositional Process

Despite Wagner's desire for his music to be a purely emotional experience, there are several accounts utilized by Riedlbauer to prove that Wagner's process was indeed intellectual, leading us to believe that he had a list of motives before he began composing an opera. For example, Wagner wrote to Karl Gaillard, a friend and music critic, around the time of his composition of *Tannhäuser*, saying that he had “all the characteristic motives in mind” prior to his actual composition of a scene.²⁷

Additionally, in his book *Oper und Drama*—“*Dichtkunst und Tonkunst im Drama der Zukunft*,” Wagner states of the essential part of dramatic expression: “it is prepared for by the pure orchestral melody as foreshadowing, and from the verse melody derives the ‘thought’ of the instrumental motive as a reminder.”²⁸

More evidence of his deliberate use of leitmotifs comes again from Cosima's diary, where she writes, “He shows me some measures for harp he has added at Siegfried's salutation by Brunnhilde... These measures will be heard again at

²⁷ Richard Wagner, *Sämtliche Briefe*, published by Gertrud Strobel and Werner Wolf, vol. I, (Leipzig, 1967), vol. II, 358 (January 30, 1844), from Riedlbauer, 25.

²⁸ Richard Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, vol. IV, 190, from Riedlbauer, 26.

Siegfried's death."²⁹ Most likely, this was a repetition of what Richard had told her, once again pointing us toward his thought process of leitmotifs as a pre-determined concept.

Other people began asking about his use of motives in his music as well, namely King Ludwig II of Bavaria.³⁰ In a letter to Wagner, Ludwig asks, "...what the principal musical motives of the *Ring der [sic] Nibelungen* and *Tristan und Isolde* are."³¹ Though Wagner did not want the public to be aware of his use of leitmotifs, instead aiming for an unconscious unification through musical themes, the analysis of his peers, as well as the letters from his friends, demonstrate that preconceived notions or thoughts about certain musical moments were unavoidable.

While one can argue that the opinions of critics and scholars may be unfounded, Wagner's friends and wife would not have written of Wagner's use of motives without any evidence from Wagner himself. In fact, Wagner did eventually admit to using musical motives. Riedlbauer cites Wagner's own writings to prove his conscious use of themes and motives in his music. In his discussion of *Das Rheingold*, Wagner writes, "it is a comprehensive unity; there is hardly any measure in the

²⁹ Cosima Wagner, *Tagebücher*, vol. I, 415, from Riedlbauer, 27.

³⁰ King Ludwig II became infatuated with the operas of Wagner as a teenager, and Ludwig served as a dedicated patron of Wagner throughout his life. Without the funding and support of Ludwig, Wagner's later operas might have never even been composed, let alone performed.

³¹ Winifred Wagner und Wittelsbacher Ausgleichs-Fonds (publisher), *König Ludwig II und Richard Wagner: Briefwechsel*, revised by Otto Strobel, 5 volumes, (Karlsruhe, 1936-1939), vol. IV, 42, from Riedlbauer, 27.

orchestral part that is not derived from preceding motives. But there is nothing to be said about it.”³² It is interesting to note that based on this quote, it seems as if Wagner’s self-analysis aligns him with the definition of the leitmotiv, which could aid in the historical association of Wagner’s music with the leitmotiv. However, this last sentence is incredibly important, showing that Wagner’s use of these themes as a unifying measure is not intended to create a new thematic development of opera—which is the association that became well known. In fact, Wagner was simply trying to unify a large opera in the way that Beethoven unified his symphonies, as he states in one of his essays:

The new form of dramatic music must have the unity of a symphonic movement. This is possible if the new form ranges over the entire drama. The unity then is the result of a web of basic themes that are interwoven into the piece and that, as in a symphonic movement, are confronted, extended by, separated from, and connected with one another.³³

Contemporary Critical Reception

Carolyn Abbate supports this view of the unity in Wagner’s music, writing, “...these ‘symphonic’ operas are as musically logical, as ‘unified,’ as German

³² Richard Wagner, *Briefe an August Röchel*, with introduction by La Mara (Leipzig, 1903), 42, from Riedlbauer, 27.

³³ Richard Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, vol. X, 187, from Riedlbauer, 30.

instrumental music of the accepted canon.”³⁴ While Wagner strove for the unity of instrumental music, he also sought to elevate the power and status of the unification, coercing listeners into deeply engaged dramatic mindsets. Abbate writes, “In short, Wagner wrote of a musical substance whose progress through time, whose essence, is not merely coordinated with but determined by the text; he insisted that such music will involve elements that are unthinkable in instrumental music.”³⁵ Additionally, Wagner believed that the text was the overarching shape of unification, and that it implied specific musical gestures, as opposed to a motivic unity in absolute music that is based solely upon musical form and convention. For example, Abbate points out that he writes, “...the entire expanse of the musical fabric is already prefigured by the web of words and poetic lines; that is, this musical fabric was already predetermined by the poem itself.”³⁶

Wagner’s idea of the text (or dramatic ideas) and music as star-crossed lovers has persisted into contemporary film music. To take one example that will be more fully developed in Chapter Four, John Williams uses the *Imperial March* theme, or the theme associated with Darth Vader and the evil of the Galactic Empire, in several moments throughout Anakin Skywalker’s training and childhood that foreshadow his inevitable downward spiral toward the Dark Side of the Force. In *Episode III: Revenge*

³⁴ Carolyn Abbate, “Opera as Symphony, a Wagnerian Myth,” In *Analyzing Opera: Verdi and Wagner* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 94.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 96.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 98.

of the Sith, this culminates in the destruction of Anakin and his innocent theme, and the birth of Darth Vader and the prominent power of the *Imperial March*.³⁷ In *Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back*, when Luke learns that Darth Vader is his father, the *Imperial March* sounds, restating the inevitability of evil and its power. The way that these moments of text and music interact with each other has become a crucial part of film, and these relationships developed from Wagner's desire to elevate the interplay between text and music, intertwining the two forever. However, Williams use of these themes in Episodes I–III is very different from the way he they are treated in the original trilogy, a point which will be discussed in the later chapters.

Abbate and others point us to Wagner's premeditated sketches of motives, which he would rationally insert according to their pre-determined associations with the drama itself. Curt von Westernhagen provides further support for this in his book, *The Forging of the 'Ring'*, which details the composition sketches from all of the operas in the *Ring*, which are now in archives. Additionally, he leads the reader to a greater understanding of Wagner's appreciation for Beethoven and his compositional techniques, especially its motivic development.³⁸

³⁷ Interestingly, the *Imperial March* as we know and love it today is not present in *Episode IV: A New Hope*. It is not until *Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back*, that we hear this theme. However, since people associate that theme with Darth Vader, Williams chose to use it at the end of *Episode III* when Anakin's transformation into Darth Vader is completed. It leaves a bit of an awkward music gap if you watch all of the films in their storytelling order (I–VI).

³⁸ Curt von Westernhagen, *The Forging of the "Ring,"* translated by Mary Whitall and Arnold Whitall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 4.

This demonstrates an obvious disconnect from the argument of Riedlbauer, and it is important to note that there are several scholars who Riedlbauer argues against. Westernhagen is one, who argues that Wagner's music does contain development of his themes. I disagree with Westernhagen's analysis of Wagner's motivic development, but it is important to point out that though scholars may disagree over Wagner's treatment of themes, everyone agrees that he did sketch themes for an opera before writing the opera, a technique that has been adapted by contemporary film composers.

Westernhagen spends the majority of his first chapter outlining the similarities between the compositional styles of Wagner and Beethoven, particularly their use of motives. Specifically, Westernhagen mentions Wagner's start on the compositional sketch for *Siegfried's Tod (Götterdämmerung)* in 1850, writing, "...knowing how he worked, it is reasonable to assume that other motives and melodies had occurred to him at that time."³⁹ However, it is important to note that Wagner never referred to his motives as leitmotifs. Instead, Riedlbauer makes it clear that Wagner very specifically calls them *Erinnerungsmotivs* when he points them out in his autobiography.⁴⁰

Wagner's deliberate terminology illustrates his thought process regarding opera as a large-scale symphonic work, rather than viewing his work as motivic evolution of the genre of opera. Despite popular views that Wagner created the leitmotiv, he very rarely used a motive in the way that we think of a leitmotiv today,

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴⁰ Richard Wagner, *Mein Leben* (Munich, 1963), translated by Andrew Gray and edited by Mary Whittall.

and he never accepted the usage of the term. Instead, he consistently referred to his motives as reminiscence motives, and cited them as a necessary element for grand-scale unification. On multiple occasions, he chastised the work of scholars such as the aforementioned Wolzogen, rejecting their praise and admiration for his perceived creativity. Interestingly, according to Riedlbauer, Wagner saw himself as a catalyst in the evolution of the symphony, rather than the genre of opera.⁴¹ However, we can accurately state that Wagner conceived his motives beforehand, inserting them in a dramatic way that formed a “web of themes” which would grow to be the foundation of the music of the future.

With all of these definitions of different motives, it is easy to get lost, and perhaps neither the reminiscence motive nor the leitmotiv adequately convey the impact of Wagner’s musical themes on an audience. While Wagner does refer to his themes as *Errinerungsmotive*, the leitmotiv as we know it today was not a technically defined concept during his lifetime, and Wagner’s primary sources, such as his aforementioned letters, are more oriented toward the leitmotiv as it would come to be defined in history. Based on previously mentioned musical analysis, I do not believe that Wagner’s treatment of themes satisfies Warrack’s definition of the leitmotiv, but I believe that Wagner’s immersion in the *Gesamtkunstwerk* and his thinking about themes as more than a signpost planted the seeds of the leitmotiv as it would develop

⁴¹ Richard Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, vol. X, 187, from Riedlbauer, 30.

in film music, and therefore it is unfair to simply label his themes as *Erringerungsmotive*. Wagnerian motivic use, though not adequately developed in the sense of a leitmotiv, was dramatically progressive in a way that represented more than a simple sign for the listener. His unique ability to enrapture an audience with his combination of story and music made him famous, and inspired the real battle-ground of music and drama—film music, whose concepts are indebted to the pioneers of the dramatic use of musical motives—the opera composers of the nineteenth century.

