

Hans Zimmer Composition Notes

Hans Florian Zimmer (born 12 September 1957) is a German composer and record producer. Since the 1980s, he has composed music for over 150 films. His works include *The Lion King*, for which he won Academy Award for Best Original Score in 1994, *A World Apart*, *Rain Man*, the *Pirates of the Caribbean* series, *The Thin Red Line*, *Gladiator*, *The Last Samurai*, *The Da Vinci Code*, *The Dark Knight Trilogy*, *Inception*, and *Interstellar*.

Zimmer spent the early part of his career in the United Kingdom before moving to the United States. He is the head of the film music division at DreamWorks studios and works with other composers through the company that he founded, Remote Control Productions. He played keyboard for the band 'Krakatoa' and with 'The Buggles'.

Zimmer's works are notable for integrating electronic music sounds with traditional orchestral arrangements. He has received four Grammy Awards, three Classical BRIT Awards, two Golden Globes, and an Academy Award. He was also named on the list of Top 100 Living Geniuses, published by The Daily Telegraph.

Note: The original of this document is on the Hans Zimmer Website with aural examples.

Interstellar:

1. The score for *Interstellar* is notable for its prominent use of the pipe organ, an instrument that, in film, is normally reserved for scenes involving religion in some way.
2. Zimmer's *Interstellar* music is like many of his other scores, relying on a few thematic ideas that emphasize the emotions a particular character or group is feeling at various points in the film. Effectively an emotional '*leitmotif*', but not those immediately associated with people or objects (and therefore similar to Herrmann's Approach).

Murph and Cooper:



3. The theme for Murph and Cooper is generally heard when the focus is on the relationship between Murph and her father Cooper. It first appears with the studio logos before the start of the film proper, suggesting the importance of the theme's association to the narrative.
4. The theme association occurs in the scene when Cooper, a former NASA pilot, says his goodbyes to Murph before leaving his family to join the interstellar mission to save humanity.

5. The theme is also heard when, after waking up on the Endurance spacecraft, Cooper hears that Murph refused to make a video message to send him, and occurs once more when Cooper is told that Murph is on her way to see him again after learning of his return.
6. Musically, the theme's melody begins with a long note a seventh above the bass, creating an interval that has a feeling of vastness to it and thus suggests the great distance that will long separate Cooper from Murph. (This same interval was also used in the film *Gravity* as a suggestion of the vastness of space).
7. The theme is supported by a sustained bass note or pedal point, that sounds the fifth, or dominant note of the scale. Dominant bass notes create an expectation that they will, at some point, resolve to the tonic. To sustain a dominant pedal at length as this theme does gives an impression of a prolonged avoidance of resolution. This relates to Cooper's long absence.
8. The theme implies both loving and hurtful aspects that comprise Murph and Cooper's relationship through its use of major and minor. While the theme begins in the major key, suggesting the love in the relationship, it is immediately followed by a statement in the minor, implying the grudge Murph holds against Cooper for abandoning her.
9. The theme recurs where Cooper detaches his shuttle from Endurance to give it the "push" it needs to escape the black hole's gravitational pull. Though Murph is not present, Cooper's decision to detach is a crucial one leading to him making essential connections with Murph. The theme plays in grandiose style to mark the importance of this decision.

Love and Action



14. In 11 to 14, the theme occurs in a lightly orchestrated form, with the delicate melody played on the organ. At other times, the theme acquires a “bigger” effect omitting the melody and adding a more massive orchestration, a sound associated with scenes of heavy action. The two instances this occurs are on the first planet the crew visits, meeting gigantic tidal waves, and when Cooper and Brand re-dock with Endurance after it spinning out of control.
15. Though the theme’s two uses are opposing in meaning, its musical structure helps to understand why it works in both cases. The theme is set in a minor key supported by a bass line that progresses from scale degree 6, up to 7, and up once more to 1. In minor keys, scale degree 6 typically falls down to 5 since the latter exerts a kind of gravitational pull that attracts 6 towards it. The pull is especially strong in minor since the distance between 6 and 5 is a mere semitone. Listen, for example, to a version of the minor-mode Frank/Harmonica theme from Ennio Morricone’s score for *Once Upon a Time in the West*, paying particular attention to the way that scale degree 6 in the bass seems to be “pulled” down to 5.
16. As with gravity in the physical world, breaking free of this pull requires a good deal of energy, and with the bass motion from 6 to 7 (nb Natural Minor, not Harmonic), there is a sense that a lot of energy is, an energy that can be seen in the rise from 7 up to 1 (another whole step).
17. This sense of struggling to escape is present in both the “love” and “action” forms of the theme. Love, although challenged, transcends vast expanses of space and time. In Action, the obstacle is clearly physical, be it a tidal wave or a spiralling spacecraft.

