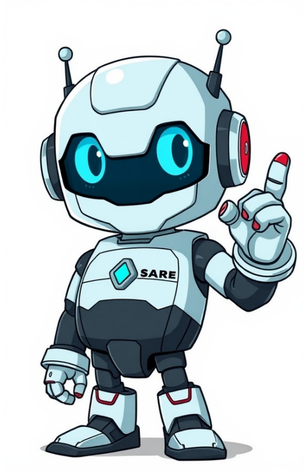
I'm not a robot



"The Imperial March" is sometimes referred to simply as "Darth Vader's Theme." In the movies (except for the original Star Wars), the march is often played when Darth Vader appears. It is also played during Darth Sidious's arrival on the Death Star in Return of the Jedi, though it does segue into the Emperor's own theme as he appears. "The Imperial March" is first heard in The Empire Strikes Back in low piccolos as the Galactic Empire sends probe droids across the galaxy in search of Luke Skywalker. Its major opening occurs as Imperial-class Star Destroyers amass and Darth Vader is first presented in the film, 19 minutes into the running time. The theme and related motifs are also incorporated into tracks such as "The Battle of Hoth" during the eponymous battle, "The Asteroid Field" during the chase sequence involving the Millennium Falcon, and "The Clash of Lightsabers" during Luke and Vader's duel on Cloud City over Bespin. Return of the Jedi makes similar use of the theme, though its final statement is significantly different, making quiet use of a harp as a redeemed Anakin Skywalker dies in his son's arms. "The Imperial March" appears on a few occasions in the prequel trilogy, most often used to foreshadow Anakin Skywalker's future as Darth Vader. An innocent theme for the nine-year-old Anakin in The Phantom Menace at 1H10 is thematically based on "The Imperial March." "The Imperial March" is also heard towards the end, as Yoda acknowledges Anakin as Obi-Wan's apprentice in saying "The Chosen One, the boy may be. Nevertheless, grave danger I fear in his training" at 2H06. It is also heard softly at the end of the final credit roll, where it fades into the character's signature breathing, showing that the rest of the prequel trilogy will reveal how Anakin became Darth Vader. In the second prequel, Attack of the Clones, "The Imperial March" is sometimes played subtly when an event foreshadows Anakin's future: It is first played when Yoda senses Anakin slaughtering a tribe of Tusken Raiders to avenge his mother's death and later with more force when Anakin tells Padmé Amidala what he did. It is played most prominently and recognizably during the final sequence when clone troopers assemble and depart Coruscant, foreshadowing the end of the Republic. Although "Across the Stars" is featured most prominently in the film's end credits, several notes from "The Imperial March" are heard beneath it near the end. In Revenge of the Sith "The Imperial March" is first played when Anakin rebukes the Jedi Council for denying him the rank of Jedi Master, although appointing him to the Council at 0H37. The track can also be heard when Anakin tells Mace Windu about Palpatine's true identity, Darth Sidious. It is later played when Anakin is dubbed as the Sith Darth Vader, shortly after the death of Mace Windu. "The Imperial March" is quoted when clone troopers find dead Wookiees on Kashyyyk and when Padmé confronts Anakin on Mustafar. A few notes of the "March" are played when Vader arrives on Mustafar to kill the Separatists. The piece is played more clearly during the "Battle of the Heroes" scene between Obi-Wan and Darth Vader at the movie's climax and in the simultaneous battle between Yoda and Sidious, as a rearrangement of the version heard in "The Clash of Lightsabers" from The Empire Strikes Back. It is also played when Darth Vader receives his armor at 2H06 and when he looks up at the first Death Star with Sidious at 2H11. In the 2015 Star Wars: The Force Awakens, two bars from the brass motif of "The Imperial March" are played after antagonist Kylo Ren regards the charred remains of Darth Vader's helmet, vowing to finally succeed where the Galactic Empire failed. In the 2017 Star Wars: The Last Jedi, the track was briefly played after Supreme Leader Snoke compares antagonist Kylo Ren to Darth Vader, saying he saw the potential of "A new Vader." In the 2019 Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker the track is present in the scenes where the mask of Darth Vader is shown, when Darth Sidious first reveals the Final Order, a massive armada of Xyston-class Star Destroyers built by the Sith Eternal, to Kylo Ren, when Rey seeks Sidious' Sith wayfinder in the Death Star's wreckage, and when a Sith Star Destroyer arrives to destroy Kijimi. Trailers for Rogue One: A Star Wars Story featured the track prominently; the first notes of "The Imperial March" can be heard at the end of the trailer as the letters turn to reveal the name of