

# A RETURN, OR

Say what you will about the man, but George Lucas knows a thing or two about destinies. Who else would have had the courage to predict a mixed response to his own Most Anticipated Film of All Time? Yes, *Star Wars: Episode One—The Phantom Menace* is finally here, and as Lucas prognosticated, fans have staked their claims on either side of the judgmental fence.

John Williams's *Phantom Menace* score, however, has proven less controversial. Those expecting to revisit fond memories found enough familiar territory in Williams's music to satiate their nostalgic demands, and those searching for a forward progression found several surprising twists and turns. A few fans have quibbled that Williams doesn't seem to place the same emphasis on leitmotifs as in the previous three scores. While this is true, it should be noted that the *Phantom Menace* themes are woven more deeply into the score than in previous *Star Wars* efforts. In fact, his new *Star Wars* themes are constructed much in the same style as his previous ones and many of the new themes seem to vaguely reference the older ones. Intervalic relationships and connections have remained consistent, as has, more or less, Williams's harmonic language. Nowhere is that more apparent than in Williams's hub of the score...

## 1 Duel of the Fates

Here lies Williams's equivalent of the Force theme for *The Phantom Menace*. Neither character-driven nor event-oriented, this theme represents the unseen-events-unfolding (or "phantom") aspect of the film. Even more interesting is the fact that the theme's construction is close to the original Force theme, which represented many of the same ideas in the original trilogy. Like its predecessor, this is a diatonic tune with large leaps and downward motions—the *Star Wars* notions of maturity and timelessness. It's almost a dark flipside to Williams's original theme. Both hinge upon the first four notes of the minor scale, which may also tie them to one version of Anakin's theme ([2b] below).

The Duel of the Fates theme is associated with a churning Orffesque ostinato [1a] which Williams often treats thematically in the score—most prominently at the film's climax where it underpins the Force theme. Also noteworthy is the choral component [1b] which hints at the same harmonies as The Imperial March/Darth Vader's theme: minor triads a minor sixth apart.

## 2 Anakin Skywalker's Theme

Anakin's theme first appears to be sweet and slightly scampish, connected to the established *Star Wars* sound with its translucent

Lydian mode implications—the same mode heard in Yoda's theme, for example. However, closer inspection reveals a heavy emphasis on chromaticism and sustained dissonances, and while Williams reins his theme in and maintains its sweet and innocent visage, it's constantly threatening to spin out of kilter at any moment—representing Anakin's true potential. The final result is one of Williams's most complex and cohesive *Star Wars* themes.

The primary version of this theme incorporates both the perfect fourth and perfect fifth intervals—Williams's *Star Wars* intervals of heroism and boldness (see Obi-Wan's theme, Luke's theme, etc.). However, following this introduction, the composer bends the theme out of the heroic mold with odd chromatic inflections and melodic leaps. At a few crucial points, Anakin's theme embraces rather than redirects these darker hues—most notably in the final phrases of the concert/end credits version where it references the harmonies and melodic structure of The Imperial March/Darth Vader's Theme [2a].

There also exists a rising, scalar setting of this tune [2b] drawn from the introduction of the concert version. Interestingly, if the opening notes of Duel of the Fates were to be transferred into a Lydian mode, they would form the opening notes of Anakin's theme. It's possible that (a) Williams is hinting at the boy's importance in future events, (b) Williams is lending cohesion to the score by beginning motifs similarly, or (c) it's just easy and logical to begin themes with the first four notes of the mode in which they reside. During the final battle, Williams uses a heroic variation of this version that concludes with a rising fourth [2c]. In one instance, the composer lays a rising fifth over this figure and introduces the *Star Wars* main theme, tying Anakin's heroic actions to his future son's.

**Rumor Control:** *Anakin's theme is reportedly built upon a twelve-tone row, and while this may be true, the theme is not strictly serial in nature. If Williams did base this theme on a row, he buried it pretty deeply inside the construction.*

## 3 Qui-Gon Jinn's Theme

Although this character's theme is pretty well masked within the score, his actions are underscored a handful of times with the material seen here. Williams says, "Qui-Gon's theme had to do with nobility, because he is a teacher, a master, a moral conscience for the young Jedi,"<sup>1</sup> so it's not surprising that this material is, again, very close to the Force theme in construction. (Note the two minor phrases beginning with the climbing dominant-to-tonic perfect fourth.) This theme is most apparent in the film during Qui-Gon's desert duel with Darth Maul and upon the character's eventual fate.