Wonder

The musical score for the 'Wonder' theme is presented in a piano arrangement. It features a 4/4 time signature. The melody in the treble clef begins with a sharp 4 (F#) in the first measure, followed by a whole rest in the second measure, and then a sharp 4 (F#) in the third measure. The bass line in the bass clef starts with a sharp 4 (F#) in the first measure, followed by a whole rest in the second measure, and then a sharp 4 (F#) in the third measure. The dynamics are marked as mezzo-forte (mf) in the first and third measures, and piano (pp) in the second measure. The score concludes with a melodic line in the treble clef that rises from a sharp 4 (F#) to a natural 5 (G) and then to a natural 6 (A) in the fourth measure.

18. One theme that consistently occurs seems to express a sense of fascination with one’s surroundings. The theme enters at several points in the film: 1) when Cooper’s farm machines “go haywire” and head north instead of maintaining the crops, 2) when Cooper observes what appears to be a message in dust written by an unknown being, 3) when Cooper and the crew first enter Endurance, 4) upon reaching the distant galaxy through the wormhole, and 5) when Cooper and Mann explore a potentially-habitable planet.
19. The most prominent features of this theme are its sustained, shimmering accompaniment and the continual recurrences of a single melodic pitch. The accompaniment sustains a major chord along with a dissonance created by the raised 4 of the scale. This scale degree (whether in major or minor) is often associated with the mysterious or inscrutable, for example, Hedwig’s theme from *Harry Potter*, and in the classical world, “Aquarium” from Saint-Saëns’ *Carnival of the Animals*. Not only is this raised 4 in the accompaniment of the Wonder theme, but it is also the single melodic pitch that enters repeatedly. It is also worth noting that the theme’s major key setting matches the positive outlooks of the characters.

Man of Steel:

2013's *Man of Steel* takes a different approach to the Superman story than 1978's well known *Superman: The Movie*. The 1978 film is largely optimistic in tone, lighthearted, and includes touches of humor. Indeed, when John Williams scored the film, he remarked that one of the things he liked about it was that "it was fun and didn't take itself too seriously." Williams' vibrant score certainly reflects this element of fun while also capturing the film's optimism in grand heroic fashion.

Man of Steel, though, deals more with the philosophical questions of being an outsider. Desperately wanting to fit in with society, Superman is continually faced with a dilemma: if he reveals his powers to other people, then he'll no longer be considered one of them. If he retains his "fit" with society, then he can no longer rescue anyone with the help of his powers. This different kind of Superman film calls for a different kind of Superman score, and that is exactly what Hans Zimmer provides.

Again, although Zimmer's score does not make use of strict *leitmotifs*, which correlate a short snippet of melody with a certain character, place, object, and the like, it does loosely co-ordinate certain themes and situations involving certain characters. For this reason, it is difficult to label Zimmer's themes and they must often be given a general descriptive title. Another feature of Zimmer's scores is the way in which many of its themes have dual meanings that can be either opposites or complements. This film music analysis examines these aspects of several themes in the film.

