

AREA OF STUDY 3:

Music for stage and screen

Music and drama have been partners since ancient times and are still closely linked today. We know that music was heard in the mystery plays of medieval Europe and that song played an important part in the works of Shakespeare. Almost a century later, 'Music for a While' was one of many songs written by Purcell for inclusion in the plays of his day.

When Shakespeare was writing in the years around 1600, **opera** was invented in Italy – drama sung and acted on stage by professional singers accompanied by an orchestra. A lighter type of opera known as **operetta** ('little opera') developed in the late-19th century, in which spoken dialogue alternated with musical items, and this paved the way for the 20th-century **musical** – a play or film with music in a broadly popular style that generally includes some memorable hit songs.

Set work 1

Stephen Schwartz: 'Defying Gravity'
(from the musical *Wicked*)

Context, date and genre

One of the best-loved musical films of the 20th century was *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), based on the *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, an American children's novel of 1900 by L. Frank Baum.

In 1995, American author Gregory Maguire produced a fantasy novel entitled *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West*. It retells the original story from the point of view of the witches, Elphaba (The Wicked Witch of the West) and Glinda, who Maguire casts as The Good Witch of the North. It creates a back-story for many of the other characters in *Oz* and explores the nature of good and evil.

Maguire's novel was turned into the **book** (the spoken dialogue of a musical) by the American screenwriter Winnie Holzman to form the basis of *Wicked*, a musical first staged in the USA, in 2003. The **lyrics** (the words of the songs) and the music are by Stephen Schwartz (born 1948) whose other credits include the 1971 musical *Godspell* and the lyrics for Disney's animated musical film *Pocahontas* (1995).

'Defying Gravity' is the Act One **finale** (the last number in the first half of the show) in which Elphaba, who has discovered that the Wizard of Oz is a charlatan, vows to oppose his evil plans. The song describes how she wants to live life without limits, going against the rules that others have set for her. The song includes short duet sections with Glinda, **underscore** (music played under dialogue), and a short part for the chorus at the end. This composite format is sometimes called a **scena** ('scene'). The staging is highly dramatic, culminating in Elphaba flying into the air on her broomstick, accompanied by moving lights, smoke and wind effects as the citizens of Oz rush in, trying in vain to 'bring her down'.

Structure

The core of *Defying Gravity* is a song in verse-and-chorus form. In the table below, recitative is a type of vocal music that mimics the rhythms of speech.

Bar	Time	Section
1	0:04	Intro (<i>recitative for Glinda and Elphaba</i>): 'I hope you're happy...'
34 ²	1:17	Verse 1 (<i>Elphaba</i>): 'Something has changed within me, ...'
50 ²	1:51	Chorus (<i>Elphaba</i>): 'It's time to try defying gravity...' (<i>Glinda sings the link at bar 60</i>)
63 ²	2:10	Verse 2 (<i>Elphaba</i>): 'I'm through accepting limits...'
79 ²	2:35	Chorus (<i>Elphaba</i>): 'I'd sooner try defying gravity...' (<i>Glinda sings the link at bar 60</i>)
88	2:48	Bridge (<i>Elphaba</i>): 'Unlimited, together...' (+ <i>Glinda from bar 100</i>)
102 ³	3:27	Chorus (<i>Elphaba and Glinda</i>): 'Just you and I defying gravity...' (<i>orchestral build at end</i>)

115 ²	3:53	Varied reprise of intro (<i>Glinda, then both</i>): 'I hope you're happy...'
135 ²	4:32	Verse 3 (<i>Elphaba</i>): 'So if you care to find me' (<i>some parts 8ve higher than before</i>)
151 ²	4:58	Chorus (<i>Elphaba</i>): 'Tell them how I am defying gravity...'
161 ⁴	5:15	Coda (<i>Elphaba, then all</i>): 'And nobody in all of Oz...'

In the stage show, the finale is in D \flat major, a semitone lower than the version in the Anthology, and there are additional passages of underscore.

Resources

The accompaniment is scored by specialist orchestrator Bill Brohn for a relatively large pit band of 23 musicians. The four woodwind ('reed') players have to double on a variety of instruments (including piccolo, bass clarinet and cor anglais).

There are six brass, a harp, two electric guitars, three keyboard synths, used partly to bolster the four string parts (a full body of strings is used for recordings) and a wide range of percussion, including drum kit, timpani, glockenspiel (a tuned percussion instrument with metal bars struck by beaters) and tubular bells.