Chapter 2

THE BIRTH OF FILM MUSIC

The adventure film *King Kong* was produced in 1933, and ever since, people have been obsessed with the beast and his story. Undergoing remakes in 1976 and 2005, what has made this story so important—what made the film so successful? Perhaps the film’s music was key. Mervyn Cooke writes, in his comprehensive history of film music, that the score for this film “almost single-handedly marked the coming-of-age of non-diegetic film music: it established a style and technique of scoring that was not only much imitated during the Golden Age, but continues to be reflected in mainstream narrative scoring practices to the present day.”⁴² This popular and successful style of scoring appealed to its audiences by utilizing leitmotifs to give structural unity in a similar vein to the practice of nineteenth-century opera. In this chapter, I will examine the evolution of film music and its techniques from the birth of film music through the Golden Age of Hollywood, focusing on the music of Joseph Carl Breil, Max Steiner, and Erich Kongold. I will demonstrate film music’s debt to

⁴² Mervyn Cooke, *A History of Film Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 88.

opera and the leitmotiv technique, highlighting the transformation of the leitmotiv technique over time and hinting at what remains popular in film music today.

Cooke credits the origin of film music to late nineteenth-century Paris, more specifically Gaston Paulin's piano music which was specially composed for Emily Reynaud's animated *Pantomimes lumineuses*.⁴³ In the late nineteenth-century, live music, rather than recordings, often accompanied the new invention of moving pictures. This tradition continued into the twentieth century, when movie companies made the switch to pre-recorded sound, though to this day, people could still attend movies where a live orchestra is the sole accompaniment, though this is not very popular.

Presently, we think of composers creating music specifically for a film, but this was not the case when film music was born. In fact, non-original music was the preferred accompaniment to silent films. Take, for example, *The Clansman* (1915), more commonly recognized under the title *The Birth of a Nation*, whose score for the Los Angeles premiere was composed by Carli Elinor—Elinor believed that “there was no need for original music since so many good tunes had already been written.”⁴⁴ He felt that the music of the past was so exquisite and varied that he could compile old pieces to reinforce any dramatic idea. The composers featured in this otherwise silent epic directed by D.W. Griffith included Mozart, Bizet, Rossini, Schubert, Verdi, and

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁴ William Darby and Jack Du Bois, *American Film Music: Major Composers, Techniques, Trends, 1915-1990* (London, 1990), 3, from Cooke, 23.

Wagner.

At this point in history, it was common procedure for a film to have different music for the film's debuts in several locations. With regard to the later New York screenings of *The Birth of a Nation*, reporter Grace Kingsley for the *Los Angeles Times* commented in 1915 that the music, this time original and composed by Joseph Briel, was to be "...no less than the adapting of grand-opera methods to motion pictures! Each character playing has a distinct type of music, a distinct theme as in opera."⁴⁵ This, of course, harkens back to the operas of Richard Wagner, with his usage of a different theme for each character or main dramatic concept.

Cooke points out that one theme, called "The Bringing of the African to America," contains hints of Dvorak in its uses of musical techniques, including syncopation and pentatonicism.⁴⁶ I would also point out that Breil specifically made use of themes for each main family of the film, the Stonemans and the Camerons, as well as themes for "the little colonel," Elsie Stoneman, and Silas Lynch, among others. Though most of Briel's music was original, his score still drew greatly upon the successful, proven music of the past. For example, Breil used a variation of Edvard Grieg's *In the Hall of the Mountain King* during a battle scene in the film. Yet another example is Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries," used to accompany the equestrian riders of the Ku Klux Klan. Interestingly, the composer and director argued at length over

⁴⁵ Quoted from Cooke, 24.

⁴⁶ Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 24.

the use of the Wagnerian material—Griffith wanted some of the notes to be altered but Breil refused to tamper with it. To this, the director replied that this music was not “*primarily* music,” but rather “music for motion pictures.”⁴⁷ As we will see in chapter three, John Williams would compose a film score for *Episode IV: A New Hope* in a very similar fashion, drawing from successful composers of the past with slight alterations. One major difference between the approaches of these two composers, however, is that John Williams did not utilize any popular, non-classical music in his score; there are several instances in which Breil composed variations on more popular tunes of his day. One example is the scene where a variation on “Do your ears hang low?” plays to represent the slaves, singing and dancing in their quarters. Another is the patriotic song “My Country, ‘Tis of Thee,” which can be heard during the surrender of Robert E. Lee in the film. Additionally, the well-known tune to “O Tannenbaum” is used as a theme for the Confederacy and their flag, heard as we look at the flag and again later when the Confederates rescue the Camerons after they are attacked. A final example of Breil’s use of pre-existing music is the variation on the common Civil War song “Dixie Land,” which plays while the sons of each family march off to war, plays again later during a battle charge, and plays for a final time for the parade of the victorious clansmen at the conclusion of the film.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ This distinction may become increasingly more important as we advance in the history of film music.

⁴⁸ D.W. Griffith, “The Birth of a Nation.” Image Entertainment 6305130949. November 17 1998, DVD.

Breil's score for *The Birth of a Nation* became immensely popular, and people began to realize that a more advanced narrative required accompaniment and themes equal in complexity and depth.⁴⁹ This, of course, should remind us of Wagner's belief that his system of interlocking musical themes was essential to the cohesion of the drama as a whole. With regard to motives, Breil himself said, "the motif must in its further presentations be varied to suit the new situations. And the greatest development of the theme must not appear in the early part of the score, but towards the end where is the climax of the whole action."⁵⁰ This idea had firmly taken root in traditional Western music, where sonata form dominated the symphonic scene and privileged the continuity of themes and their development. More specifically, the exposition contains the introduction of the theme, then its development, and finally culminates in the recapitulation, which we can compare to "the greatest development of the theme," as Breil stated. This, of course, is slightly different from Wagner's main use of motives as described in the first chapter, because Wagner's motives were almost exclusively exact repetitions, or reminiscence motives, rather than themes that developed over time. However, Wagner's use of musical themes to aid in dramatic continuity and understanding is the crux of Breil's musical ideas as well—Breil, along with the following film composers we will encounter, owes much to Wagner's progressive ideas regarding the marriage of music and the moving image.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁵⁰ Martin Miller Marks, *Music and the Silent Film: Contexts and Case Studies, 1825–1924* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 156.

Moving past silent films, a young Alfred Hitchcock's early films acted as a catalyst for the further development of Breil's operatic technique. As Cooke writes of Hitchcock's film *Blackmail* (1929):

the score [by Jimmy Campbell and Reg Connelly] also incorporates impressionistic reworkings of a motif borrowed from a song first heard diegetically and then used to comment on aspects of the drama as it unfolds, a technique anticipating the similar procedure used many years later by [Max] Steiner and others.⁵¹

There are several others who lead us to the classical Hollywood film scoring technique as well, including Joseph von Sternberg, a film composer who began his work in the late 1920s. On the subject of film, he writes, "The sound film affords me the opportunity to orchestrate an action in such a way that the instrumentation becomes a necessary organic constituent of the entire work."⁵² Some directors felt the same way, such as René Clair, a French filmmaker from the 1930s who chose to involve the composer Georges Auric in the entire production of his film *A nous la liberté* (1931), rather than bringing him in to compose once the rest of the film was nearly complete.⁵³ These examples all point to the integration of the visual image and

⁵¹ Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 61.

⁵² Werner Sudendorf, "The Chronicles" and "Commentary", *Josef von Sternberg's 'The Blue Angel'*, 2001, Eureka DVD, EKA 50009, from Cooke, 65.

⁵³ Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 63. Interestingly, bringing the composer in during pre-production is rare in film music even today, though one famous example of early working between director and composer is Peter Jackson and Howard Shore in their *The Lord of the Rings* collaboration, where the operatic technique I have been discussing forms the basis of these film scores.

music, and their increasingly more intimate relationship ultimately leads us to the coveted Golden Age of classic Hollywood films.

Caryl Flinn discusses the nature of leitmotifs in classical Hollywood, which are often associated with specific characters as they appear on screen. This approach is based on the process of signification, which consists of a sign, in this case a specific character, and a referent, which, in our example, is the leitmotif for that particular character. This is further expanded upon by the foundational work of Claudia Gorbman, who sees leitmotifs as examples of film music's "connotative values so strongly codified that it can bear a similar relation to the images as a caption to a news photograph."⁵⁴ She proceeds to explain, borrowing the term *ancrage* from the work of Roland Barthes, "Music, like the caption, anchors the image in meaning, throws a net around the floating visual signifier, assures the viewer of a safely channeled signified."⁵⁵ Thinking more specifically about contemporary examples, try to listen to the Imperial March leitmotif from *Star Wars* without thinking of Darth Vader and the Dark Side, or listening to the *Indiana Jones* theme without picturing Harrison Ford with his whip and cowboy hat. Even beyond characters, music can act as a sign for anything. For example, the opening text crawl at the opening of *Episode IV: A New Hope* is inextricably linked with the main title theme. These signs are incredibly effective tools for remembering things, which is in large part why they have been so

⁵⁴ Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 81.

⁵⁵ Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 28.

successful from the nineteenth century through contemporary film scores, something that will be discussed more in the coming chapters.

