



Musical Stories

SMT Remote Music Class 200420

Essential Questions: How does music help to tell stories? How does music influence the way a story is told? Are there specific ideas and concepts that are used by composers to help develop a story?

Standards:

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| MU.5-8.7.1 | Students develop criteria for evaluating the quality and effectiveness of music performances and compositions and apply the criteria in their personal listening and performing |
| MU.5-8.9.2 | Students classify by genre and style (and, if applicable, by historical period, composer, and title) a varied body of exemplary (that is, high-quality and characteristic) musical works and explain the characteristics that cause each work to be considered exemplary |

This lesson is about music in the movies and in other elements of film, media and stage works. Part of the reason why movies and other spectacles can be so engaging is because of the music. Music is an important part of a storytelling. To help tell a story, music can be used to make a story more powerful, exciting, memorable and fun.

One of today's examples is possibly the most popular movie in America: *Star Wars*. The composer of the music in the movie is John Williams. He was asked by filmmaker George Lucas to compose the music for his movie. In so doing, Williams created some of the most memorable music ever written for the movies.



Some of the central characters of *Star Wars* have their own theme, a particular melody or song that is associated with their character. For example, Luke Skywalker, has his own individual music: *The Force*.



Listen to *Star Wars: The Force Theme* [solo trumpet]:
<https://youtu.be/MKMuzC7S56E>

Listen to Star Wars: *The Force Theme* [orchestration]:
<https://youtu.be/eb2zuegwcwk>

The idea of attaching music to a character is not new. When John Williams wrote the music, he borrowed ideas from other composers in the past to help him compose the music. One of the most famous composers that influenced John Williams was German composer Richard Wagner (1813-1883). Wagner was the first composer in music to assign specific music to individual characters within his operas. This is significant because Wagner invented what we call a *leitmotif*.

Why is this significant? It is important because sometimes, it is not just the character's actions or words that tells the story, but also the music helps to enhance the development of the story. For example, in Wagner's opera *Siegfried*, his character is associated with the horn. His horn call identifies his entrance and his action within the storytelling. When the characters are not singing, as is sometimes the case in opera, the orchestra will introduce the character's music in the development of a scene or action within the storytelling. This is very significant because no one in music had come up with these ideas to tell the story through music before. John Williams, influenced by Wagner, took these ideas and introduced music to identify characters in Star Wars. Williams liked Wagner's idea about the *leitmotif* and used it in his Star Wars compositions. What is interesting to see is that composers of our time utilize the ideas of composers in the past to help tell their stories. Listen to the theme assigned to the protagonist (the leading character) in Richard Wagner's third of the four music dramas that constitute *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (The Ring of the Nibelung) (1876). Does it sound similar to the Luke Skywalker's heroic theme?



Listen to: Examples of *leitmotif* in *Siegfried* <https://youtu.be/QoFwI8-pJYg>

In *Star Wars*, the anti-hero Darth Vader's has a theme, or *leitmotif* which is very militaristic, powerful and haunting. When we hear this music, we might feel a sense of foreboding; it might sound "evil." It's a fanfare, a march, announcing him mightily and proudly. Trumpets blare with strength.



Listen to John Williams (1932 -): Darth Vader's Theme from *Star War IV: A New Hope*

<https://youtu.be/hNv5sPu0C1E>

As a story line develops, the melody of the character is oftentimes presented in new ways as a result of the storytelling. The exciting part is to see how the character changes through the storytelling and the melody changes too! Not only does the character change because of the incidents of the story, but the music also changes to adapt to the new setting. An example of this is Darth Vader's death music:

Listen to Darth Vader's Theme transformed: *Death* from *Star Wars IV: A New Hope* [listen from 00:56] https://youtu.be/L_ZmyEKPlvs

Some people have likened Darth Vader's theme to a famous piece of classical music of the past: Gustav Holst's *Mars: The Bringer of War*. This theme is strong, percussive and rhythmical.

Listen to Gustav Holst (1874-1934): *Mars, The bringer of War*, from the seven-movement orchestra suite *The Planets*

<https://youtu.be/cXOanvv4plU>



This assignment will assist you in exploring how music influences storytelling and to recognize musical themes in character development.

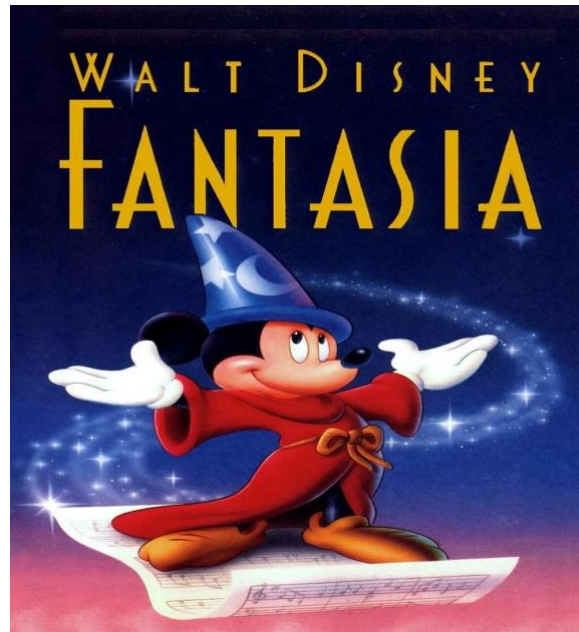
Essential question: How does Classical music of the past influence the music of the day? What specific things in Classical music are evident in movies of today?