The excerpt in the Anthology is in the form of a **short score**, which shows the main band parts on just two staves. Points to note in the orchestration include:

- Electric guitar with **overdrive** (a type of distortion) in bars 11, 40 and 45
- Chordal writing for low brass contrasting with solo synth melody (bars 20–23)
- String **tremolo** (marked tr) to create excitement (bars 34–36 and 162–165)
- Drum **fill** (bar 54) – a brief improvisation to fill the gap between vocal phrases
- Descending scales for bass clarinet (bars 89 and 91)
- Cymbal roll to announce the change of key (bar 122)
- **Tutti** (full band) for the climax at bar 135
- Synth and glockenspiel play a high-pitched **ostinato** as Elphaba sings of flying high (bars 152–160).

The two principal singers, Elphaba and Glinda, require the vocal ranges shown below for this number. In the other parts of the show, Glinda has higher notes than the F# shown below. The character requires a **soprano** vocal range. Elphaba is a **mezzo-soprano**, a voice lower in range than a soprano but not as low as an alto.



Glinda Elphaba

There is a small part for the chorus (labelled 'ensemble') in the final bars.

Commentary

The direction *colla voce* ('with the voice') in bar 1 indicates that the band must follow the rhythm of the singers, which is fairly free.

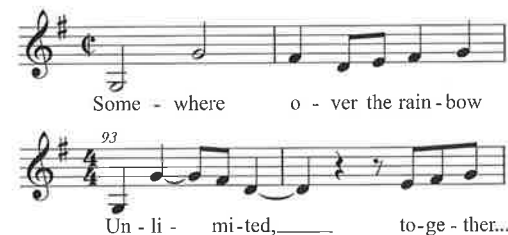
In the introduction (bars 1–31) Glinda confronts Elphaba in **recitative** initially punctuated by chromatic **stabs** (loud detached chords). Elphaba answers her taunts by sarcastically mimicking them a semitone lower (bar 9). Hints of the change that is about to occur in Elphaba are heard in the underscore of bars 20–24, where the syncopated introductory chords to her song are first heard, but the juxtaposition of two totally unrelated keys (B major followed by F major) creates an unsettling effect. Glinda's reassurance that Elphaba can still be with the wizard is accompanied by comforting sustained harmonies in F major.

Elphaba's realisation that 'Something has changed within me' is underpinned by another sudden change of key in bar 32, this time to D major, the main key of 'Defying Gravity'. The song itself begins after a two-bar introduction.

Elphaba asserts her desire to break free from expectations in a 16-bar verse characterised by a number of determined, wide leaps initially accompanied by a nervous **tremolo** from violins (bars 34–39). The tempo tightens to **Allegro** in bar 49 as she moves towards the chorus, which features more angular leaps in the vocal line, many of which are **triadic**. High above the vocal line, a repeating accompaniment pattern of three ascending quavers (printed in small type in the Anthology) cuts across the beat from bar 51 onwards.

The introductory chords from bars 32–3 return in bar 59 and are repeated as an accompaniment to Glinda's accusation in crotchet triplets that Elphaba is having delusions of grandeur, but Elphaba defiantly continues into her second verse, at a faster tempo and with firmly syncopated accompaniment.

After the second chorus, the tempo relaxes (**Moderato** in bar 88) and the key changes to G major. The melody in bars 93–94 quotes the first seven pitches of the song 'Over the Rainbow' from the 1939 musical film, 'The Wizard of Oz':



This 'unlimited' melody is a **leitmotif** that reflects Elphaba's growing confidence and that permeates the musical.

The *colla voce* direction in bar 99 marks a short passage of recitative in which Elphaba invites Glinda to join her and they begin the chorus together, starting at the end of bar 102, with just a little two-part singing before Elphaba finishes the chorus alone.

The introductory music from bar 32 returns in bars 111–114, this time leading to a recitative based on the chromatic chords of the opening bars of the scene. In a subtle change, Schwartz removes the word 'now' from the sarcastic 'I hope you're happy now', turning it into an affirmative 'I hope you're happy' as the friends wish each other well. The tempo returns to **Allegro** and the introductory syncopated motif to the verses is heard again in bars 129 and 132. The return of D major in bar 132 sees an exciting orchestral **build** (a *crescendo* on repeated quavers) during which the castle guards break in, only to see Elphaba soar above them on her broom as she launches into her triumphant final verse (starting at bar 135). Parts of this verse are sung an octave higher than previously.