Some critics were vehemently opposed to film composers' nigh obsessive use of leitmotifs, citing a departure from the Wagnerian model. One famous critic of the use of the leitmotiv in film music is Aaron Copland, who expressed his distaste for the formulaic quality of the technique itself.⁵⁶ Copland, in his few film scores, strayed from the Romantic borrowings that were popular during the time, and aimed for a subtler underscoring than his contemporaries, choosing to enhance action with musical themes, rather than using themes simply to signify characters.⁵⁷

Some criticized the use of leitmotifs for other reasons. For example, Wilfred Mellers wrote that the use of the leitmotiv was inappropriate and ineffective outside of large-scale musical forms. Others, such as Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, were of the same opinion:

The constantly changing scenes are characteristic of the structure of the motion picture. Musically, also, shorter forms prevail, and the leitmotif is unsuitable here because of this brevity of forms which must be complete in themselves. 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.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Kathryn Kalinak, *Settling the Score: Music and the Classical Hollywood Film* (London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 104-105.

⁵⁷ Howard Pollack, *Aaron Copland* (New York: Henry Holt, 1999), 349.

⁵⁸ Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, *Composing for the Films*, with a new introduction by Graham McCann (London: Athlone Press, 1994 [1947]), 4-6, from Cooke, 82.

Furthermore, Adorno and Eisler critiqued the usage of leitmotifs based on the episodic structuring of film, stating that the free-flowing, unending melody and connected themes from which this technique was born were at odds with the creation of more separate scenes.

Cooke argues strongly against the views of Adorno and Eisler, writing “their comments reveal strikingly basic misapprehensions about the function of music in narrative cinema, which can scarcely be said to depict ‘reality.’”⁵⁹ Cooke continues in his criticism, stating, “These misapprehensions are rained by an elitist dogma...” and that they have a “...rigid belief that music should aspire towards a state of modernist originality that is inherently more difficult for the average movie-goer to comprehend.”⁶⁰

While the techniques of this time period may have become predictable, they remain a staple in the production of film scores today. Cooke proves this thought, writing

Indeed, it is a cliché for individual cues to end with some kind of interrupted cadence (another Wagnerian mannerism), a particularly common method of rounding off main-title music by extending it into the opening shots of the first scene and leaving the harmony unresolved in order to create a sense of expectancy... [this interrupted cadence] remains a powerful emotional tool, even when consciously manipulative and formulaically overworked.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 82.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 82-83.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 83.

At this point, the influence of opera becomes even clearer in film music, noted by the increasingly popular leitmotiv technique of film scoring. The composers from the Golden Age period knew how much they owed to opera composers like Wagner. As Erich Korngold wrote, “If Wagner had lived in this century, he would have been the Number One film composer.”⁶² While Wagner probably would have been successful in the film era, it is important to note that despite the close relationship with operatic techniques, the use of the leitmotiv has already been changing for a number of years, and this transformation would continue into contemporary film music. Rather than simply repeating themes, composers begin layering themes, varying and developing them to serve as more than the reminiscence motives of the nineteenth century. Eventually, this brings us to the musical theme layerings in scores for movies like *Star Wars*, which enhance the drama through a more inherently emotional method than simply illustrating everything through acting and script writing. Additionally, they vaguely reinforce the overarching dramatic concepts and structure of the film, keeping audiences engaged and helping them to understand the plot as it develops. However, it is important to note that the music of the original *Star Wars* trilogy does not foreshadow future dramatic events; it simply helps to reinforce the plot and summarize events as they unfold. The transformation into a musical object that

⁶² Tony Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Silman James Press, 1997), 157.

inherently informs the listener in a progressive dramatic fashion does not occur until Howard Shore's scores for *The Lord of the Rings*.

We must also note that throughout the transformation of this technique in the Golden Age, the music serves to enhance the visual image to provide unity, but not to represent something else entirely as in *The Lord of the Rings*. Flinn reinforces this, writing “for both Wagner and Hollywood, the leitmotiv was primarily motivated by dramatic and not musical necessities, a fact that hints at the subservient relationship music ultimately serves to narrative.”⁶³

The methods of composing employed during the Golden Age of Hollywood films and beyond have proven successful, and have not only been a stylistic choice, but have been proposed by some scholars as a set of rules—something that a composer *must* do in order to successfully compose a film score. For example, in Gorbman's writing about the necessary principles of composition for Hollywood films, rule number six is “*Unity*: via repetition and variation of musical material and instrumentation, music aids in the construction of formal and narrative unity.”⁶⁴ Though written well after these films were composed, Gorbman's rules are based on what was done almost universally by film composers of the past, as we can see in the specific works of the two most successful Golden Age composers, Max Steiner and Erich Korngold.

⁶³ Caryl Flinn, *Strains of Utopia*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 26.

⁶⁴ Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies*, 73.

Max Steiner

Max Steiner was born in Austria in 1888, both a time and a place very rich in musical tradition. Steiner studied under composers such as Johannes Brahms and Robert Fuchs, conducting his first operetta at age 12.⁶⁵ He worked as a music professional in both Vienna and London until immigrating to the United States in 1914 to begin his career in American music. For more than a decade, he made his living as a successful conductor and composer of musicals on Broadway. Then, in 1929, Steiner moved to Hollywood to join the music staff of RKO Pictures, an American film company identified as one of the Big Five studios of Hollywood's Golden Age. Often referred to as the “father of film music,” Steiner composed over 300 film scores, and was nominated for 24 Oscars, of which he won three. He is widely recognized for his scores of *King Kong* (1933), *Little Women* (1933), *Gone with the Wind* (1939), and *Casablanca* (1942). Additionally, Steiner was the first to win a Golden Globe for Best Original Score, which he won for his film *Life with Father* (1947).

Of these films, Steiner's score for *King Kong* has received the most acclaim among film music scholars. Steiner's contemporaries often imitated the score's iconic

⁶⁵ Most biographical information on Max Steiner lifted from MSS 1547; The Max Steiner Collection; Film Music Archives; L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

binary main title theme opening and consistent use of leitmotifs, and these techniques have even been adapted by more modern composers.⁶⁶

In my own viewing of the film, it is clear that the main title theme of the score owes much to opera. Indeed, while the main title music plays, there are no credits, just a blank screen that reads “Overture.”⁶⁷ The music itself contrasts two musical ideas, the aggressive and chromatic motive of the beast, and the stable, romantic love motive. These two ideas are just as dramatically significant, as they represent the two overarching ideas of the story: people view Kong as an untamable monster, yet we see his ability to care for and fall in love with the leading lady. Cooke describes this main title music as “characteristic of Steiner's simple musicodramatic language,”⁶⁸ illustrating how Steiner's music, much like Wagner's, tied together dramatic ideas with memorable musical idioms. In fact, Steiner limits Kong's leitmotiv to just three notes, allowing him to easily incorporate it into almost any music. For example, in the scene in the cave, Kong's chromatic motive interrupts diegetic music, and then it intertwines with the love motive as the relationship between Kong and Darrow is abruptly cut short.⁶⁹ Christopher Palmer, an orchestrator for several Oscar-winning film composers, explains this musical moment, stating, “Here the music is required,

⁶⁶ Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 88.

⁶⁷ Merian C. Cooper, *King Kong*, RKO Pictures 62311266, 1933, DVD.

⁶⁸ Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 88.

⁶⁹ This intertwining of the two main themes is also done masterfully at the conclusion of the film where Kong is killed, musically foreshadowing the famous last line, “Twas beauty killed the beast.”

perhaps for the first time in an American film, to explain to the audience what is actually happening on the screen, since the camera is unable to articulate Kong's instinctive feelings of tenderness towards his helpless victim.”⁷⁰ In addition, we can look deeper into this simultaneous combination of diegetic and non-diegetic music, which Steiner does at another point in the film as well: as the ship approaches Skull Island through the fog, we hear drumming in the background, a diegetic element, mixing with the non-diegetic layering of musical ostinati. This technique is still prevalent in films today; the example that most immediately comes to mind is Howard Shore’s scores for the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. In the third installment, *Return of the King*, there is a moment where the Orcs are advancing on Minas Tirith, and we see and hear trolls beating drums (diegetic), and these sounds become a part of the non-diegetic music played here to represent the siege of the kingdom of Gondor. Evidently, Steiner’s combination of diegetic and non-diegetic music was ahead of its time, and more examples will be discussed in the next chapter.

Steiner's use of leitmotifs was widely recognized in other movies as well, for example in RKO's 1935 film *The Informer*. Palmer states that this main title music illustrates Steiner's “ability to crystallize the essence of a film in a single theme.”⁷¹ This does not mean that Steiner utilized only one theme, just that the title music was

⁷⁰ Christopher Palmer, *The Composer in Hollywood* (London: Marion Boyars, 1990), 28-29.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

particularly effective in acting as a microcosm of the main dramatic themes of the film, as in *King Kong*.⁷²

Steiner was also very well known for his adaptations of pre-existing melodies in his films. This technique, specifically minor-key variations of well-known tunes, was a practice adopted from silent films. Steiner employed this technique in several movies, such as *Gone With the Wind*, where the burning of Atlanta is punctuated by minor-key brass interjections based on the popular Civil War song “Dixie,” and in the movie *Casablanca*, where the arrival of the Germans in Paris is enhanced by a plodding, unpleasant minor-key version of the German national anthem.

Steiner's output, though admittedly not all equal in quality, is astonishing, and foreshadows the standard working practice of film composers today, who many think of as composing in something akin to a factory, churning out music to meet deadlines. Steiner followed Wagner's technique of sketching themes for main characters and overriding dramatic ideas before composing any actual music, stating in a newspaper article “every character should have a theme.”⁷³ Steiner also felt that drama was the most important part of the film, as he is quoted saying, “I've always tried to subordinate myself to the film,” going on to discuss that the film is not the appropriate

⁷² The motivic techniques in *The Informer* are almost as prevalent as they are in *King Kong*, specifically the famous four-note motive used to represent money.

⁷³ Max Steiner, interview quoted in “Music in the Cinema: Hollywood Has Discovered How the Score Improves the Photoplay”, *New York Times*, 29 September 1935.

platform for showing how clever they can be with music.⁷⁴ Steiner's iconic work with film scoring established the formulaic precedent followed by composers for years to come, enduring to this day.

