

How does john
williams' music
contribute to the
feelings of fear
tension and exci...



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In the 50's the science fiction genre of film really took off.

So called 'B movies' like 'King Kong' started to show over sized animals wrecking havoc in the humans lives. This is really where 'Jaws' stems from. Many recent films like 'Anaconda', 'Lake Placid' and 'Deep Blue Sea' are descendents from the 1975 'Jaws', that went down in film history. The film is based on Peter Benchley's novel also called 'Jaws', set in the small seaside town of Amity Island. The seaside town has havoc wrecked in it when a great white shark begins making sharks on the unsuspecting victims.

Martin Brody is the town's local police officer who tries to persuade the mayor to shut the beach down before any more attacks are made. Of course the mayor refuses worried that the tourists will panic and leave and so he refuses. So Brody decides to take matter into his own hands. To help him he invites Mat Hooper a young and confident man and Quint a rude and arrogant shark expert.

Together the three venture out to try to catch and slaughter the menacing shark that caused so much trouble. Although to a modern audience 'Jaws' may seem 'pathetic' and the animatronics 'pitiable' in its time it was phenomenon. Before it was shown in the cinemas labeled as a doomed failure. The unknown actors and director and production difficulties however did not stop it taking in \$260 million breaking the records of films like The Exorcist and The Godfather.

The immense popularity of 'Jaws' prompted 3 sequels. Needless to say like most sequels they didn't even compare with the original. The phenomenal success of the film simply couldn't be followed. Jaws was such a success

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because many of the techniques used in it were pioneering ideas that had never been seen before. The animatronics for the time were amazing and John Williams' music score really added depth and excitement for the audience.

The actual film differed greatly from the original novel by Peter Benchley. This caused a lot of friction on the set between himself and Steven Spielberg. Three models were made of the shark. One was a full body version and two of the models were of the front half of the shark. The full sized shark was 25 feet long and weighed 12 tons.

Real life models had rarely been used in films. In most films the model would be very small and then the actors would be mixed with it during the editing process. The shark in the film has almost been made a pivot point for the characters and their behavior in this film. Before the shark appears Amity Island is your average holiday location with its average inhabitants.

But when the shark arrives it causes all sorts of human behavior to come out which interests and grasps the audience's attention. The three main characters - Martin Brody, Quint and Matt Hooper are all very different throughout the film. However there is one part when they have all gone out looking for the shark and they start singing 'Show me the way to go home'. At this point they all join and become one.

They are all connected even though they have such different personalities. As humans we are always interested in looking at other people, their relationships, reaction and attitudes. In this film we get to see how people react in a situation of fear and this overview is what appeals to many and <https://assignbuster.com/how-does-john-williams-music-contribute-to-the-feelings-of-fear-tension-and-excitement-in-steven-spielbergs-jaws/>

helped make the film such a success. If you took away the music score by John Williams the film would have been a doomed failure. But the music gives it all the depth and excitement that at points the story line lacks. John Williams was born in New York on February 8, 1932, and moved to Los Angeles with his family in 1948.

He has composed the music and served as music director for more than seventy-five films including *The Lost World*, *Sleepers*, *Sabrina*, *Schindler's List*, *Jurassic Park*, *Hook*, *Home Alone*, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, *Empire of the Sun*, *The Witches of Eastwick*, *Indiana Jones, Return of the Jedi*, *E. T.*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *The Empire Strikes Back*, *Superman*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *Star Wars*. He has received thirty-four Academy Award nominations and has been awarded five Oscars, four British Academy Awards and sixteen Grammys as well as several gold and platinum records. The use of leitmotif which throughout the film symbolises the shark, really gets the audience on the edge of their seats. The reoccurring theme lets the audience get on a more acquainted level with the shark.

Even if the shark is not in that particular frame, if that leitmotif appears the audience know the shark is near by. This music cleverly manipulates the audience. Often the music will begin to play and then die down. Other times it will come very suddenly and result in a sighting or an attack. The music makes the audience tense and then relax to give an effect of excitement.

Wagner a German composer was the first to use the technique of leitmotif in his operas. He used phrases of reoccurring music to symbolise a person, object or emotion. The leitmotif combined with the POV shots meant that

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they did not always have to use the shark model, which was extremely complex to maneuver. When the audience see the camera moving and the leitmotif in the background they know that the shark is coming without even seeing it on screen. The shark doesn't actually appear in the film until 46 minutes in the film. However the audience is fully aware that the shark exists and is there and this is due to the incredible leitmotif score.