The **coda** ('And nobody in all of Oz') begins quietly and at a slower pace (**Andante** in Bar 162) but quickly crescendos into the final bars. Elphaba rises to her top note (F#) on 'me' in bar 167) and from bar 169 to the end the people of Oz rush in and join with the guards in singing 'Look at her! She's wicked! Get her!'.

Texture

After some brief **monophonic** passages at the start, the texture is mainly **melody and accompaniment**. Schwartz included the simplest type of **duet writing** in which the two characters mainly sing either alternately or together in **unison** (e.g. bars 101–109).

There are just a couple of passages of very easy two-part vocal writing (e.g. parallel 3rds in bars 125–128), plus a brief contrapuntal section in the final bars. **Ostinato** figures occur in bars 80–87, 88–97, 103–109 and 152–159.

Tonality

The main parts of the song (verses and choruses) are in D major, with a section in G major in bars 88–100.

Chromatic writing at the start and in bars 115–131 creates areas of ambiguous tonality.

Harmony

The **harmony** includes root position triads and **sus chords**, in which the 3rd of the chord is replaced by either a 2nd above the root (sus²) or a 4th (sus⁴). For example, the chord in bar 60 is Gsus² (G–A–D), whereas a chord of G would be G–B–D).

There is an inner **pedal** on A in bars 162–167 followed by an inverted pedal on D, starting in bar 168.

Rhythm and melody

Recitative sections are in **free time** in which the speed is dictated by the singers. Elsewhere, there are many changes of tempo in the song, some associated with a ‘rall.’ (*rallentando*, meaning slowing down).

There is a minim beat ($\frac{2}{2}$ or $\frac{3}{2}$ time) until the $\frac{4}{4}$ in bar 88. $\frac{2}{2}$ returns in bar 115. Many vocal phrases start on a weak beat and the word setting is syllabic.

Syncopation plays an important role in the **rhythm** of ‘Defying Gravity’, particularly in the anticipation of strong beats by a quaver (a technique known as a **push** in pop music and jazz), as in bars 50–51:



Syncopation:



Notice the **triadic** style of Elphaba's vocal line in this example – most of the notes come from a triad of D major (D–F#–A). The long notes and wide leaps help to illustrate Elphaba's new-found confidence as the song unfolds. Intervals of a 4th and 5th feature prominently in the vocal line as Elphaba becomes increasingly sure of herself and even wider leaps appear as she becomes more determined, especially in bars 39–40 (a leap of an 11th) and bar 140 (a leap of a 12th).

The melody for ‘try defying gravity’ shown above is known as the **title hook** – in pop music, a hook is a melodic fragment designed to catch the ear of the listener, and is called the title hook when it includes the words of the song's title.

Test yourself

- What is the term for music played under dialogue in musicals and films?
- Give the meaning of the following directions:
 - colla voce*
 - rall.*
- Describe the accompaniment in the first three bars of ‘Defying Gravity’.
- The vocal style at the start of ‘Defying Gravity’ is described as like recitative. What do you understand is meant by the term recitative?
- How does the vocal melody in bar 7 relate to bar 6? ____?
- How are the x-headed notes (X) in the score of ‘Defying Gravity’ performed?
- What type of effect is guitar overdrive?
- What is an ostinato?
- What is the approximate range of the two solo vocal parts in this song?
- Complete the following sentence:
The structure of ‘Defying Gravity’ is based on _____ and _____ form.
- Glinda and Elphaba sometimes sing in unison. What is meant by unison?
- What does the sign  above or below a note indicate?
- In musicals, woodwind players are often required to double. What does this mean?
- The end of the song include parts for ‘Ensemble’. What is another name for this group of singers?
- What is the meaning of the  symbol in the last few bars of the song?

Answers: See page 70

Set work 2

John Williams: 'Main Title' / 'Rebel Blockade Runner' (from *Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope*)

Context

Specially commissioned music for films first appeared in the 1930s. Many of the early composers in the genre had emigrated to Hollywood from Austria and eastern Europe, and continued to write for large symphony orchestras in the late Romantic style with which they were familiar. The 1950s saw the use of jazz in some film scores, and from the 1960s onwards film soundtracks included styles as diverse as pop, rock and experimental electronic music.