Erich Korngold

Erich Wolfgang Korngold was a Viennese composer born in 1897 to a well-known music critic, Julius Korngold. Widely recognized as a child prodigy, Korngold began composing and performing at a very young age, famously playing his cantata *Gold* for Gustav Mahler in 1906 when he was only nine years old. Mahler was astounded by the musical intellect of the boy, recommending that he study composition with Alexander von Zemlinsky. At age eleven, Korngold composed his ballet *Der Schneemann*, which became immensely popular after its debut in 1910, highlighted by a performance for Emperor Franz Josef. Korngold's first orchestral score, *The Schauspiel Ouverture*, was composed at the age of fourteen, and his first large-scale orchestral work, *Sinfonietta*, was composed the following year. In 1914, he completed his first two operas, *Der Ring des Polykrates* and *Violanta*. At age twenty-three, Korngold finished his most famous opera, *Die tote Stadt*, and was atop the European musical world. Korngold was praised by the likes of famous opera

⁷⁴ Tony Thomas, *Film Score: The View from the Podium* (New York: A.S. Barnes, 1979), 81.

composers Richard Strauss and Giacomo Puccini, and his work was in high demand. In 1934, Korngold was asked to come to Hollywood to adapt Mendelssohn's incidental music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for Max Reinhardt's film version of the play. In 1938, Korngold was back in Austria, conducting opera, when he was asked to come back to the United States again to compose the film score for *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938). Soon after his move back to the U.S., the Jewish Korngold decided to stay long term, due to the rise of Adolf Hitler in Germany and the German annexation of Austria. Korngold won the Academy Award for Best Original Score for *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, and became a naturalized citizen of the U.S. in 1943.

Brendan G. Carroll, a biographer of Korngold, writes “Treating each film as an ‘opera without singing’ (each character has his or her own leitmotif) [Korngold] created intensely romantic, richly melodic and contrapuntally intricate scores.”⁷⁵

Korngold was not as prolific a film composer as Steiner, but was equally as influential to the evolution of film music, if not more so. Korngold was known for the swashbuckling genre, composing scores to *The Adventures of Robin Hood* and *The Bandit of Sherwood Forest* (1946) among others, and this genre has endured to the present day. This is well demonstrated in the works of John Williams, among others,

⁷⁵ Brendan G. Carroll, “Korngold, Erich Wolfgang,” *Grove Music Online*, Oxford Music Online, Oxford University Press, accessed March 8, 2013.

who borrow scoring techniques and the use of musical themes in a similar way to Korngold, something which will be further explained in the next chapter.⁷⁶

Much like Steiner, Korngold's music followed the formula of leitmotiv usage, Korngold describing the method as “symphonic” to demonstrate its ability to give structural unity to a work. Korngold, too, stressed the subordination of the music to the dialogue and the screen action. He believed that film music was just like opera, only without the singing, famously stating that Puccini's *Tosca* was “the best film score ever written.”⁷⁷ Owing quite a bit to Wagner, Strauss, and Puccini, Korngold's music was very popular and has stood the test of time, noted by composers such as John Williams who have taken up the flag since Korngold's passing. Korngold's scores excelled in prolonging themes, noted by his formulaic opening: the main title theme transforms into a variation as the film begins, an idea central to the scores of Williams, who most people associate with that concept in the opening of his *Star Wars* films. Korngold used this method time and time again, which “at times verges on the monothematic,” according to Cooke.⁷⁸ Korngold sprinkles in variety, changing instrumentation, articulation, and key areas among other things to keep the audience from becoming bored with the idiom.

⁷⁶ Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 94.

⁷⁷ Tony Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 2nd edition, Silman James Press, (Los Angeles, 1997), 175.

⁷⁸ Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 95.

For *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, Cooke notes that Korngold's score contains “suggestions of Mahler and Reger audible through the Straussian norm.”⁷⁹ As will be discussed at length in the next chapter, his idea of borrowing musical ideas from successful romantic composers has continued to this day, sometimes at the request of the film’s director, and sometimes simply because the composer is attempting to capture the feeling created by a particular piece or the writing of a specific composer.

In 1945, things began to change for the successful composer—Korngold’s father died, World War II came to a close, and the composer had become disillusioned with Hollywood and the kinds of films they were producing, all of which ultimately resulted in him ceasing to write for films after 1946. Many speculate that Korngold rethought his career after the death of his critical father, who had never approved of his son's decision to write exclusively for film. Korngold went back to composing concert music after World War II, and died in Hollywood in 1957.⁸⁰

Both Korngold and Steiner were very successful during the Golden Age of Hollywood, adapting older techniques to appeal to a modern audience. The use of these basic nineteenth-century opera techniques would continue further into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, most famously in the music of John Williams and

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 96.

⁸⁰ For additional information on Korngold’s life, please consult the biography Brendan G. Carroll, *The Last Prodigy: A Biography of Erich Wolfgang Korngold* (Amadeus Press, 1997), and Jessica Duchon, *Erich Wolfgang Korngold* (Phaidon Press, 1996).

Howard Shore, though those composers approached the issue in different ways.

Chapter 3

SERVING THE MYTHOLOGICAL NARRATIVE

The scores of *Star Wars* have become staples in film music literature. Is this simply because of the abilities of the composer, John Williams, to use the idea of unifying musical themes as they were used in the operas of Richard Wagner and in the Golden Age Hollywood films? Theodor Adorno, in his book *In Search of Wagner*, argued that the degeneration of the leitmotiv “leads to directly to cinema music where the sole function of the leitmotiv is to announce heroes or situations so as to help the audience to orient itself more easily.”⁸¹ Though the technique has been used by several composers in that seemingly simplistic sense, I argue that what makes John Williams special is his ability to not only embrace Wagner’s use of themes, but engage deeper with his philosophy, immersing himself in the concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, connecting with an epic myth that transcends all things. In this chapter, I will discuss Williams’ use of leitmotifs as compared to Wagner’s, highlighting similarities in both use and the thematic material itself.

⁸¹ Theodor Adorno, *In Search of Wagner* (Manchester: NLB, 1981), 46.

George Lucas and Postmodern Pastiche

The early 1970s were marked by financial woes around the country, and Hollywood was no exception. The film industry had attempted to appeal to a younger audience with anti-war films such as *R.P.M.* (1970) and *The Strawberry Statement* (1970), but these movies didn't fare well, leaving studios at a financial loss. In order to keep afloat, studios began auctioning off old costumes and props, and nostalgic fans from Hollywood's Golden Age jumped at the opportunity, paying outrageous amounts of money for old memorabilia. For example, a pair of Judy Garland's ruby slippers sold for \$15,000 at an MGM auction in 1970.⁸² This nostalgia culminated in the popularization of the pastiche style, which attempted to capitalize on the intersection of older, popular works. *Star Wars* is a great example of postmodern pastiche, combining 1930s science fiction cliffhanger serials like Buck Rogers with the classic Western.

In addition to a hodge-podge of 1930s genres and specific references, *Star Wars* also recalled a more distant past. In the commentary that accompanied the 2011 Blu-Ray release of the *Star Wars* saga, George Lucas uses the words "mythological motifs" to describe some of the dramatic concepts of the films. He describes these as "used" and "organic," alluding to the fact that there is something about the stories of

⁸² Tim Gihring, "Who Stole the Ruby Slippers?" *Minnesota Monthly*, March 2009, <http://www.minnesotamonthly.com/media/Minnesota-Monthly/March-2009/>.

these films that keeps bringing us back. He says, “There’s always a teacher, someone who mentors the young hero in what his destiny is,” and describes the character of the “old wizard or old man...the wise companion.”⁸³ Lucas used these archetypes, which have been used in literature throughout history, to retell the age-old story of good and evil, and ultimately, the cyclical nature of life.

For any who know the early history of George Lucas, none of this seems to fit together. Lucas was a socially awkward student at USC who did experimental, avant-garde cinematography. He preferred to deal with humans through a lens if at all, usually focusing on objects instead of people. For example, one of his early films, called *I:42.08* (1966), famously has “no character except the car.”⁸⁴ This, along with other early films like *THX1138* (1971), earned Lucas a reputation as a cold, calculated director. In response to this reputation, Lucas created *American Graffiti* (1973) to show something different; the movie tracks the adventures of a group of 1960s teenagers. *American Graffiti* enjoyed commercial success, and many believed that it sidetracked Lucas from his creative and original filmmaking by thrusting him into the commercial movie market.

After his endeavor with *American Graffiti*, Lucas biographer Dale Pollock writes, “Lucas wanted to return to more traditional values that held a special appeal for out rootless society. He needed a timeless fable that could demonstrate, not pontificate

⁸³ George Lucas, *Episode IV: A New Hope, Star Wars*, Commentary by George Lucas, among others, DVD, 2011.

⁸⁴ John Baxter, *George Lucas* (London: HarperCollins, 1999), 56.

on, the differences between right and wrong, good and evil, responsibility and shiftlessness.”⁸⁵ The mythological subject matter that was to be included in the story compelled Lucas to create his story in the form of the trilogy. There is history behind the use of the trilogy, and it is no mere coincidence that Wagner, too, chose to create his story in the form of the trilogy, though it eventually culminated in a tetralogy. The trilogy is a form created by Aeschylus, a Greek dramatist who wrote about the disastrous effect of sin on both the sinner and his descendants. Wagner famously drew upon Aeschylus for other things as well, namely the ancestral curse that Alberich puts on the ring in *Rheingold*, and we can assume that Tolkien and Lucas drew inspiration either from Wagner or directly from Aeschylus in the form of their stories.

The titles of Wagner’s original trilogy of epic poems were *Siegfried’s Death*, *The Young Siegfried*, and *The Valkyrie*, with a grand introductory play called *The Rape of the Rheingold*.⁸⁶ *Star Wars*, is of course known to have been conceived as trilogy (*A New Hope* [1977], *The Empire Strikes Back* [1980], *Return of the Jedi* [1983]) but as mentioned in Chapter One, interestingly Lucas, too, conceived of something akin to a grand introduction which gave background to the characters and established the world in which the stories take place. This introduction or background was eventually made into *The Phantom Menace* (1999), *Attack of the Clones* (2002), and *Revenge of the Sith* (2005). It is interesting to note that in both these cases, the

⁸⁵ Dale Pollock, *Skywalking* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1999).

