

STAR WARS

John Williams and the Leitmotif

About John Williams

John Williams is a famous composer of film music.

Read this short [biography](#) about him, and circle the following key words: AMERICAN, COMPOSER, CONDUCTOR, HARRY POTTER, JOHN WILLIAMS, JURASSIC PARK, MOVIES, PIANO, STAR WARS

Then, print out and complete this [word search](#) using the key words you circled.

Motif or *Leitmotif*?

In last week's lesson, we learned that a **MOTIF** is “a short melody or rhythm that repeats and varies throughout a piece.”

A **LEITMOTIF** (LITE-moTEEF) is “a short melody or rhythm that represents a particular character, place, or idea in a piece of music.” You could also think of it as a *theme*.

The **leitmotif** is a musical technique that was first used by German composer Richard Wagner (VAHGner) in his operas. He wrote a special theme for each important thing in the opera, such as: the magic fire, the Rhine River, and Wotan (the king of the gods).

Ride of the Valkyries

Wagner's most famous leitmotif is [this theme](#) that he wrote to represent the Valkyries in one of his operas. Have you heard it before?



What does opera have to do with Star Wars???

Great question!

John Williams used the **leitmotif** idea from **Wagner** when he composed the music for the Star Wars saga.

If you can think of a character or place in one of the movies, chances are there is a musical theme that goes with it! For example, if someone says Darth Vader, you would probably think of the theme that goes “DUN DUN DUN, DUN-da-dun DUN-da-dun.” It’s also known as *The Imperial March*.

Go to the next slide to listen to some of the main leitmotifs from Star Wars.

The Imperial March -
Darth Vader's Theme



Princess Leia's Theme



Rey's Theme



The Force Theme -
or Obi Wan's Theme



Anakin and Padme's
Theme



Kylo Ren's Theme



Matching music to movie

Film composers have to make their music sync up with the movie they are writing for. Check out this video showing actual footage of John Williams working with the orchestra and chorus for *Episode I: The Phantom Menace*. Notice how he watches the film above the singers to make sure the music is the correct tempo (speed) for the action in the movie.



Star Wars vs. Cello Wars

Let's do some comparing and contrasting. Print this [Venn Diagram](#) or draw your own.

Watch and listen to this video of the epic main theme from Star Wars. Notice how different instruments of the orchestra are highlighted.



Then, watch this parody by The Piano Guys. How are the two versions alike? How are they different? Record your answers.

