

# Space odyssey essay

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## **Also Sprach Zarathusthra by Richard Strauss**

This symphonic poem is probably one of the greatest that the German composer Richard Strauss ever wrote. The film uses the opening for its entry and this is probably one of the most awe inspiring moments in the entire classical music canon. The way the timpani begin the scene in conjunction with the horns is extremely exciting and uplifting as the music then reaches an uninhibited climax which culminates in a succession of fanfares which even include the organ in their remit. The music is very descriptive and although it is loosely based on Nietzsche's poem of the same name, one can apply it to different circumstances. The use of the full orchestra is also instructive in the sense that Strauss changes his palette accordingly even in the quieter moments to create a grand sense of occasion and great beauty with nature rather prominent.

## **Requiem by Gyorgy Ligeti**

Ligeti's Requiem is a dark and deeply brooding piece which conforms with the post modern style of this composer. It consists basically of a succession of sounds which eventually dissipate into nothingness, rather similar to what

happens in space. Notwithstanding all this, the Requiem is also a powerful piece and uses voices with supreme craft especially the low basses and sopranos which also create what can be termed as an ethereal effect. The Requiem is a magnificent piece in all respects and deserves far greater currency although with Ligeti's recent death his stock has risen quite considerably. It is a post modern piece yet in parts of it Ligeti also pays tribute to past Renaissance masters such as Palestrina and Tallis with certain sounds and effects. Other parts of Ligeti's music are also used in the film but the main focus remains the Requiem which is a strong and intrinsically powerful piece

### **The Blue Danube by Johann Strauss**

This waltz is probably the work for which Johann Strauss is consistently remembered. It is a memorable and classic piece which attempts to describe the River Danube which passes through Vienna and also creates a sense of the old world with its inflexions and rhythms. The waltz opens with the main theme on wind and strings which is then nicely developed until it rises to a nice crescendo where all the themes come together in a rousing conclusion. Strauss is a master at using the violins to create melodies which are memorable and which consistently stick and The Blue Danube is no exception. One really has the feeling that the water is moving along with the music and such is Strauss' fine description that one feels transported to the old world of Vienna with the music. One also has to bear in mind that Johann Strauss was writing for a different audience in those days and with Austria an important imperial power, the waltz has an added majesty to it.

Write 500 words to describe how the music is used - how is the music related

to the action on the screen? What meaning does the music give to the action? Is it congruous?

Stanley Kubrick's 2001 A Space Odyssey is surely a film which uses music to the best of its abilities. A typical example is the way the film begins with the grandeur of space showing and the magnificent opening theme of Also Sprach Zarathustra playing in the background. The sense of palpable emotion created by the music is unforgettable and it does truly relate to the infinity of the spacial experience. The tone poem opening definitely gives an intrinsic meaning to the action as it demonstrates the grandeur and total infinity of space which is an important part of our understanding of the cosmos. With Strauss' 'Also Sprach Zarathustra', everything almost fits into place like a glove. The music recurs also at the end of the film so one can say that the piece is used as an opener and a closer to added effect. It also acts as a beacon to transformational procedures such as the ape transformed to Star Child and suchlike.

Kubrick also uses The Blue Danube to depict the graceful movement of special satellites and this is another excellent parallel. The way the waltz goes along with the movements of the satellites is probably one of the high points of the film and further conveys the intrinsic power of music over film. Johann Staruss' music is ideal for such motion and one can almost say that the waltz is tailor made for space so it is definitely a congruous decision to use it. The Blue Danube also reappears in the closing credits of the film as a sort of reprise which shows that Kubrick was quite fascinated by it and what it meant to the whole story.

Other parts of the film use a substantial part of Ligeti's music especially the

Requiem. In fact this also recurs as a leitmotif in the film in similar ways that Also Sprach Zarathustra is used. Ligeti's Requiem is heard during the appearance of the monoliths and thus adds mystery to the proceedings especially when Bowman approaches the Star Gate close to Jupiter. One has to admit that Ligeti's music blends perfectly with all that is happening as its sense of mystery and special emptiness mixes perfectly with what is going on in the film in more ways than one (Champlin 1970). Other pieces by Ligeti such as Lux aeternae are also used but these appear only briefly and without much meaning to the whole plot.

The musical choice by Kubrick is definitely excellent and demonstrates that each piece has a particular reference to the whole story. Although sometimes one may seem slightly confused in matching the music with what is going on on screen, repeated viewings make this quite easy in the end. The use of both Strauss' music is definitely a masterstroke in this respect.

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