⁸⁶ Alice Cleather, *The Ring of the Nibelung* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1900), 23-24.

creators of the stories had an original vision, but the proportion was so large that it needed more background than a trilogy could provide. Additionally, all of these trilogies are themselves prologues to contemporary society, happening “a long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away.”

Lucas wanted to create a world that was still understandable and relatable to kids, even though it was based in an unfamiliar environment. He says,

I was able to use archetypes, which helped develop the characters, and put them in a context where they could be easily grasped because they are traditional characters that are easily to understand. I felt that was important in a movie like this because if you're in a really bizarre, strange environment—if the lead characters have emotions and motivations that are very, very familiar to you, then it's easy for you to grab onto something in the movie and make sense out of it. And this is the same story that had been told a thousand times around the world for several thousand years.⁸⁷

Lucas states that he uses archetypes such as the old wizard and the young hero to make the story tangible to children by reproducing something akin to a fairy tale. In these films, Lucas expanded the archetypal idea to other parts of the films as well, as we can see examples relating to previously established templates in almost every aspect of the production.

Of the shooting and editing, Will Brooker writes, “*Star Wars* is cut almost exactly to Hollywood convention.”⁸⁸ In watching a film, the audience had to be led to believe that all parts of the film coalesced into a continuous, seamless display. This

⁸⁷ George Lucas, *Episode IV: A New Hope, Star Wars*, Commentary by George Lucas, among others, DVD, 2011.

⁸⁸ Will Brooker, *Film Classics: Star Wars* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 51.

was done through continuity editing and similar techniques in sound editing.⁸⁹ There are no strange jump-cuts, and there is no confusion about spatial relationships between characters or overall continuity and consistency as in some of Lucas' previous films. Lucas once again drew upon convention to enhance the drama itself. For example, in the scene where Luke discovers the burning homestead of Uncle Owen and Aunt Beru, there is a sequence of three shots (protagonist approaches scene and gazes in horror, shot of the disaster from the view of the protagonist, then back to the reaction of the protagonist) which is borrowed from John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956) where Martin Pawley returns to his family home to find that it has been raided in the same fashion as in *Star Wars*. Another example is the sequence of Tatooine shots very similar to David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962)—first of the expansive desert, then of approaching strangers (in *Star Wars* the dot on the horizon is the Jawa Transport, in *Lawrence of Arabia* it is a Harith rider). A third example is the duel between Obi-Wan Kenobi and Darth Vader at the end of *A New Hope*, which follows the exact pattern of Toshiro Mifune's staff fight in Akira Kurosawa's *The Hidden Fortress* (1958).⁹⁰

Lucas put together a montage of war movies to show his special effects crew what he wanted for his space dogfights, and many of these are borrowed almost

⁸⁹ Scott D. Paulin, "Wagner and the Fantasy of Cinematic Unity," *Music and Cinema*, ed. James Buhler, Caryl Flinn, and David Neumeyer (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2000), 62.

⁹⁰ Will Brooker, *Film Classics: Star Wars* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 52-56.

exactly from older films. Additionally, in the dialogue that accompanies the Blu-Ray release, Lucas points out another stolen tactic—“the swing across the Death Star canyon was really, again, in the tradition of the old serials—Tarzan, Zoro, Errol Flynn movies, Robin Hood—they always had a swinging scene of some kind.”⁹¹ A final example of a borrowed shot in *A New Hope* is the attack on the Death Star trench at the end of the film. This scene is based on the conventions of *The Dam Busters* (1955, directed by Michael Anderson) and *633 Squadron* (1964, directed by Walter Grauman) where a team of pilots must fly through a small passage while under attack, trying to hit a small target to bring down a large structure. Will Brooker notes that *A New Hope* “directly follows the editing pattern from these earlier films, building a suspenseful rhythm between POV shots, reaction shots of each individual pilot, exterior shots of planes swooping (and crashing), and constant reminders of the enemy cannon fire.”⁹² Brooker also identifies the increased tension in this series of shots from cutting back to the control room as the staff waits helplessly and watches diagrams and messages. To further reinforce the idea of borrowing from other films, Brooker writes that this sequence of alternating shots in *Star Wars* may have been adapted from D.W. Griffith, the director of *Birth of a Nation* (1915), whose music I discussed in the previous chapter.

⁹¹ George Lucas, *Episode IV: A New Hope, Star Wars*, Commentary by George Lucas, among others, DVD, 2011.

⁹² Will Brooker, *Film Classics: Star Wars* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 56-57.

Through numerous examples, it is clear that George Lucas and his cinematography for the *Star Wars* films owe much to a shared body of work, comprised of films that had come before him. In much the same way, John Williams composed music that drew heavily upon the work of those who came before him, both in the distant past and in fairly modern times.

John Williams and Borrowed Musical Practices

John Williams has been the highest paid film composer since the 1970s, and his music has dominated the awards for the genre of film music. He has composed the scores for six of the top twelve highest grossing movies of all time, and three of his scores are listed on the American Film Institute's Top 25 Greatest Film Scores of all time (*Star Wars*, *Jaws*, *E.T.*). Williams idolized Erich Korngold, and much has been made of the similarities between some of their music, particularly the main title music of *Star Wars* and that of Korngold's *King's Row* (1942). Williams' famous main title theme harkens back to westerns, with the distinctive flat-seven to major-dominant progression that was formulaically typical of the cowboys themes from the Golden Age. These themes became a trademark for Williams, made famous in other scores as well, most notably *Indiana Jones*. Specifically speaking of his title music for *Star*

Wars, Williams says “But it has that kind of resonance—it resonates within us in some past hero's life that we've all lived.”⁹³

Though Williams wanted it to resonate with our collective unconscious, he did not condone the use of pre-existing classical music for his *Star Wars* films, as was Lucas' initial intent. Lucas was afraid that in a world with droids, spaceships, and alien races, the audience would need something tangible to adhere to, and believed that music could accomplish that goal. Instead of using complete pieces of music with which people were already familiar, Williams drew upon the common technique of using unifying musical themes. As James Buhler writes, “[Star Wars] unfolds in mythic time that grants the recurrence of leitmotifs, especially orchestral climaxes, a kind of summarizing power that is more than simply the recurrence of linguistic tokens.”⁹⁴ Regarding Wagner, Adorno argues, “A moment of reflection [musically] would suffice to shatter its illusion of ideal unity.”⁹⁵ However, I believe that Williams willingly and knowingly did this, contributing to the mythic nature of this *Gesamtkunstwerk* by musically adding to the concept of mythic, immutable time, where all stands still. Additionally, it is important to note that though many discuss Williams' use of the leitmotiv, I do not believe that the musical use in the original trilogy satisfies the thematic development demanded by John Warrack's definition.

⁹³ Quoted in Buhler, “*Star Wars*, Music, and Myth,” 34.

⁹⁴ James Buhler, “*Star Wars*, Music, and Myth,” *Music and Cinema*, ed. James Buhler, Caryl Flinn, and David Neumeyer (Wesleyan University Press, 2000), 44.

⁹⁵ Quoted in Paulin, “Wagner and the Fantasy of Cinematic Unity,” 71.

However, I recognize that there are several moments of different orchestration, which will be discussed later in the chapter, and I do not believe that Williams' themes simply act as signs. I believe that the "summarizing power" that Buhler describes points out that these themes act as more than a check on who is who, giving a period for dramatic reflection and greater understanding of the story.

Let us now examine some individual motives used in *Star Wars*, and their similarities to Wagnerian themes. John Williams' motives are all very unique, but it is interesting to note these similarities because these musical tropes parallel mythic tropes. First, we will take a look at the leitmotiv for Luke Skywalker:



Luke is, of course, our protagonist and young hero in *Star Wars*, and when compared to the story of the *Ring*, he most closely resembles the character of Siegfried, whose heroic motive is shown below:



These two musical motives, though from different centuries and different stories, both represent the same type of character, and therefore contain some interesting musical similarities. For example, the opening interval of a rising perfect fifth is significant. This interval has a heroic quality, and is played by brass instruments in both cases,

adding to the heroic feel. Then, there is the stepwise movement from the subdominant (E-flat) down to the supertonic (C) that is prevalent in both motives. In “Siegfried” this ends at a sustained supertonic, while in “Luke,” this movement is repeated twice and the supertonic is only sustained the third and final time.

Another example is the audible similarity between the Force motive (also used to represent Obi-Wan Kenobi) and Siegfried’s tragic motive. The reason for my comparison of these two motives is that Obi-Wan is the main hero killed in *Star Wars*, just as Siegfried is the main hero killed in the *Ring*. Both deaths redeem others from oppression and misguided action.

The Force (transposed for comparison):



Siegfried’s Tragic motive:



As in the previous example, the opening interval is the same, this time a rising perfect fourth. Next, there is a long note followed by short, stepwise motion (though in opposite directions) that leads to a falling minor sixth with identical rhythm. This is then followed by a sequence of rising notes, which ultimately land on the long note that ends the motive.