the upcoming movie. Prior to this, Darth Vader can be heard breathing and his appearance is seen as a reflection on the floor. In the film proper, scored by Michael Giacchino, the theme can be heard when Vader emerges from his sanctum to confer with Director Orson Krennic, and again after Vader warns Krennic about overstepping his bounds. The theme can be heard once more when Vader attacks the Rebel soldiers trapped in a hallway; it is slowed down enough not to be obvious and joined with a chorus reminiscent of that from Revenge of the Sith. The theme is finally heard outright when Vader witnesses the Tantive IV fleeing into hyperspace. The track appears early in Solo: A Star Wars Story, transposed into a major key, as diegetic music in the Corellia spaceport as part of a commercial encouraging viewers to join the Imperial Navy, encouraging Han Solo to enlist as his ticket off the planet. This brief appearance marks the first and thus-far only in-universe appearance of "The Imperial March" in a theatrical film. "The Imperial March" has influence in short but dark moments revolving around Anakin. For example, in episode 62, "Citadel Rescue", Anakin and Captain Wilhuff Tarkin both mention during their escape their good relationship with the Supreme Chancellor Palpatine. Anakin shakes hands with Tarkin at the end of the episode, while Tarkin says he will inform the Chancellor of Anakin's good performance. During that handshake, a hint is to be heard in the music referring to "The Imperial March." Other episodes that feature the theme include "Brain Invaders" (when Anakin strangles Poggle), "Voyage of Temptation" (when Anakin kills Merrik), "Overlords" (multiple times), "Ghosts of Mortis" (multiple times), "Kidnapped" (when Obi-Wan talks with Anakin and then Ahsoka), "Deception" (multiple times) and "Friends and Enemies" (multiple times), "Crisis on Naboo" (when Anakin argues with Obi-Wan), "The Lawless" (during Darth Sidious scenes), and "The Jedi Who Knew Too Much" (multiple times). The theme is used prominently during the sixth season. In "Empire Day", the episode's title referring to the Empire's anniversary, "The Imperial Anthem" arrangement of "The Imperial March", is heard during the parade. The march is also heard in "Call to Action" when Grand Moff Tarkin arrives on Lothal, in the final scene of "Fire Across the Galaxy" when Darth Vader arrives on Lothal, and in multiple scenes in "The Siege of Lothal." In Obi-Wan Kenobi, the march is heard in "Part VI" after Darth Vader's contact with Darth Sidious. 'Star Wars' 'Imperial March' plays behind National Guard members in DCA man was spotted in Washington following National Guard members while playing Star Wars' Imperial March. Footage originally uploaded by TikTok user @everybodyacriticshow captures the man walking his dog in the park while his phone plays the tune to the backs of the guards. Credit: Everybody a Critic/@everybodyacriticshow via StoryfulSam O'Hara started playing the "Imperial March" from "Star Wars" behind National Guard troops in Washington, DC, in late August. His TikTok posts showing the interactions garnered millions of views.An Ohio National Guard sergeant called the police on O'Hara on Sept. 11. He was accused of harassing the troops, though O'Hara disputed the claim.The ACLU is suing various officials on O'Hara's behalf, alleging that his First and Fourth Amendment rights were violated, among other charges.Sam O'Hara was walking his 10-year-old rescue dog Lincoln, a daschund mix, near Dupont Circle in Washington, DC, in late August when he saw two National Guard members patrolling the area. "The thought just kind of dawned on me that they look like stormtroopers," the 35-year-old O'Hara said. So he opened Spotify on his phone, called up the iconic "Imperial March" theme from "Star Wars" and began playing it aloud.O'Hara doesn't own a light saber but said he's seen all of the "Star Wars" movies and has "always identified with the rebellion."The John Williams-composed song symbolizes Darth Vader and the evil Galactic Empire. Playing it behind troops and recording the interactions to post on TikTok was a creative and peaceful way, he thought, to protest what he described as the National Guard's unnecessary and anxiety-inducing presence in the city.President Donald Trump deployed the military to address crime and homelessness in the nation's capital in August, though the effort was met with resistance from many Washington residents. "I'm not anti-National Guard or anti-military," O'Hara said. "I have lots of respect