From the 1970s onwards, John Williams (born 1932) reinvigorated the style of the early film composers, producing highly successful film scores in a late Romantic idiom (spiced with occasional more modern dissonance) and designed for the rich resources of a full symphony orchestra.

Star Wars, released in 1977, was the first in what is now being developed into a cycle of nine related movies. It later received the sub-title '*Episode IV - A New Hope*' to indicate its position within the complete cycle. The films are set in a distant galaxy and concern an epic struggle between the evil Galactic Empire and the organised resistance of the Rebel Alliance, who are fighting to restore democracy.

Another traditional aspect of Williams' work is his use of **leitmotifs** – musical ideas associated with a character, object or event that are transformed to become grander, sadder, more romantic or whatever else the dramatic situation demands. The device was pioneered in the 19th-century operas of Richard Wagner.

In *Star Wars*, the motif starting on the upbeat to bar 4 of the set work is used to portray heroism and adventure, and soon becomes associated with the hero Luke Skywalker – in fact, just its opening notes are enough to suggest *Star Wars* to anyone who has seen the film:



The motif gets its heroic quality from a loud dynamic, its scoring for trumpets and its focus on the two most important notes in the key of Bb major – the tonic (Bb, shown in red) and the dominant (F, shown in blue). In addition, the motif starts with strong rising intervals and the triplet in bar 5, instead of falling a step to Bb, defiantly leaps a 7th to a high Bb. Triplets are often a feature of heroic music, and here they add to the march-like quality, while the syncopated accompaniment to these bars helps create the overall mood of excitement.

John Williams' transformations of this leitmotif occur later in the film in excerpts not included in the Anthology. For example, when Luke ponders his destiny, it is played thoughtfully and slowly by solo flute, then solo clarinet, accompanied by tremolo strings. When he rescues Leia (who turns out to be his twin sister) it becomes strongly rhythmic and percussive.

The main title of *A New Hope* is particularly important because the first half of this heroic music is the basis for the main title music in all of the *Star Wars* films, acting as an important unifying force for the series. Its continuation, though, is different in each film.

In the case of *A New Hope*, a second leitmotif is introduced in the final 10 bars of the set work. Known as the **Rebel Blockade Runner**, (or 'rebel fanfare') this is heard whenever the Rebel Alliance (or one of its spaceships) is trying to outrun the spaceships of the evil Empire. It is particularly like Wagner's leitmotifs in its brevity being, in essence, just an interval of a minor 3rd:



Resources

The music is scored for a full symphony orchestra of nearly 90 players:

- 10 woodwind, 11 brass, 6 percussion, harp and 60 strings (divided into five parts: first violins, second violins, violas, cellos and double basses)

The Anthology is printed as a **short score**, containing just three staves per line and showing only the most important orchestral parts.

Make sure you understand the abbreviations:

Trp.	Trumpet	Hrp.	Harp
Trb.	Trombone	Vln.	Violins
Hrn.	Horn	Str.	Strings
Timp.	Timpani	Fl.	Flutes

Tutti (e.g. in bar 21) means all, or everyone. The diagonal beams over the topmost notes in bars 1–6 and elsewhere indicate a tremolo for violins, played by small, very rapid movements of the bow across the strings.

The score for *A New Hope* was orchestrated by Herbert W. Spencer, who had long experience in scoring film musicals for Hollywood. The music is thickly scored, with much doubling of parts, few solo lines and no use of electric guitars, synthesisers or electronic effects.

Structure

The structure is largely determined by the visual images on screen that the music is designed to accompany. The first 29 bars consist of a short introductory **fanfare** followed by a ternary (ABA') structure, creating the familiar opening to all the *Star Wars* films. The second part sets the scene for this particular film, *A New Hope*:

Bars	Time	Music	Film
1–3 ³	0:00	Introductory fanfare	The title 'Star Wars', fills the screen but immediately recedes into the distance
3 ⁴ –11 ³	0:07	A 4-bar theme on trumpets, immediately repeated with a different accompaniment	Three paragraphs of scrolling text (the 'main title crawl'), each aligned to one of these three sections of music. They explain the background to the film.
11 ⁴ –20 ³	0:26	B 8-bar contrasting theme on violins plus link (bar 20)	
20 ⁴ –29 ³	0:48	A' Repeat of A, more fully scored with small changes and a link (bar 29)	

29 ⁴ –35	1:09	Shortened fanfare, crescendo and diminuendo	Tiny stars appear against the black void.
36 ⁴ –39 ¹	1:25	Piccolo solo, mysterious harmony	
39 ² –50 51–60	1.31 1.56	Sudden orchestral outburst followed by Rebel Blockade Runner leitmotif.	The surface of a huge planet swings into view. A tiny rebel spacecraft is being fired on by a spaceship of the Galactic Empire.