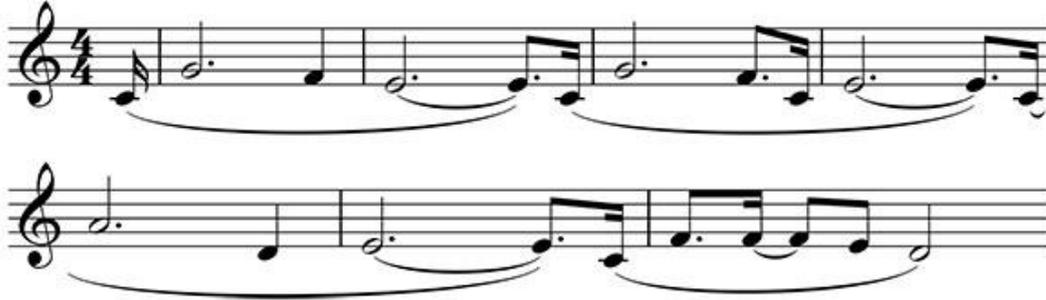
Jor-El /Kal-El



1. This ostinato is the first theme we hear in the film as it sounds over the production credits, before the film proper is underway. The theme reflects two meanings, since, with practically every instance of the **theme**, we see either Jor-El (Superman's biological father from Krypton) or Kal-El (Superman, as he is called on Krypton), even though it is not associated with any particular type of action of theirs. Near the start of the film, for example, as Jor-El escapes on a dragon-like creature with the "codex" we hear this theme stated boldly in the brass.
2. The theme also appears in some scenes where Jor-El's focus is on Kal-El, as when the baby Kal-El is put into the escape pod near the film's start. ...and when Jonathan Kent (Superman's foster father on Earth) shows Clark (Kal-El) the escape pod in which he arrived on Earth.
3. The association between this theme and the characters is quite loose—it doesn't always signify any one particular emotion or situation with these characters. Rather, it seems to be more of a main theme for the film to be used flexibly in relation to Jor-El and Kal-El.
4. It could even be read as an attempt to reinforce the Christ-like portrayal of Superman (a god-like being whose goal is to save humanity) by linking the theme with the "holy trinity": Jor-El (the father), Kal-El (the son), and Jor-El's ghost (the "holy" spirit). This connection is strengthened by the themes relation to the Superman "heroic" theme in its triplet-based rhythms, its rising motifs, and the relatively large intervals. Compare the two below:

Superman Introspective

1. The other form of Superman's dual-natured theme is closely related to Superman Heroic, as the phrases involve the same intervals (fifths, sixths, and fourths) in the same dotted rhythm. Compare this theme with the Heroic theme above.



2. Despite these connections, the two forms of the theme differ in meaning. While Superman Heroic tends to accompany Superman in situations where he accepts expectations placed on him and is fitting in with society, Superman Introspective accompanies him in situations, when his thoughts and desires differ with social expectations, for example when Clark:
 - As a child, is overwhelmed by the abundance of stimuli his super-senses give him
 - As a child, discusses with Jonathan (his foster father) Clark's saving of a school busload of children and how to better "fit in" with society
 - As a young adult, follows Jonathan's signal not to save him from a fatal tornado because Jonathan believed the world was not ready for Clark's superpowers
 - As a full adult, discusses with a priest whether he should reveal his alien identity and turn himself over to General Zod (Superman's enemy)
 - Has a final memory of childhood, remembering his father (recall of the tornado dilemma).
3. Superman becomes introspective as he searches for a way to satisfy both his own desires and those of society. The emotional quality is created by the slow, contemplative rhythm of the theme, its scoring for piano lending the sound the intimacy of Superman's thoughts.

Krypton's Old Ways

1. Another dualistic theme depicts Krypton's opposing forces, one negative, destructive, and of the old way of thinking where every Kryptonian is born for a specific social purpose (as seen in Zod and his crew), the other positive, constructive, and of the new way of thinking where Kryptonians choose their own path in life (seen in Jor-El, his wife Lara, and Kal-El). The character of each is often due to the scoring. Krypton's Old Ways link with an ostinato usually in the mid to low strings with rapidly repeating notes, suggesting aggression.



This theme appears when Krypton's old ways are being threatened, as when:

- Jor-El explains to the Council (which has not heeded his warnings up to this point) that the planet's destruction is imminent due to their excessive mining of the planet's core
- A machine under Zod's authority tries to prevent Jor-El from escaping with the codex
- Zod breaks into Jor-El's lab to retrieve the codex
- Lois and Jor-El's ghost fight Zod and his crew on Zod's ship (after Jor-El has changed the atmosphere on the ship from that of Krypton to that of Earth)
- Superman destroys Zod's ship in the final battle

Krypton's New Ways



1. This form of the Krypton theme is scored much lighter than the Old Ways theme. It features synthesized sounds, higher and in longer notes, together suggesting something benign, yet otherworldly, and even exploratory—all aspects of the new way of thinking. We hear this theme in several scenes showing the effects of this new mode of thought, as when:
 - Jor-El dives into the water and in search of the codex
 - The baby Kal-El is launched off of Krypton in an escape pod
 - Kal-El's pod heads out to space towards Earth
 - Superman floats (in Christ-like pose) in the water after having saved the humans on board an oil rig, rather than killing them or letting them die as Zod and the “old way” would dictate)
 - Lois examines a photo of Clark Kent going to the Kryptonian scout ship in the arctic (where he will meet Jor-El and obtain the new mode of thought directly from his father)
 - Superman talks with Jor-El in the scout ship.