for people that joined the force and decided to enlist to protect our country. My problem is that people are here under orders that I do not agree with, and that's what I'm protesting." The National Guard troops he approached that first day took it in stride, he said, adding that others in subsequent encounters responded with smiles and waves. But Sept. 11 was different. The events of that day prompted the American Civil Liberties Union to sue authorities on O'Hara's behalf for alleged violations of his First and Fourth Amendment rights, among other claims. According to an Oct. 23 complaint against the city and Ohio National Guard, O'Hara began walking behind four Ohio guard members in the Logan Circle neighborhood and played the song – just as he'd been doing for weeks.Less than two minutes later, an Ohio National Guard sergeant "turned around and threatened to call D.C. police officers to 'handle' Mr. O'Hara if he persisted," the complaint said. O'Hara continued his protest, at which point DC metro police were called to the scene and put him in handcuffs on the basis of his supposed harassment of the troops, according to the lawsuit. He rejected the accusation during the incident, and the complaint reiterates his assertion that he was neither harassing the troops nor interfering with their duties. O'Hara complained about the tightness of the handcuffs, which were on for between 15 and 20 minutes, but no efforts were made to loosen them, according to the complaint. "The law might have tolerated government conduct of this sort a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away," the complaint said. "But in the here and now, the First Amendment bars government officials from shutting down peaceful protests, and the Fourth Amendment – along with the District's prohibition on false arrest – bars groundless seizures." Both the city's attorney general's office and the National Guard's Joint Task Force in Washington said they could not comment on pending litigation. Music has long been used as a form of protest and solidarity, whether by enslaved people singing spirituals or demonstrators chanting during the Civil Rights Movement, Georgetown Law School constitutional law professor David Cole said. O'Hara was continuing that longstanding tradition with his actions, exercising his constitutional rights both to protest and record government actors carrying out their duties in public, he said. There are limits to those rights, however. The government is allowed to implement content-neutral time, place and manner restrictions, and a protest can't interfere with law enforcement's duties. But Cole saw no evidence that O'Hara had violated those limits based on the information presented in the ACLU complaint. "He made fun of the function they were serving, and they were offended by that – that's it," he said. "There's no claim that somehow they couldn't do their job because someone was making fun of them." ACLU attorney Michael Perloff echoed Cole's sentiments, saying O'Hara's actions were "perfectly in line with the types of actions that courts have held the First Amendment protects." "I don't think this is ... a borderline case," Perloff said. O'Hara moved to DC in 2015, having previously lived in Massachusetts and Florida, and since then he has participated in numerous protests, including the 2017 Women's March and the People's Climate March later that year. He's lived in various neighborhoods including Adams Morgan, Capitol Hill and Dupont Circle, calling the city "very formative" in his adult life. He also described it as "gorgeous" and "wonderful." In other words, a far cry in O'Hara's view from how Trump has characterized the city in justifying his move to call in the troops. The president has referred to the city as "dirty and disgusting" and unsafe, though its crime rates have declined in recent years. O'Hara said he's received "overwhelmingly positive" responses to his form of protest and that some TikTok users have even expressed interest in taking similar actions in cities like Portland, Oregon, where Trump is also pushing to deploy troops. "It's the people that don't live in Washington, DC, that I think are being negative in the comments, that don't understand what it's like to live in a city that was beautiful, and then one day to have ... armed National Guard members carrying giant rifles standing in front of your metro station," he said. "It just feels insane." Though O'Hara said being at the center of a First Amendment lawsuit against his beloved city "was not on my bingo card for 