

THESE ARE THE LEITMOTIFS YOU'RE LOOKING FOR

John Williams (born 1932) the American film composer is famous for writing the soundtracks to many blockbuster films over his six decade long career, earning him Grammy and Oscar nominations and awards, but his most notable work is for the Star Wars franchise, which includes 8 films plus TV shows and video games.

He is a master contemporary composer who also makes use of a very old operatic technique – the *leitmotif*. While not created by the composer Richard Wagner, he used leitmotifs extensively in his operas, specifically the four operas that have come to be known as the Ring Cycle – “Die Walkure,” “Das Rheingold,” “Siegfried” and “Nibelungenlied.”

Leitmotif – a recurrent theme throughout a musical or literary composition, associated with a particular person, idea, or situation.

Today we will listen to some of the more prominent leitmotifs that make up the soundtrack to the Star Wars universe.

Star Wars Main Theme – plays at the beginning of each movie and also symbolizes specifically Luke, the protagonist of episodes 4, 5 and 6, and generally, heroism. The main theme specifically represents ideas about heroism: the opening fifth symbolizes reaching upward, the descending triplet is gathering strength for another try, the jump up to an octave above the opening note means the attainment of a goal, repeating the last four notes is a reassurance of achievement and the rounding out of the phrase symbolizes the task completed.

Princess Leia’s Theme – a sweet melody that represents the Princess. It makes its “first” appearance in Episode 3 when she is adopted by her new family, and then appears again in each of the subsequent films. It plays when Leia appears or when she is thinking of something of her past. It is also incorporated into “Han Solo and the Princess” in Episode 5.

Han Solo and the Princess – the “love theme” that first appears in Episode 5, whenever the romance between Han and Leia develops. The theme is a more mature take on Princess Leia’s own theme, which also symbolizes her maturity.

Rey’s Theme – this song starts out simply, which suggests Rey’s simple and humble upbringing. As the melody develops and theme progresses, it could suggest that Rey is much more mature than she might at first appear.

The Jedi Steps – a short theme that appears at the very beginning in the movie to signal that a character is connected to the force. It appears again at the end of the movie as a full fledged piece of music that also incorporates Poe Dameron’s theme, The Force theme, and the March of the Resistance

Rebel Fanfare – a short motif that is incorporated into a number of songs throughout the movies, and also in each movie’s ending credits. It is a triumphant motif that signifies the Rebel Alliance.

March of the Resistance – a theme representing the Resistance, who are attempting to stand up against the Knights of Ren and the First Order. The theme evokes strength, heroism and determination.

Anakin’s theme – a longer theme that usually appears as a full piece of music. It is an innocent and beautiful melody, that also contains a subtle reference to the “Imperial March,” a theme that signifies who he becomes later in the series. It only appears in Episode 1.

Binary Sunset / The Force Theme – the song is officially titled Binary Sunset for its first appearance in Episode 4, but it is officially the theme for The Force. Though the force can be used for both good and evil, it only ever represents the good side of the force, and the characters who wield it.

Imperial Motif – a short motif that is featured only in Episode 4 to represent the Galactic Empire. It is more of a rhythmic motif than a melodic motif. When Darth Vader and his theme, The Imperial March appear later, it is clear that he is related to the Empire due to this motif's similarities to his theme.

The Imperial March – the imposing theme for the imposing Darth Vader. It is based on the well known classical pieces Piano Sonata No. 2 in B flat Minor by Frederic Chopin and Mars, the Bringer of War by Gustav Holst. The theme represents strength, order, and control, but also tyranny, oppression and hate. It is also one of the few soundtrack songs that appears to exist in-universe.

Kylo Ren's motif / The First Order motif – these are short motifs – neither are more than 10 notes long, that are heard whenever Kylo Ren appears. The First Order motif plays later in the movie.

The Emperor's Theme / Snoke's Theme – these two themes represent the most evil of the bad guys in the Star Wars movies, and their theme songs reflect that in their chilling use of lower registers and ominous male choirs.