I am not trying to prove that John Williams consciously tried to take melodic or thematic material from Wagner. Rather, the inherent qualities of this mythic story all seem to give rise to similar outcomes: in editing, direct shots were taken from older movies, in music, a borrowing of musical material from a collective unconscious. In fact, John Williams was quoted as saying that the films reached “across cultural bounds and beyond language into some kind of mythic, shared remembered past—from the deep past of our collective unconscious.”⁹⁶

The *Star Wars* scores insert a lively, heroic character into the films, and verge on saturation scoring, a trend in films that require some suspension of disbelief. The musical content of the scores combine the leitmotiv technique with nineteenth-century romanticism, specifically Tchaikovsky and Prokofiev. As Mervyn Cooke writes, “the angular melodies and enlivenment of solid tonal harmonies with acerbic added dissonances are two of the most prominent aspects of Williams’ style.”⁹⁷ His use of the leitmotiv adds to the drama of the mythical saga and holds the audience together through all of the unfamiliar aspects of the film. In keeping with the theme of a collective unconscious used by both composer and director in the creation of these films, one of the obvious examples of borrowed musical material is the pounding triplet rhythm from “Mars,” a selection from Gustav Holst’s *The Planets*. Another

⁹⁶ Craig L. Byrd, “The *Star Wars* Interview: John Williams,” *Film Score Monthly*, 2, no. 1 (1997): 18.

⁹⁷ Mervyn Cooke, *A History of Film Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 463.

recognizable borrowing is the music of the Dune Sea on Tatooine, where the linear triads are non-functional, reminding us of the opening of part II of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*. We even have an example of a more contemporary borrowing in the cantina band music, which is an oddly orchestrated version of Benny Goodman's 1930s swing band music, arranged to fit an alien world with exotic instruments. These examples make it clear that Williams employed the pastiche technique in his composition, very similar to the way that Lucas used it in other aspects of the filmmaking for the trilogy.

Though there are several nods to romantic composers, we must still appreciate John Williams for his ability to use leitmotifs to enhance the mythic construct of George Lucas' epic story. James Buhler states of the themes, "Nothing actually happens musically in any of these scores [Star Wars]. The themes simply remain the same; none of them are really born of a thematic process, despite the obvious motivic relations among the themes."⁹⁸ It is not until the creation of the prequels that we truly encounter leitmotivic development in the way that we will with Howard Shore in *The Lord of the Rings*. For example, Williams uses the leitmotif called "The Imperial March" to represent Darth Vader, and at times simply the evil of the Galactic Empire. This is done in a fairly straightforward, signifying way in *A New Hope*, but Williams expands on it for the prequel trilogy, subtly embedding it in Anakin's seemingly beautiful, innocent theme. It is heard with progressive prominence through Episodes II

⁹⁸ James Buhler, "Star Wars, Music, and Myth," *Music and Cinema*, ed. James Buhler, Caryl Flinn, and David Neumeier (Wesleyan University Press, 2000), 53.

and III, signaling critical points in Anakin's downward spiral to the Dark side. There is one particular moment in Episode II where this theme is layered over the Dies Irae Gregorian chant, heard when Anakin confesses that he murdered the Sand People after they killed his mother. This layering is heard again in Episode II, when the clone troops turn against the Jedi, and we are flashed through shots of the perishing Jedi Order from around the galaxy. In the Imperial March's final rendition, accompanying Vader's death in Episode VI, Williams counters the innate power of the theme by reducing the orchestration and playing is very quietly with strings, flute, clarinet, horn, and harp as evil fades away and Vader dies. His ability to fragment themes and intertwine them is a powerful music tool that only now begins to fully emerge; it had previously not been done in the operas of Wagner, the film music of Golden Age composers like Steiner and Korngold, or even in Williams' original *Star Wars* trilogy scores.

Ultimately, what purpose does the borrowed material serve? I believe that the point of difference in *Star Wars* is its service to the ultimate mythological story, the cancelling of time and the cyclical nature of life. Adorno writes, "The eternity of Wagnerian music, like that of the music of the *Ring*, is one which proclaims that nothing has happened; it is a state of immutability that refutes all history by confronting it with the silence of nature."⁹⁹ Adorno constantly refers to the "cancelling of time," or something of the like in his critical writing on Wagner. In practice, this is

⁹⁹ Theodor Adorno, *In Search of Wagner* (Manchester: NLB, 1981), 40.

functionally represented as the deflection of action, and the expansion of lengthy, otherwise functionless narratives, such as Wotan's verbose speeches in act II of *The Valkyrie*. This idea may have transformed into cinematic music, just as the technique of the leitmotiv has made its way into film music. However, one can say that in the practice of modern film, this practice has been refined—the unnecessary weeded out. Ironically, what we are left with is the boiling down of the roaming, unspecific and therefore timeless Wagner into a concise, entertaining and attention-holding film of about two hours. The iconic films that utilize the same musical techniques as Wagner serve to philosophically and dramatically represent this same idea of timelessness, of a concrete moral divide, where the audience always knows the answer. Lucas was trying to create a modern fairy tale to teach children the difference between right and wrong. In that sense, his use of archetypes and drawing on the collective unconscious creates the perfect story, relatable and understandable regardless of which galaxy you come from.

Chapter 4

TOLKIEN'S "RING CYCLE" AND THE MUSICAL TECHNIQUES OF HOWARD SHORE

In taking on a project like *The Lord of the Rings*, Peter Jackson, the director, knew how important the music would be in tying together his vision. Jackson says, "More so than just scoring the film, I wanted the music to reflect Tolkien; I wanted the music to also bring the world of Middle-earth to life."¹⁰⁰ He selected Howard Shore to compose the scores to accompany the epic trilogy, and Shore admits that he had to look into the operatic form of Wagner to determine how he could organize and unify his work.¹⁰¹ Of Shore's compositions for the films, Jackson states, "You know it'll be an interesting day to listen to the music of all three films, because I know that Howard does see this as being his...the opportunity in his life to basically create an opera."¹⁰² As many composers before him did, Howard Shore drew upon the leitmotiv technique

¹⁰⁰ Howard Shore, "Music and Sound," *The Appendices Part 2: From Vision to Reality*, Recorded 2011, New Line Cinema 3000035613, 2011, DVD.

¹⁰¹ Wolf, 2003, from Judith Bernanke, "Howard Shore's Ring Cycle: The Film Score and Operatic Strategy." In *Studying the Event Film: The Lord of the Rings*. Ed. Harriet Elaine Margolis, Sean Cubitt, Barry King, and Thierry Jutel. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 176.

¹⁰² Howard Shore, "Music and Sound," *The Appendices Part 2: From Vision to Reality*, Recorded 2011, New Line Cinema 3000035613, 2011, DVD.

to create large-scale unity and enhance the drama of Peter Jackson's interpretation. However, Shore's music is the ultimate realization of the leitmotiv technique; the masterful use of the leitmotiv in these films is akin to its own unique character on the journey: narrating, foreshadowing, and reflecting upon the story throughout. Shore transforms themes with colorful orchestration and expansion and fragmentation of memorable thematic material, serving the narrative in a manner more sophisticated than the scores for any other film series to date.

As we have seen with operas, classic film scores, and the scores of John Williams, listeners learn the signification of the leitmotiv as the story progresses and begins to inform their understanding of dramatic concepts, even without prior knowledge of the musical technique. This is usually done through the presentation of leitmotivic material with the first appearance of the character or concept that it represents. Then, the material is restated with each important subsequent appearance or mention of the character or concept. However, where Howard Shore begins to extend the use of the leitmotiv even beyond what Williams did in *Star Wars* is Shore's ability to "change [the leitmotiv's meaning and function] as it recurs in new contexts to reflect the character's development as the story progresses."¹⁰³ Finally, by the twenty-first century, the leitmotiv has progressed beyond its early limitations of simply

¹⁰³ Judith Bernanke, "Howard Shore's Ring Cycle: The Film Score and Operatic Strategy." In *Studying the Event Film: The Lord of the Rings*. Ed. Harriet Elaine Margolis, Sean Cubitt, Barry King, and Thierry Jutel. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 178.

representing the appearance of a character or dramatic concept in film; now, film music also has the ability to dramatically connect the past, present and future.¹⁰⁴

Shore certainly viewed this project as an epic opera, composing over ten hours of music that are present in the extended editions of the films; over 90% of the three films have accompanying musical material, markedly more than in *Star Wars*.¹⁰⁵ This is similar to the *unendliche Melodie* of Wagner's *Ring* cycle, where “motivic associations between music and action extend over an entire work to create a seamlessly flowing dramatic unity.”¹⁰⁶ Others have compared this scoring style as fitting the tradition of the “music-flooded” film scores of Korngold and Steiner,¹⁰⁷ so it certainly has its roots in the past, but it also transforms the leitmotiv in a progressively dramatic fashion.

Despite its progressiveness, there is one important scene that draws upon a postmodern pastiche style similar to what George Lucas and John Williams achieved in *Star Wars*. For example, with regard to the scene in Shelob’s lair, Jackson said, “I said to Howard, ‘Listen, for Shelob why don't you go back to the old Cronenberg

¹⁰⁴ Carl Dalhaus, *Richard Wagner's Music Dramas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 123.

¹⁰⁵ Bernanke, “Howard Shore's Ring Cycle,” 176.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 176.

¹⁰⁷ Royal S. Brown, *Overtones and Undertones: Reading Film Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 97.

films? Let's have some of that stuff. This should be like *The Fly*.”¹⁰⁸ So, Shore went to work, looking at the older film style, and more specifically at the horror films of Alfred Hitchcock. With regard to this, Peter Cobbin, the score mixer, says, “I love all that kind of—brass under all this kind of screechy, scary, almost like, you know, like Hitchcock-type strings.”¹⁰⁹ Putting the music aside, Jackson wanted this borrowed style to come through in the action onscreen as well. As Shelob coils up Frodo in the web, Sam’s arm comes into the frame,¹¹⁰ and of this moment, Jackson remarks, “It's like a gunslinger shot. Its sort of a Clint Eastwood sort of, you know, hand slides into the side of frame.”¹¹¹ Certainly, there were elements of art long since passed that Jackson wanted to draw upon, and Shore did this musically as well, namely in the dramatic premises of the films.