2025," his sense that he's part of a bigger movement challenging the Trump administration outweighed his preference for a quiet, private life. He hopes the lawsuit will be resolved quickly, and he'd love to see the involved law enforcement and military personnel receive training on protesters' rights. He'd also appreciate an apology but says he's "not holding my breath."Cole said the lawsuit could have implications beyond O'Hara's individual case. "It's about ensuring more broadly that law enforcement, whether it be local police or National Guard, respect our constitutional rights, even when we are using our constitutional rights in ways that offend them," Cole said. "If the government learns that lesson, that would be a good thing."BrieAnna Frank is a First Amendment reporter at USA TODAY. Reach her at bjfrank@usatoday.com.USA TODAY's coverage of First Amendment issues is funded through a collaboration between the Freedom Forum and Journalism Funding Partners. Funders do not provide editorial input. Galactic EmpireDarth VaderDark side of the Force London Symphony Orchestra I, II, III, V, VI, VII, Rogue One, VIII, Solo and IX The Empire Strikes Back RC "There will be a new piece of music for Darth Vader who plays a more important role in this film. In Star Wars he had what you could call a musical fragment, but in the new picture there will be a Grand Imperial March." —John Williams[1] "The Imperial March," also called "Darth Vader's Theme," is a recurring musical theme of the Star Wars movies. It was composed by John Williams and first appeared in the film The Empire Strikes Back. The theme is based on the well-known funeral march from Chopin's Piano Sonata No. 2 in B-flat minor and on "Mars, the Bringer of War" by Gustav Holst. One of the best known symphonic movie themes, it is a classic example of a leitmotiv, a recurrent theme associated with characters or events in a drama. "The Imperial March" is the theme music that represents the authoritarian Galactic Empire. As Anakin Skywalker is stripped of all individuality, he, in essence, becomes one with the Empire as Darth Vader; hence the reason the march is often associated with him as well. "The Imperial March" represents all that is the Empire; therefore, it is nearly equivalent to a galactic anthem. To the Galactic Empire, "The Imperial March" represents strength, order, and control. However, to the Rebel Alliance, it is symbolic of tyranny, oppression, and hate. Although played by an orchestra on the movie soundtrack, it is often played by brass bands; military bands are particularly effective in delivering the theme's martial stance. "The Imperial March" was also played by No Doubt at some of their live concerts. For the game Star Wars: Force Commander, the menu music was a "March" remix with a rock/metal flavor. Use ‡[] In the movies[] "The Imperial March" is first heard in The Empire Strikes Back at the beginning of the film when probe droids are sent from an Imperial Star Destroyer down to Hoth. This version is played by a piccolo and is barely audible. The most familiar rendition of the theme first plays when Darth Vader is reintroduced as Death Squadron assembles. It is played throughout the film nearly every time the Death Squadron or Darth Vader appears, most notably during the track "The Battle of Hoth" as the Executor is seen approaching Hoth and as Vader enters Echo Base after the battle. It is then used in the beginning of "The Asteroid Field" as the Millennium Falcon tries to evade the attacking Star Destroyers and, in a more powerful form, during "Han Solo and the Princess" as the Death Squadron blasts its way through the asteroid field and as the Executor emerges from the asteroids. Later the tune is shortly heard during the end of "The Training of a Jedi Knight," as the bounty hunters assemble on the Executor, "Yoda and the Force" when Captain Needa departs the Avenger to apologize to Darth Vader, and "Imperial Starfleet Deployed" as the Falcon is seen hanging on the back of the Avenger's command tower. Then, in a more dramatic form, it was played during the duel between Vader and Luke, known as "The Clash of Lightsabers," when Vader uses the Force to throw objects at Luke. It also appears in "Rescue from Cloud City/Hyperspace" when Darth Vader reveals to Luke that he is his father. Like The Empire Strikes Back, "The Imperial March" is played throughout Return of the Jedi nearly every time Darth Vader appears. It is used in a powerful form when Emperor Palpatine is seen arriving on the DS-2 Death Star II Mobile