Notice the close similarity between this and the Old Ways theme (from 0:07 in the clip below). Like the Jor-El/Kal-El theme, the Krypton themes also are juxtaposed.

Suffering - Lament

1. A third theme showing a dual nature is linked to suffering of one kind or another. Its melody uses a series of rising sixths, which, in a minor key (as here), often depict tragic or troubled situations. The first form of the theme (Lament) is scored plaintively in the French horn, or cello with voice, lending the scene a feeling of grief. It appears, for instance, when:
 - Jor-El convinces Lara to part with their son and send him to Earth
 - Lara mourns Jor-El's death
 - Lara utters her last words just before the destruction of Krypton

Here is the score of this version of the theme:



Suffering - Burden

1. The second form of the theme accompanies Superman's second flight testing the limits of his powers in the desert. Just before he takes off, Jor-El's voice is heard telling Superman that the people of Earth will follow his lead as an ideal to strive towards, but that it will take

time. The sense of a psychological weight on Superman is clear from these words, and from his facial expressions as well. Hence the suggested title: Burden.

2. Zimmer leaves the melodic line as it was in the Lament theme but changes its scoring, and giving it a more uplifting sound. A new rhythmic accompaniment suggests power.

General Zod



1. This short ostinato has the tightest association of any theme as it is heard only when General Zod is onscreen or is being discussed. Its appearances include when:
 - Zod enters the council chamber at start of film (where he is introduced to us)
 - Zod and his crew are imprisoned and taken away
 - Lois agrees to be taken captive in Zod's ship
 - Superman beats Zod up when he attacks Superman's mother
 - Zod and Faora (Zod's second-in-command) have a standoff with Superman
 - Zod and Superman fight for the last time.
2. The theme's most distinctive feature is its use of the Phrygian mode (with the flattened 2nd). This characteristic sound of the Phrygian mode gives the theme a dark, sinister character.

Conclusion

1. Many themes in Hans Zimmer's score for *Man of Steel* are given dual meanings, generally one positive, the other negative, made distinct by the instrumentation and rhythmic settings.
2. Additionally, the associations that the themes have are rather loose in that they signify the same character (or set of characters) in similar situations rather than simply signifying the character in the manner of traditional leitmotifs.
3. While themes in films usually change to reflect the changing emotions of the story, the two forms of each of the themes in *Man of Steel* contrast so that they actually signify something different, at least on the surface.
4. On a deeper level the dualistic themes represent two aspects of the same idea or two sides of the same coin. This is quite a different approach to film scoring, especially for a blockbuster such as this, but then, this is quite a different Superman film.

The original of this (with sound clips) is at:

<http://www.filmmusicnotes.com/hans-zimmers-score-for-man-of-steel/>

FOR REFERENCE ONLY:

Comparison with John William's Superman Theme

While the sound of Zimmer's *Man of Steel* score is almost nothing like that of Williams' famous score for *Superman: The Movie*, there are a number of resemblances that bear mentioning. Most obviously, Zimmer's Superman Heroic theme opens with the same rising fifth as Williams' Superman March, and in the same key of C major. More subtly, the goal notes of the Heroic theme create melodic lines that found in the March. The first 5 goal notes of the Heroic theme, for example, are G-A-G-F-G; the very same notes found in the opening of the March theme, as shown below:

Williams' Superman March

Zimmer's Superman Heroic

The image displays two musical excerpts. The first, 'Williams' Superman March', is in 12/8 time and shows a treble clef staff with notes G, A, G, F, G. The second, 'Zimmer's Superman Heroic', is in 12/8 time and shows a bass clef staff with notes G, A, G, F, G. Both excerpts include a piano accompaniment with eighth and sixteenth notes.

There are more similarities to be found. In the Heroic theme, beginning from the second G, the goal notes are then G-A-B-C. This very same line underlies Williams' March theme:

Williams' March

The image displays two musical excerpts. The first, 'Williams' March', is in 12/8 time and shows a treble clef staff with notes G, A, B, C. The second, 'Zimmer's Superman Heroic', is in 12/8 time and shows a bass clef staff with notes G, A, B, C. Both excerpts include a piano accompaniment with eighth and sixteenth notes.