### The Musical Themes of STAR WARS: EPISODE ONE—THE PHANTOM MENACE Analyzed By Doug Adams



# A NEW HOPE?

## 4 Darth Maul's Theme

Darth Maul's motif—which seems to double, at least in one instance, as a motif for the evil Sith—is the first non-pitched *Star Wars* character theme. Scored for whispering voices, the Maul theme offers one of Williams's most adroit gestures: the evil that dare not sing its theme. Indeed this motif with its vaporously cloaked malevolence evokes more danger that the barely-there character could possibly do on his own. Musically, the theme paraphrases the choral motto from *Duel of the Fates*, although Williams does incorporate variations—even extending to the lyrics.

Darth Maul also seems to have some association with Petrushka-like tenor drum patterns—perhaps building upon Williams's notion of non-pitched material for this character.

## 5 Darth Sidious's Theme

If you think this theme sounds familiar, you're right. The film's central baddy is scored with the Emperor's theme from *Return of the Jedi*. This is a dramatic foreshadowing—à la Herrmann's Rosebud motif in *Citizen Kane* or Waxman's Black Knight theme in *Prince Valiant*—showing Darth Sidious and the Emperor (aka Senator Palpatine) to be one and the same.

**Rumor Control:** Williams's score proper ends with "Augie's Great Municipal Band," [5a] which sounds like a major, pentatonic variation of Sidious's/The Emperor's/Palpatine's Theme. However, recent comments from Williams's camp (not from Williams, himself) have denied this connection. Purposeful or not, the connection is audible, and would seemingly be appropriate for the senator's rise to power. Hopefully the issue will be cleared up in future installments.

## 6 Jar Jar Binks's Theme

Jar Jar's theme consists of a series of stooping chromatic hiccups reflecting the character's designation as the film's comic relief. Williams builds a lopsided gait into the tune via some offset phrase accents. Like the Ewoks', Jar Jar's theme is introduced with a dollop of "primitive" percussion—here log drums and temple blocks—to underline his uncivilized nature.

## 7 The Trade Federation Army Theme

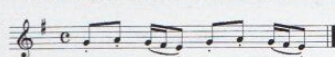
This theme, which Williams describes as "a new evil march for the Trade Federation army... [not] at all like the music of Darth Vader from the previous films, even though it has the same function,"<sup>2</sup> rumbles out in the first act of the film as battle droid forces land on the planet Naboo. Similar in style to Williams's writing from the third *Indiana Jones* film, this gravely melody briefly tinkers with diminished harmonies, yet never strays far from its diatonic minor roots.

**Rumor Control:** As the *Phantom Menace* album first hit store shelves, many early listeners felt that this martial theme was a variation on the origi-