Instructions: Read about and listen to the following examples. As you listen, think about the following questions:

- 1) What does this music sound like to you?
- 2) What is the story that is being told?
- 3) How does the music make you feel?

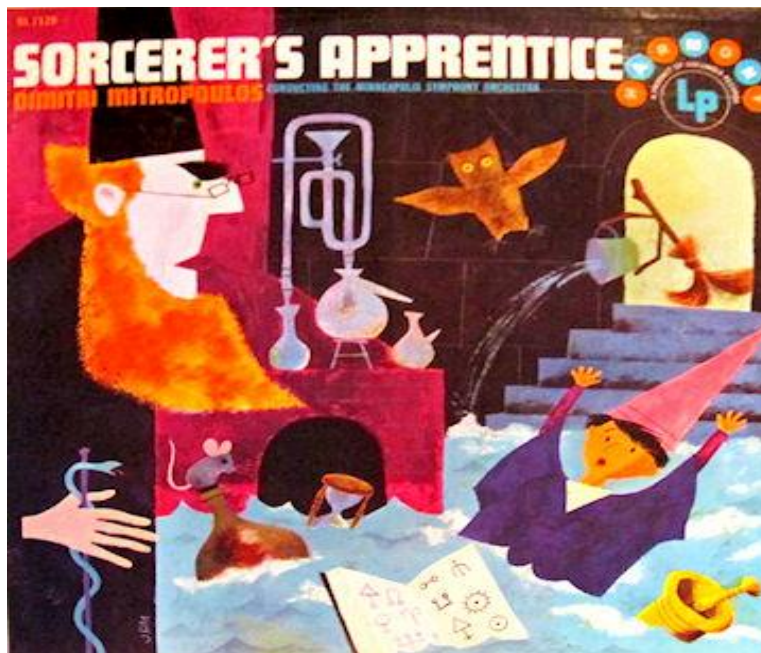
Assignment: After listening to the music examples provided. Write short answers to the questions below for each of the three examples on the answer sheet and upload the three-page answer sheet (pages 9-11 of this packet) to Google Classroom.

Example I: *Fantasia* is an animated movie made in 1940, which was an experiment to blend animated imagery with classical music. Mickey Mouse is the conductor who leads the orchestra into an adventure of storytelling and animation.



Listen to: *The Broom Theme*, from the Disney movie *Fantasia*, originally from Paul Dukas' (1865-1935) symphonic poem *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* (1897), which was based on Goethe's 1797 poem of the same name.

<https://youtu.be/xHEMkbyXFs>



Example II: *Bug's Bunny At The Symphony 2: The Rabbit of Seville* is a Warner Brothers cartoon, made in 1950.



The cartoon was inspired by Gioacchino Rossini's (1792-1868) opera buffa [comedic opera] *The Barber Of Seville* (1816).

Listen to https://youtu.be/aE7khe0AT_g



Listen to one of the most famous operatic arias ever composed: Figaro's Aria, from Rossini's opera *The Barber of Seville*. <https://youtu.be/7qHZkkgowdY>

Example III. The Stanley Kubrick film *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), is based on the book by Arthur C. Clark (1917-2008). It is a science-fiction adventure movie depicting the relationship between man and computers.



The iconic theme is taken from Richard Strauss' (1864-1849) tone poem *Also Sprach Zarathustra* [Thus Spake Zarathustra] (1896).

Listen to: <https://youtu.be/e-QFj59PON4>





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Creating a Sound Story

Answer Sheet

Name _____ Grade _____

I: Regarding the “Broom Theme”, from *Fantasia/Dukas: The Sorcerer’s Apprentice*:

1) What does this music sound like to you?

2) What is the story that is being told in this scene from *Fantasia*? _____

3) How does the music make you feel? _____

Example II: Regarding *Bugs Bunny At The Symphony*:

4) What does this music sound like to you? _____

5) What is the story that is being told in *Bugs Bunny At The Symphony*? _____

6) How does the music make you feel? _____

Example III: Regarding the movie *2001: A Space Odyssey*:

7) What does this music sound like to you? _____

8) What is the story that is being told in the excerpt from *Also Sprache Zarathustra/2001: A Space Odyssey*?

9) How does the music make you feel? _____

10) Short Essay: How does Classical music of the past influence the music of today? In other words, what specific things in Classical music are evident in movies, media and stage works of today?

Extra credit: Search online one of the pieces of music that was presented in this packet and write three sentences about it and/or the composer.