The opening sequence is described by many as amazing. It really gets the audience gripped and sets up a tension that is carried through the film. An underwater sequence is accompanied by the sound of the wind alongside dolphins and whales. This is very calming and leads the audience into a false sense of security.

Suddenly all these noises disappear and there is silence. This is to show that something has disturbed these peaceful creatures. Then comes in the use of leitmotif. It comes in the patten of 1 note, then 1 2, 1 2 3 and finally 1 2 3 4. The sound is slowly built up and this build up the tension. The audience gets the feeling that the shark is approaching and getting closer.

The double bass notes are deep and create an appropriate sound image of the shark. The menacing theme to Jaws raises the feeling of terror immediately. The theme is incredibly simple and is only actually 3 notes (E, F, E, F, E, F, D, E, and F...

). This manages to capture the terrifying mood of the film. Just as the tension is mounting the camera goes to a crowdy night beach party. This is again leading the audience into a sense of security. The tension falls and again the feeling of calm reigns. The two characters run off onto a quite spot.
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The sea is calm and the feeling of romance and tranquility is built carrying on the feeling of security for the audience. This is manipulating the audience again. As suddenly as all the noise began it stops and all you can hear is the bell sound coming from the boat. In the opening sequence and throughout John Williams is in control of the audience. He uses the leitmotif, music and silence to manipulate the audience. He decided when they will feel calm, excited and tense and uses it to his advantage to make the audience want more.

Apart from the leitmotif of the shark he also composed Williams composed several heart-racing action sequences, along with mysterious melodies for the scenes under water. Many believed that when Jaws 2 was released it would have been as amazing as the first one. But as with most sequels it wasn't. Although the same leitmotif was kept, the suspense and tension of the sequel never matched or even came close to the original. The opening sequence showed two divers diving around the wreck of the Orca that was the ship Martin, Quint and Hooper sailed on in the final scenes of the original. Suddenly without any warning or the build up of the original the leitmotif accompanied by other big band instruments, the shark appears and the attack is made upon the divers.

This was highly ineffective. In the original, the tension is built and then dropped before the climax comes again. This creates suspense brilliantly as the audience tries to anticipate what will happen next. In Jaws 2, the attack is too sudden. The fact that you see the shark within the opening sequence also lets the film down. A main part of the tension created in the first one is the facts that you can't see the shark, until quite far into the film.

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The leitmotif is also blended in with other sounds in Jaws 2, which makes it sound more like one track than a reoccurring leitmotif. Everything happens so suddenly and the tension and suspense is killed. Another one of John Williams music score was for Star Wars episode 4 - A New Hope. In this again he uses leitmotif to represent certain characters and groups. The score throughout the film are very dramatic and use big orchestral sounds.

This is to reflect the image of the ' Empire'. With that word people associate civilizations like the Romans and get grand imagery. The music accompanies this extremely effectively. There is a big comparison and contest amongst the good and bad throughout the film and the different instrument groups are used to represent this.

Leitmotif is again used and this time it is used to symbolise a Jedi. When a member of the Jedis appears there is a very quiet but noticeable variation of the original theme that plays. When Darth Vader appears there is deep sounds that almost sound like thunder to represent him and his evilness. The idea of a reoccurring theme being repeated with slight variation was used in ET where Williams used the ET theme with different instruments and volumes to represent the changing relationship between ET and Eliot. This leitmotif is used to symbolise the relationship between the two characters that gets closer as the film progresses. John Williams seems to keep the reoccurring themes and leitmotifs very simple often only using a few notes and then looping them.

To add variation he changes instruments, tempo and volume. This is highly effective and manages to manipulate the audience and almost make them

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putty in his hand. With his music he decides when the audience will feel sad, happy, tense or excited. His tremendous success as a film score writer inspired modern day composers like Hans Zimmer (Driving Miss Daisy, Thelma and Louise, Crimson Tide, The Thin Red Line, Gladiator, Hannibal and Pearl Harbor) and James Horner (Aliens, An American Tail, The Land before Time, Legends of the Fall, Jumanji, Braveheart, Titanic and A Perfect Storm). His phenomenal success and amazing talent will always be remembered.