## 1. Duel of the Fates theme



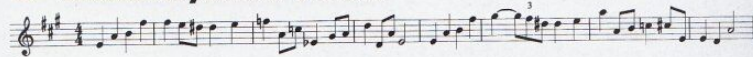
### 1a. Duel of the Fates ostinato



### 1b. Duel of the Fates choral theme



## 2. Anakin Skywalker's theme



### 2a. Anakin's Vader reference



### 2b. Anakin Skywalker's theme (scalar setting)



### 2c. Anakin Skywalker's theme, heroic variation



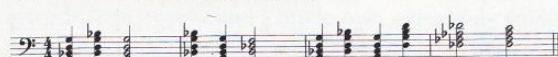
## 3. Qui-Gon Jinn's theme



## 4. Darth Maul's theme



## 5. Darth Sidious' theme



### 5a. Augie's Great Municipal Band theme





#### 6. Jar Jar Binks's theme



#### 7. The Trade Federation Army theme



#### 8. The Pod Race theme



## RETURN OF THE JEDI

Themes we neglected to discuss in our previous installment

### ROTJ 1 The Ewoks' Secondary Theme

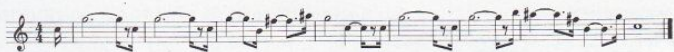
Our cutesy friends, the Ewoks, inspired John Williams to compose more than just one theme. Here, then, is Williams's secondary Ewok theme—mistakenly left out of the previous article. This motive is intent on underlining the primitive (i.e. savage, in a good way) woodland culture aspect of the creatures with a rising open fifth auguring the diegetic Ewok horn calls that will announce their entrance into the final battle. This theme is introduced scored for recorders.

### ROTJ 2 Luke and Leia's Theme/Luke's Theme Comparison

Also erroneously omitted from the last article was the fact that Luke and Leia's theme leads off with what is ostensibly a variation on the Luke Skywalker/*Star Wars* Main Theme. The first Luke and Leia phrase quotes the first five Main Theme notes; the second quotes six. (The written excerpt features Luke's theme with stems up and Luke and Leia's with stems down.) Was this Williams's subtle development of Luke's theme? It's not beyond the realm of possibility.

Special thanks to Jon and Al Kaplan for their keen observations.

#### ROTJ1. The Ewoks's primitive theme



#### ROTJ2. Luke and Leia's theme



nal Imperial March. Williams's statements pretty well disprove this theory, as does the fact that the two melodies have little in common.

### 8 The Pod Race Theme

Owing a purposeful debt to Rózsa's *Ben-Hur* score, Williams's Pod Race theme weaves in and out of several modal inflections in a collection of cues closely resembling the composer's "Parade of the Slave Children" music from *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*. Much of the theme's sneering danger comes from its insistence upon half-step figures both in harmonic and melodic structures. The half-steps also give the theme a vaguely Middle Eastern sound in keeping with Williams's take on the desert planet this time out.

returning old favorites:

### 9 Star Wars Main Theme

Although its inclusion is mainly due to tradition, the *Star Wars* main theme does pop up occasionally in *The Phantom Menace*, primarily as a heroism motif rather than as a characterization. Williams leans heavily on the theme in the opening scene of the film. Underscoring the heroics of the two Jedi, the composer quickly reminds us that we're watching/listening to a *Star Wars* film with a few short clips, then hides the theme until near the end.

### 10 The Force Theme

This tune is always good for a few key sequences in a *Star Wars* film. Among other *Phantom Menace* scenes, it underscores Anakin leaving his mother, the destruction of the villains' command ship, and Qui-Gon's funeral. Williams treats the theme pretty much as he has before, as a tonal, deistic entity. Only rarely—if at all—is this tune used as Obi-Wan's signature; however, it does earn a fleeting statement as he and Anakin first meet.

### 11 Jabba the Hutt's Theme

Just as the corpulent crime lord cameos at the Pod Race, so does his signature tune. Williams cleverly weaves the melody into the pre-race fanfares.

### 12 Yoda's Theme

Yoda's theme crops up as he and Obi-Wan discuss the future. It's a short-lived glance, but Williams makes it immediately recognizable by setting it in its standard solo French horn dressing.

### 13 The Imperial March/Darth Vader's Theme

Ignoring the subtle inflections within Anakin's theme, Darth Vader's famous melody makes a single appearance in *The Phantom Menace*. As Obi-Wan is told he is allowed to train Anakin, a subdued reading of the tune foretells of the horrible significance of this decision.

**Rumor Control:** A handful of listeners have wondered if Williams has used a pared-down version of *The Imperial March* for a repeating action pattern in one of *Phantom Menace*'s space battle cues. The ostinato in question—which can be heard on the CD's fifth track—does bear a passing resemblance to Vader's theme, but it seems to be more the by-product of Williams's harmonic style than anything else. Coupled with the fact that the scenes this cue underscores don't particularly involve the Anakin character or his destiny, it appears no connection was intended. **FSM**

### Notes

1 Laurent Bouzereau, and Jody Duncan. *The Making of Episode I—The Phantom Menace*. New York: The Ballantine Publishing Group, 1999.  
2 Ibid.