The Dramatic Premise of a Film: Similarities to Opera Overtures

The prologue of *The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001) serves as a dramatic introduction to the overarching concepts of good versus evil in Middle-earth,

¹⁰⁸ Howard Shore, “Music and Sound,” *The Appendices Part 6: The Passing of an Age*, Recorded 2011, New Line Cinema 3000035615, 2011, DVD.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Interesting bit of trivia: the arm that you see is not that of Sean Astin, who plays Sam, but is actually Peter Jackson’s arm because Astin was not present on that day of shooting.

¹¹¹ Howard Shore, “Music and Sound,” *The Appendices Part 6: The Passing of An Age*, Recorded 2011, New Line Cinema 3000035615, 2011, DVD.

providing us with a concise explanation of the history of the Ring. The score to this prologue functions as an opera overture, introducing the important musical material that will be presented in the rest of the film. Early in this introduction, the very important musical leitmotiv of the Ring, called the *History of the Ring* theme, is introduced and repeated to strengthen the association with the Ring itself: it is first heard when Isildur takes the ring from Sauron, second, when a hobbit scoops the Ring up out of the river where Isildur was murdered,¹¹² and finally, when Bilbo takes the Ring from Gollum. This third and final expression of the leitmotiv essentially brings the audience up to the present day, the start of the film, where the suspense of the E-flat minor chord turns to a lighter, happier E-flat major as we enter the Shire, and we then hear the expression of its beautiful, folksy theme. Finally, as the *Shire* theme comes to a close, we are propelled forward into the full, heroic *Fellowship* theme as the title of the film appears onscreen. Thus, the exposition has ended, and the film can begin; the audience has been intrigued by the history of Middle-earth, and all of the main leitmotifs have been presented, all covered in a brief eight minutes. This technique, very similar to the construction of an opera overture, is used by Shore in each of the three films.

The opening of *The Two Towers* (2002) utilizes the same technique, though not quite as much exposition is needed since we have already experienced the first

¹¹² We assume that the hobbit who first found the Ring must have been Gollum (also known as Sméagol), but we later learn that it was his brother Déagol who first found the Ring, and Sméagol killed his brother and took the Ring from him.

“act,” if you will, of the story. Here, the *Ring* theme accompanies the appearance of the words “The Lord of the Rings,” and then the emergence of the title *The Two Towers* is underscored by the leitmotiv of the Kingdom of Rohan. Interestingly, this theme is not presented in full at the main title screen, as in the presentation of the theme in the main title screen of the *Star Wars* films. Instead, we hear a brief fragment of the theme, ending with uncertainty communicated through a slow tempo, a minor key, and very thin scoring. The fragmentation of this theme, before we even really know what it is, reflects the dramatic uncertainty of the future of the race of Men—the main dramatic concept of this installment in the trilogy. Will Men be subject to more corruption, and fall to the powerful will of the Ring, or will the race re-emerge as a strong and powerful system of kingdoms, fending off Sauron and the forces of evil? The main title music of this film is more similar to the classical Hollywood scores, with their use of two contrasting main themes comparable to the title music of Steiner's *King Kong* discussed earlier. Here, the ‘A’ theme is that of the Ring, and the ‘B’ theme is the Kingdom of Rohan, more loosely used to represent the race of Men as a whole in this film. This firmly establishes the forces of good and evil that will be present throughout the film, introducing the most important thematic material for the rest of the movie.

In the third and final movie, *The Return of the King* (2003), there is a prologue to explain events of the past, as in the first film. The first thing that we hear is the full *Ring* theme, underscoring the appearance of the words “The Lord of the Rings” onscreen (as in the second film), but this gives way to a happy, light music that evokes

the *Shire* theme through similar instrumentation and color, though it is different melodic material. Here, we see Sméagol and Déagol, happily fishing in the sunshine. Déagol is pulled under the water by a fish, where he sees the Ring, underscored by a solo violin playing the *Ring* theme. Eventually, Sméagol chokes his brother to death, taking the Ring for himself. We are then taken through the story of Sméagol exiling himself, poisoned by the Ring and eventually becoming the creature we know as Gollum. Howard Shore represents this character transformation musically, saying:

There's the Sméagol theme [also called Slinker theme], which has a little more pity in it, it's a little more melancholy, it's a little sadder really. And then the second part of Gollum's theme [also known as Stinker theme] is a more schizophrenic theme; it's more development of the creepier side of Gollum. And that uses the cimbalom, which is actually a hammer dulcimer. The hammer dulcimer seemed like a good one because it has that jittery sound and because it was one of the instruments of Hobbiton.¹¹³

Interestingly, Shore also points out that Gollum's theme contains fragments of the *History of the Ring* theme, because of the amount of time he has spent being poisoned by the Ring, and his close relationship with it.¹¹⁴

The screen goes black, and we are brought back to the current day, where Frodo stares at his Ring, being poisoned in the same way as Sméagol, and we hear the *Ring* theme once more. Next, we transition to Fangorn Forest,¹¹⁵ hearing a short

¹¹³ Howard Shore, "Music and Sound," *The Appendices Part 6: The Passing of An Age*, Recorded 2011, New Line Cinema 3000035615, 2011, DVD.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Howard Shore says of the orchestration used for Fangorn Forest (in *Two Towers* Music and Sound documentary), "Because of the nature of the woods, I used all

fragment of the *Fellowship* theme as we see the trio of Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli, now accompanied by Gandalf and Théoden as well. As they ride through the forest, we hear a hint of the *Gondor* theme—the ascending perfect fifth in the brass, and then we hear the E-minor cadence indicative of the *Rohan* theme, which then moves to A major, perfectly setting up the fragmentary statement of the *Gondor* theme in D major which underscores the title, “The Return of the King.” This introduces all of the main thematic material of the final film (the two main themes are the Ring and Gondor) and also foreshadows the convergence of Rohan and Gondor.

The subtle hint at the *Gondor* theme is heard as we see Théoden onscreen, and then the teasing bit of the *Rohan* theme is heard while the camera is on Aragorn, the themes signifying the opposite characters! However, Shore does this on purpose, hinting at both themes of Men before we hear the *Gondor* theme at the main title, musically representing that the race of Men will finally unite in their battle against evil, and showing us that the *Gondor* theme will now be used to represent the entire race of Men, rather than just Gondor. Of the *Gondor* theme, Howard Shore says “It’s a bringing together of the cultures of Men to defend themselves against the forces of evil, so it’s a really historic moment in Middle-earth.”¹¹⁶

wooden percussion. So you hear wood logs and bass marimbas. I mean...it's essentially the sound of wooden, natural elements.”

¹¹⁶ Howard Shore, “Music and Sound,” *The Appendices Part 6: The Passing of An Age*, Recorded 2011, New Line Cinema 3000035615, 2011, DVD.

Transformation of the History of the Ring Theme



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Of course, the *History of the Ring* theme plays as the title “The Lord of the Rings” appears onscreen at the beginning of each film. The theme itself is in a minor key and is very chromatic, beginning with its indicative rising half step. Shore starts this theme with a rising minor second half so that he can easily intertwine it with other themes, and it is no mere coincidence that the *Mordor* theme also begins with a rising minor second.

The *History of the Ring* theme is a great example of how Shore breaks from the use of the leitmotiv merely as a sign to represent a character. Shore could have deployed this theme far more often than he actually does throughout the trilogy, but instead he chooses to use it strategically to enhance the drama. During the previously discussed Prologue that opens *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the *Ring* theme is heard while Galadriel describes the creation of the nine of the Rings of Power, but interestingly, not when she describes the creation of the “one Ring to rule them all.” Instead of a sign for the Ring itself, Shore uses this theme to represent the seductive power of evil, and also plays the theme when the Ring changes owners and it starts to poison the mind of a new character. For example, the theme plays when Isildur picks

¹¹⁷ Reproduced from Bernanke, “Howard Shore's Ring Cycle,” 179.

up the Ring from Sauron's severed finger at the battle of Dagorlad, and we hear it again when the Ring falls from Isildur's dead body into a river. Later, we will hear it when Déagol scoops it out of that same river. This style of narration with the *Ring* theme continues, heard again when Bilbo Baggins pulls the ring out of his pocket, and once more when Frodo finds the Ring where Bilbo left it, in Bag End.

Until now, all of our experiences with the *Ring* theme have been when it changes owners, but now we are met with something new: the Ring's *want* for a new owner. We encounter the theme in this way when characters that never possess the Ring are tempted by its immeasurable power. For example, when Boromir tells the Council of Elrond of his dream¹¹⁸ about Isildur's Bane (the Ring) we hear the theme, pleading for Boromir to take it and use it. It briefly stops as he finishes recounting the story, then begins again and intensifies as he reaches his hand toward the Ring. This is stopped by an outburst from Gandalf in Black Speech, frightening all members of the Council. Another example lies in the dialogue between Gandalf and Frodo, when Gandalf says, "There are many powers in this world for good or for evil. Some are greater than I am and against some I have not yet been tested [the Ring]." Here, the theme is used to demonstrate the Ring's ability to twist evil into the minds of those that might be swayed by its power.

¹¹⁸ The dream is actually Faramir's (his brother), but Boromir is the one who brings it to their father, and Boromir is then sent to the Council for clarification on the matter.

The moments when the *Ring* theme is expected but *not* heard are particularly interesting. First, in *Fellowship* just after Boromir has tried to steal the Ring from Frodo at Amon Hen, Aragorn finds Frodo. Frodo tells him of Boromir's betrayal, and when Aragorn asks where the Ring is, Frodo begins to run away. Aragorn follows him, saying, "I swore to protect you," to which Frodo retorts, "Can you protect me from yourself?" At this point, Frodo holds out the Ring and Aragorn casts his gaze upon it for considerable time, but we do not hear the *Ring* theme. There is no musical indication of its power twisting the mind of Aragorn, and sure enough, Aragorn closes Frodo's hand around the Ring and says goodbye, saying "I would have gone with you to the end...into the very fires of Mordor." Another example of this theme's omission is in *The Return of the King*, when Faramir learns that Frodo is the Ring-bearer. We are led to believe that Faramir is tempted by the power of the Ring, enticed by the chance of restoring the power and glory of Gondor, but the theme is not heard in this scene. Then, Faramir releases Frodo and Sam so they may continue on their journey to destroy the Ring. Shore's omission of the *Ring* theme in these two instances serves to enhance the audience's knowledge of these characters, showing that they are true of heart and cannot be seduced by the power of evil.