Battle Station. As Luke unmasks Vader at the end of Jedi, the theme is carried somberly by high-range strings; as Vader dies, the tune is heard one last time as a dirge played by the harp. "The Imperial March" theme appears scarcely in the prequel trilogy, but is often used to hint at Anakin Skywalker's future as Darth Vader. Its usage increases through the trilogy. A few notes of "The Imperial March" are played in Star Wars: Episode I The Phantom Menace in a scene where Obi-Wan Kenobi and Yoda discuss the future of Anakin Skywalker on Naboo. The main few notes of "The Imperial March" are heard in "The Droid Battle." It is also heard at the sinister end to "Anakin's Theme," played during the end credits, along with Darth Vader's breathing, indicating that the prequel trilogy will show how Anakin became Darth Vader. In the next film, Star Wars: Episode II Attack of the Clones, "The Imperial March" is played subtly and so faintly that it's barely audible when Yoda senses Anakin's slaughter of the Tusken Raiders. The first notes of the march are heard again, slightly louder this time, after Anakin confesses the deed to Padmé. At the end of the movie, a new full version accompanies the deployment of the Grand Army of the Republic, hinting at the eventual link between clone troopers and stormtroopers, and as Supreme Chancellor Palpatine is shown observing the deployment of the Army from a balcony, foreshadowing his becoming the Emperor. For the scene of the new army, "The Imperial March" was used as temp music in pre-production from the beginning.[2] In Star Wars: Episode III Revenge of the Sith, "The Imperial March" is first played when Anakin rebukes the Jedi Council for denying him the rank of Jedi Master, although being appointed to the Council. The track can also be heard when Anakin tells Mace Windu about Palpatine's true identity, Darth Sidious. It is later played when Anakin is dubbed as the Sith Darth Vader, shortly after the death of Mace Windu. "The Imperial March" is quoted when clone troopers find dead Wookiees on Kashyyyk and when Padmé confronts Anakin on Mustafar. A few notes of the "March" are played when Vader arrives on Mustafar to kill the Separatists. The piece is played more clearly during the "Battle of the Heroes" scene between Obi-Wan and Darth Vader at the movie's climax and in the simultaneous battle between Yoda and Darth Sidious. It is also played when Darth Vader receives his mask and when he looks up at the first Death Star. In Star Wars: The Clone Wars (film), "The Imperial March" is heard when Anakin talks with Jabba the Hutt about what he's done with Ahsoka Tano and Jabba accuses for Anakin coming to his palace to take his life. In Star Wars: Episode VII The Force Awakens, "The Imperial March" is briefly reprised when Kylo Ren confides his inner conflict to the burnt helmet of Darth Vader aboard the Resurgent-class Star Destroyer Finalizer. In Rogue One: A Star Wars Story, "The Imperial March" makes a prominent appearance during Vader's meeting with Director Krennic on Mustafar. A fragment of it is played at the end of the movie as well, as Vader watches the Tantive IV escaping from the docking bay of the Profundity. In Star Wars: Episode VIII The Last Jedi, a brief reprise of the theme is heard as Supreme Leader Snoke discusses with Ren his desire to be like Vader and how he is falling short of that goal. In Solo: A Star Wars Story, the theme appears prominently as the film transitions from Han Solo's escape from Corellia to his time as an Imperial infantryman on Mimban. It is also heard as the soundtrack of the advert playing at the shuttle station that encourages Han to join the Imperial forces. This is the first use ever of the Imperial March as diegetic music in a Star Wars movie. In Star Wars: Episode IX The Rise of Skywalker the theme is present many times: during the appearance of Darth Vader's helmet, the rise of Sith Star Destroyers, the destruction of Kijimi, and in the Death Star's wreckage, it was played as a version by high-range strings from Vader's death scene in Return of the Jedi. In the Expanded Universe[] The soundtrack to Shadows of the Empire by Joel McNeely samples a small part of "The Imperial March" in the "Night Skies" theme. Here, it is played as a contemplative piece, designed to show Darth Vader mulling over information about the Falleen Prince Xizor and feeling that his son is close by in Imperial Center. In Star Wars: Rogue Squadron a more synthetic and somewhat eerie version of "The Imperial March" is played during the battle with