Tonality

The first half of the set work (up to bar 29) is in B \flat major, reinforced by an inverted tonic **pedal** on B \flat in bars 1–6, a dominant **pedal** on F in bars 11–14, and phrases that end with a dominant **chord** of F, creating **imperfect cadences**.

The music becomes increasingly **atonal** in the second half, with dissonant chords and a sense of **bitonality** in the last 10 bars, where chords in A \flat minor clash with a rhythmic **ostinato** on a pedal C.

Harmony

There is **quartal harmony** (chords built from 4ths) in the first seven bars.



Chords in root position, often with added notes, then predominate in the rest of the first section. There is some chromaticism, for example in the parallel triads of bar 7.

The unrelated chords in bars 33–35 create little sense of key, but the interval of an augmented 5th between A \flat and E \sharp that permeates bars 32–39¹ gives the music a mystic, unworldly character, illustrating the void of space seen on screen at this point.

Chords become increasingly dissonant in the following bars, with A \flat clashing against triads of C major, until note **clusters** of C–D \flat –F–G are hammered out in bars 46–50. Parallel triads return in the last four bars, heard over a pedal C.

Melody

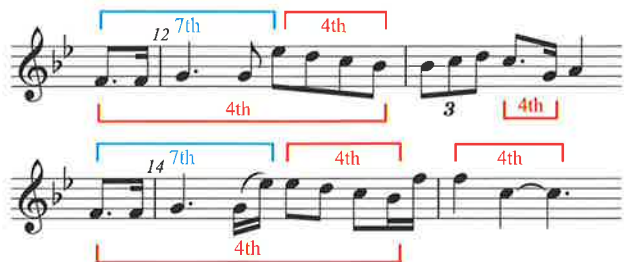
Bold, clearly-defined melodies are a feature of John Williams' style and are evident in the first section of the set work.

The intervals of a 4th and a 7th, and the triplet quaver rhythm, that were all prominent in the opening fanfare, also figure in the melody of section A:



A rising contour, based on the tonic (Bb) and dominant (F) of the key, helps to give this melody its heroic quality.

The main theme of the B section (bars 11⁴-19) forms a contrast, being scored for violins in octaves, having a less forceful dynamic and an elegant sweep with more stepwise movement, but it too makes reference to the intervals of a 4th and 7th, and to a quaver triplet rhythm:



Rhythm

The brisk tempo and $\frac{4}{4}$ time create a march-like military mood, and the triplet figures in the first three bars, scored for brass, are typical of fanfares.

The syncopated accompaniment in bars 4-6 and 21-24 adds to the excitement. The pulse becomes less obvious from bar 33, the time changes to triple metre at bar 44 and the music gradually slows in bars 47-50. The last 10 bars are at a faster tempo.

Texture

Mainly homophonic (melody and accompaniment, often with the melody doubled in octaves). A few imitative points (e.g. trumpets and trombones in opening fanfare). A **homorhythmic** texture of block chords in bars 44-50. Several pedal points, including a rhythmic **ostinato** on a pedal C in bars 51-end.

Test yourself

1. Describe **two** distinctive features of John Williams' film music.
2. How many bars long is the introductory fanfare in *Star Wars*?
3. Identify **two** aspects of the music in the openings bars that makes it sound like a fanfare.
4. The first section of music following the fanfare has an ABA' structure. Describe **two** similarities and **two** differences between sections A and B.
5. Explain the difference between bitonality and atonality by completing the following sentence:
 Bitonality is the use of _____,
 whereas atonality is _____.
6. What is the meaning of:
 - a. *tutti* (in bar 21)
 - b. *pizz.* (in bar 33)
 - c. *8va* (in bar 36)
7. Describe the texture in bars 44-50
8. Which **two** words describe the rhythm of the accompaniment in bars 21-24?
9. What is a cluster?

Answers: See page 70