The other main instances where the *Ring* theme is heard are in relation to the schizophrenic Gollum, the character who possessed the Ring longer than anyone and was most poisoned by its evil (other than Sauron himself). The first time we hear the theme in relation to Gollum is when he says, "We swears to serve the master of the Precious." Throughout the films, Gollum is always trying to regain possession of the

Ring; it has poisoned him so deeply that he needs it to survive. This is made clear at the end of *The Two Towers*, when he says, “We takes the Precious and then we be the master.”

Later on, we hear a variant of the *Ring* theme as Frodo slips on the stairs of Cirith Ungol and the Ring dangles in front of Gollum’s face. Here, we wonder if Gollum will try to take the Ring and throw Frodo from the steep and treacherous stairs, but instead he lifts Frodo to safety, much to Sam’s surprise. This is all part of a larger scheme by Gollum, who tells Frodo that Sam will try to take the Ring from him, then frames Sam for eating all of their food, ultimately resulting in Frodo telling Sam to go back home. This way, Gollum can lead Frodo to Shelob, who will kill Frodo, and then Gollum can take the Ring once and for all. This plot fails when Sam comes back and rescues Frodo from Shelob’s lair, but Gollum does not give up. He follows Frodo and Sam into Mount Doom, eventually biting off Frodo’s finger so he may be reunited with the thing he wants most desperately: the Ring. As he joyfully dances with the Ring, its theme plays in full, but Frodo attacks Gollum, knocking him into the fire with the Ring. Ultimately, Gollum was reunited with the Ring, but only for the brief instant before both are destroyed in the fires of Mount Doom.

There is one other particularly striking usage of the *Ring* theme. It occurs in *Fellowship*, when the whole Fellowship sails past the Gates of Argonath. Here, we encounter a thickly scored *Ring* theme, which at first listen seems out of place based on the action onscreen. A more obvious choice would have been the *Fellowship* theme, or even the *Gondor* theme, as Aragorn views the great statues of the kings of

old, contemplating returning to the kingdom of Gondor. However, this is the last scene where all of the characters are heading toward Mordor to destroy the Ring. After this, characters will either die or head west to Rohan, and only Frodo and Sam will continue toward Mordor, which is why we hear the *Ring* theme.

Transformation of the Fellowship theme



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The best example of Howard Shore's ability to vary themes to aid in expression of the drama is his treatment of the *Fellowship* theme. First, a portion of the theme is stated as the musical accompaniment to the presentation of the title. Next, when Frodo and Sam depart from the Shire, we hear a slow fragment of the theme, varied to represent the meandering, slower pace that characterizes the lifestyle of Hobbits. Then, a minor version of the theme accompanies Gandalf's contrastingly urgent and fast-paced ride to seek the advice of Saruman (the minor key gives the foreboding sense of Saruman's betrayal before we actually learn of it). This time, the theme is embellished with cymbal crashes and the rhythm matches the quick gallop of Gandalf's horse. This idea of the musical rhythm matching the rhythm of the action

¹¹⁹ Reproduced from Bernanke, "Howard Shore's Ring Cycle," 179.

occurring onscreen arises again when Aragorn has met the hobbits and is leading them to Rivendell. Here, the driving timpani match the footsteps of Aragorn as they approach Weathertop, reflecting the increasing danger of their journey. Then, the Ringwraiths catch the group on Weathertop, and Shore beautifully combines the theme of the Fellowship with that of the Ringwraiths. Once the group does finally arrive in Rivendell, Elrond announces (at his Council) that he is assembling a group whose mission is to journey to Mordor and destroy the Ring once and for all. Elrond names the group the Fellowship, and we finally hear the first full statement of the theme that has been hinted at throughout the first part of the film. By the end of this movie, we see Gandalf plummet to his death in the mines of Moria, and Howard Shore says of this moment, “You never hear that true, heroic version anymore after Gandalf falls.”¹²⁰

A full statement of the theme is not heard again until *Return of the King*. Instead, the theme recurs in fragments, representing the splintering of the group that happens for the rest of the trilogy. In *The Two Towers*, we experience fragments of the *Fellowship* theme to represent the trio of Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli. The fragments occur in different meters and with different orchestrations to reflect the drama of various scenes. For example, as the trio tracks the Uruk-hai in an attempt to rescue Merry and Pippin, we hear the fragment in a triple meter, helping to give the feeling of

¹²⁰ Howard Shore, “Music and Sound,” *The Appendices Part 2: From Vision to Reality*, Recorded 2011, New Line Cinema 3000035613, 2011, DVD.

a chase scene through the way that the third beat falls into the first beat of the next measure, pushing us forward with the chase. Then, as the heroes learn that the Uruk-hai are making their way toward Isengard, the 3/4 meter is replaced with the 5/4 meter indicative of the *Isengard* theme, and Shore combines the melodic material of these two themes.¹²¹

The *Fellowship* theme splinters even more as the Fellowship itself does in the films, giving us an impending sense of doom and uncertainty about the future; will good ever prevail, and will the heroes ever be reunited? For example, when we believe we have just witnessed the death of Aragorn, we hear only the first few notes of the theme, representing what we think is the loss of another member of the original Fellowship. This short fragment, the shortest in all the movies is heard again when we learn that Aragorn is alive,¹²² and he is reunited with the other two main members at Helm's Deep. On a tangentially related note, Helm's Deep is a very interesting mix of themes. As the elf archers begin the battle, Howard Shore uses a thematic thread from Lothlórien from *Fellowship*, but now it is played in what Shore calls "battle mode." Then, as the Uruk-hai dig their ladders into the wall and begin coming into Helm's Deep, the *Isengard* theme takes over, and there is a constant musical shifting of focus

¹²¹ Howard Shore says of the *Isengard* theme (in *Two Towers* Music and Sound documentary), "Isengard is the Industrial Age. And it's written in 5/4 to evoke this kind of things being a little off kilter. I mean the 5/4 rhythm is a little unusual and it always felt a bit unresolved."

¹²² Shore masterfully captures the drama of this moment, mirroring the most divided the Fellowship ever becomes with his shortest fragment of the *Fellowship* theme.

relating to the different groups being shown onscreen. Howard Shore states, “And Helm’s Deep was specially created with that concept in mind.”¹²³

There are several examples of the occurrence of the *Fellowship* theme in *Return of the King* as well, mainly in fragments similar to the way it appeared in the other two films. One example of this is when Pippin is readying himself to leave with Gandalf to ride for Minas Tirith after he has looked into the Palantir at Orthanc. Merry approaches Pippin and gives him the rest of his weed, underscored by a fragment of the *Shire* theme, which seamlessly morphs into a short fragment of the *Fellowship* theme to represent the further separation and destruction of the once strong and unified Fellowship. The most important statement of the theme is the full, heroic statement that we have been waiting to hear again since the first film, played when Aragorn enters the doorway to Frodo's room after Sauron has been defeated and the Ring has finally been destroyed. Interestingly, this leads right into the *Shire* theme as Sam appears onscreen, serving as a palindrome for the way these themes were presented in the first film where the *Shire* theme was heard first, and then the *Fellowship* theme. These serve to bookend the journey of the Ring, giving helpful symmetry and musical closure to the trilogy.¹²⁴

¹²³ Howard Shore, “Music and Sound,” *The Appendices Part 4: The Battle for Middle-earth Begins*, Recorded 2011, New Line Cinema 3000035614, 2011, DVD.

¹²⁴ Judith Bernanke, “Howard Shore's Ring Cycle: The Film Score and Operatic Strategy.” In *Studying the Event Film: The Lord of the Rings* Ed. Harriet Elaine Margolis, Sean Cubitt, Barry King, and Thierry Jutel. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 183.

Conclusion

Shore's use of the leitmotiv serves not only to give unity to the overarching structure of the film, but also to enhance to drama of particular scenes through varied orchestration and meter changes. His leitmotifs act as guideposts directing viewers' attention to onscreen events as well as their relationship with other dramatic elements.¹²⁵ This is interesting because Wagner called the melodic elements of a music drama “signposts for the emotions,” serving to unify the story as a whole. While the simple repetition of themes does help the audience keep characters straight in their heads, variation and layering of these leitmotifs can bring a whole new dimension of significance to the music.

Where will the leitmotiv go from here? This is an interesting question, especially given the current state of Peter Jackson's Middle-earth movie making. He is hard at work on *The Hobbit*, which will be another three-movie set. Howard Shore has already agreed to compose the music for all three films, so we can assume that a similar scoring technique will be used, and we will be familiar with some of the motivic material. What is intriguing however is that *The Lord of the Rings* movie trilogy used the leitmotiv technique to tie different pieces of the story together in what was

¹²⁵ Doug Adams, “Seven days in September,” *Film Score Monthly*, 8, no. 10 (2003): 19.

essentially a “Cliffs Notes” version of the three novels. *The Hobbit*, on the other hand, is only one novel (for children) being stretched out into three movies. With a less complex storyline and fewer characters, will this technique serve the films as well as it did the original three?

With *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* (2012), the first of the three new movies, we have but a small taste, but the musical results were underwhelming. Very little material was reused from the original trilogy, and what was recycled seemed like it absolutely had to be there; the technique and musical material from the original trilogy has handcuffed Shore’s creativity for these new films. Additionally, the film was not nominated for any Academy Awards that related to its music.

It has been ten years since *The Return of the King*, and perhaps we reached the apex of the leitmotiv technique. Or, maybe it has simply outlived its use in Middle-earth. Will we finally move past this technique with its roots in the nineteenth century, or will another film series and its themes become the next standard and make the technique relevant once again?

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