Kohl Seerdon. Several bits were more ominous during the World Devastators' rampage over Mon Calamari. "The Imperial March" is played often during the Star Wars: Empire at War game series, usually when playing as the Galactic Empire. A part of the theme is played in Star Wars: Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast when the Doomgiver leaves the Cairn Installation and at the dark side ending of Star Wars: Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy when Jaden Korr takes over the Star Destroyer orbiting Korriban with his Z-95. The theme can be heard in the musical piece John Williams created for Star Tours, by the same name. In Angry Birds Star Wars, it's played on the last level of every episode (boss battles), excepting Tatooine, Path of the Jedi, Boba Fett's Missions and Bonus. In LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars, the muzak version used in the Family Guy episode "Blue Harvest" is used on the elevators in the Venator-class Star Destroyer, the game's main hub. On television[] "The Imperial March" is featured in a number of episodes of the animated series Star Wars: The Clone Wars: In "Brain Invaders," when Anakin Skywalker interrogates Poggle the Lesser, "The Imperial March" can be plainly heard. In "Voyage of Temptation" when Anakin Skywalker kills Tal Merrik the "Imperial March" can be briefly heard. In "Overlords," when the Eta-class shuttle leaves Mortis, "The Imperial March" can be heard. In "Ghosts of Mortis," "The Imperial March" can clearly be heard as the Son tries to seduce Anakin Skywalker to the dark side. In "Citadel Rescue," a small snippet of "The Imperial March" is heard when Anakin and Captain Wilhuff Tarkin shake hands before parting ways. In "Deception," "The Imperial March" is heard when Anakin is at Obi-Wan's funeral. In "The Lawless," a small snippet of "The Imperial March" is heard when Darth Sidious enters the Mandalorian throne room to confront Maul and Savage Opress. In "The Wrong Jedi," the "Clash of the Lightsabers" variant of "The Imperial March" is briefly heard as Anakin confronts the fallen Jedi Padawan, Barriss Offee, who is using Asajj Ventress's red lightsabers, whom she had stolen from. In the premiere episode of Star Wars: The Bad Batch, "Aftermath," "The Imperial March" is heard right after Palpatine declared himself Emperor. It is also used in the opening of the Star Wars Rebels episode "Call to Action" as Grand Moff Tarkin visits Lothal, and appears in several other episodes as well. It is featured briefly but prominently at the end of "Fire Across the Galaxy" when Darth Vader appears. Within the franchise's new canon continuity, the tune is known in-universe as "Glory of the Empire." In-universe[] In the Sith Inquisitor storyline of Star Wars: The Old Republic, while pursuing Ashara Zavros's affair quest, Ashara is heard humming the Imperial March. It reveals that the theme had been known in the Star Wars universe for millennia before the rise of the Galactic Empire; another possibility, however, is that Ashara improvised this relatively simple tune as she went along, and a similar one was developed later with no direct connection to the one she "composed." In A. C. Crispin's book The Paradise Snare, it's slyly hinted that "The Imperial March" is "the martial theme of the Imperial Navy." The link is made more explicit in the audio book edition, when the cue is actually used. In "Rising Malevolence," a rocket battle droid is humming some kind of "Imperial March" when his Droch-class boarding ship approaches the escape pod of Plo Koon. In Star Wars: Battlefront II, Imperials occasionally whistle "The Imperial March." Leonis Murthé hums "Dum Dum Dum, Dum-te-Dum, Dum-te-Dum" as he uses his lightsaber on a "patient" in Boba Fett: Agent of Doom. In Star Wars: Republic Commando, a piano remix of the march can be heard as a cheery elevator tune in an elevator in the level "Attack of the Clones." In Star Wars Rebels episode "Empire Day," a more upbeat and heroic version of the march, titled "Glory of the Empire," is played over loudspeakers during the eponymous holiday's parade. In Solo: A Star Wars Story, a similar upbeat version of the march plays under an Imperial recruitment video playing at the Coronet Spaceport on Corellia. In Reflections, a similar version of the march plays in an elevator. In popular culture[] A muzak version of "The Imperial March" is used as elevator music on board the Death Star in the Family Guy episode Blue Harvest, which is a parody of A New Hope and derives most of its plot from the film. In the Family Guy episode, "Brian Sings and Swings", "The Imperial March" is heard when Chris head part is being put on in the bathroom in the style of how Darth Vader has helmet on in The Empire Strikes Back. The New York Yankees plays the theme when presenting players from the opposing team when at Yankee Stadium. In The Simpsons, "The Imperial March" is used once in each the three episodes when Mr. Burns appears in "Marge gets a Job", "A Star is Burns" and "Gump Roast". In an episode of The Big Bang Theory, Raj plays "The Imperial March" while entering a comic-book store to show that he is "awesome and to be feared." The Crossbone Vanguard theme from Gundam F91 is based on "The Imperial March," mostly because the creator of the anime movie Tomino really liked Star Wars. The symphonic metal band Epica made a cover of "The Imperial March" on their 2009 live album The Classical Conspiracy. Before being replaced with a new theme around mid-2010, "The Imperial March" was the opening theme song (played at the "top of the hour") for The Alex Jones Show. While the theme played, an announcer said: "Big Brother, mainstream media, government cover-ups. You want answers? Well so does he. He's Alex Jones...on the GCN Radio Network. And now, live from Austin, Texas...Alex Jones." Parts of this theme are still played in the aforementioned The Alex Jones Show at the "top of the hour" and after returning from commercial breaks. The Montreal Canadians Hockey team play "The Imperial March" whenever they have a power play at games. Certain NPCs in The Witcher PC CRPG can be heard whistling the theme. In 2012, Volkswagen teased a Super Bowl commercial where a chorus of dogs barked the march, each dressed up as different characters in the films. Ryan Bader has used a remixed version of the theme as his entrance music at UFC 144. In 2007, the Band of the Welsh Guards notoriously played the Imperial March to greet Saudi Arabian King Abdullah when he visited the UK on a controversial state visit. An episode of The Big Bang Theory titled "The Cooper/Kripke Inversion" includes the theme as Sheldon's "I'm unhappy and about to destroy the planet" music. Similarly, Raj Koothrappali briefly played the Imperial March theme when entering the comic book store in the beginning of the episode "The Excelsior Acquisition". The first TV trailer for the 2013 Japanese superhero crossover movie Kamen Rider × Super Sentai × Space Sheriff: Super Hero Taisen Z opened with a brief piece of music highly reminiscent of "The Imperial March" to introduce another space empire, Space Shocker. In Robot Chicken: Star Wars, during the segment where Luke Skywalker and Palpatine have a Dozens battle, the fight had in the background music a Hip-Hop version of "The Imperial March." In an episode of Chuck titled "Chuck Versus the Last Details", Morgan Grimes is tasked with going undercover at an auction of assassins and crime bosses bidding on a lethal weapon. He and Chuck Bartowski hum the Imperial March to get the former into the mindset of playing a bad guy, and the official instrumental kicks in as Morgan enters the auction room. In the 2018 animated film Ralph Breaks the Internet, "The Imperial March" is used when Vanellope von Schweetz runs away from First Order stormtroopers on OhMyDisney.com website. Appearances[] Canon appearances[] Legends appearances[] Non-canon appearances[] Sources[] Notes and references[] External links[] The Imperial March on Wikipedia The Imperial March, or "Darth Vader's Theme", is one of the most pervasive and well-liked themes in John Williams' Star Wars scores. Even so, the truth is that it was not until the second film, The Empire Strikes Back, that the theme made its first appearance. The first film did have a theme for the Empire informally known as the "Imperial Motif" (as heard in this clip at 0:51: But clearly Williams and those in charge of Empire felt that a more characteristic theme would be more appropriate in a film that revolves around the Empire gaining the upper hand against Luke Skywalker and the Rebels. And as Lukas Kendall points out in his notes to the trilogy's soundtracks, the Imperial Motif "is the only major theme from that score [the original Star Wars] not to return in Empire." Thus, it seems that the Imperial March was a replacement for the earlier theme. It is easy to see why Williams stuck with the Imperial March once he hit upon it—it is the perfect musical symbol for Darth Vader and the "evil" of the Empire in general. But even the music on its own seems to have this "evil" and imperial quality. How exactly is this so? One of the things that makes Williams such a master of film scoring is his ability to create meaning with many different features of the music, whether it's melody, harmony, rhythm, orchestration, or anything else. It's as if all the musical features are pointing in the same direction, so to speak, towards the character, place, or thing it represents. So how is this true of the Imperial March? Below I suggest some of the ways in my film music analysis. Here is the complete concert version of the march: The Opening Riff The march begins not with the tune itself, but with the accompaniment riff that is its backbone. Not only is this riff some of Williams' most ear-catching music, it also packs a lot of the cue's character into a very short span of time. In large part, this is due to Williams' talent for aligning so many of the music's features. Rhythm Probably the most obvious feature of the music is its rhythm. The march is set in a four-beat time, but the riff is written in such a way that it accelerates through the four beats of the bar: On the first beat, we get just one note. Then on the second beat, we get a note plus a fast triplet rhythm—things are starting to move faster. Then on the third beat, we again get the note plus triplet, but it flows without stopping into beat four, which now starts with the triplet before coming to a halt. This creates even more rhythmic motion, as though the music just can't stop until it reaches the end of the bar, then the whole thing starts over again. Combined with the rhythm's militaristic sound through the triplets and the emphasis on strong beats, the overall effect is one of forward drive, suggesting a powerful and aggressive force that doesn't let up until it gets what it wants. Orchestration How do we know that this is an evil force specifically? A number of reasons. All of the pitched instruments playing here—the strings, horns, and timpani—are at or near the very bottom of their range. The result is a very dark color to the sound. Harmony There's also the harmony Williams uses. With the first three beats, it's not clear whether the march is in a key at all because we only hear a single repeated note, G. On the fourth beat, however, we hear a chord of Eb-F#-Bb (actually heard as Eb-Gb-Bb), all of which are notes in G minor, so the color of the sound is made even darker by confirming a minor key for the march. Not only that, but the chord itself is a minor version of a chord that would normally be a major chord written as Eb-G-Bb. Because Williams' use of the chord is not the normal one but its darker minor version, it is an ideal match for the evil Empire and the Darkside of the Force. Dissonance The riff is stated four times before the melody comes in. The first two times, we hear the abnormal minor chord described above. But the third and fourth times, Williams adds the note A to the chord, which scrapes against the Bb already in the chord to produce a gritty and biting dissonance. This dissonance evokes the harshness and terror of Vader's and the Empire's ways. Thus, even before we hear a note of melody, much of the character of the march has already been established by the meaningful riff that is its accompaniment. The Main Melody Rhythm The famous melody that begins in the fifth bar further enhances the military feel of the march by emphasizing the strong beats and using dotted rhythms. But also notice that a moderately long note is sounded on the first seven beats in a row: This gives the march a sure-footed character that wonderfully depicts Vader's unwavering confidence. And since this rhythm is the basic motive for most of the march, the confident tone is carried through the whole piece. Orchestration The dark orchestral colour of the opening riff is also continued into the main melody, which is sounded by trumpets and trombones in a mid to low register. Recall that the climactic high note in the first few bars of the Star Wars main title music, by contrast, uses the trumpet at the very top of its range to suggest heroism (see Part 2 of this series). The lower range employed here is in keeping with the more menacing feel of the opening riff. And the use of brass instruments gives the sense of considerable military might. Harmony The harmony of the first twenty bars of the march (the portion we hear in the film) also contributes to the dark color of the music. To start with, just about every chord we hear is a minor chord. The brighter, happier sound of major chords are completely banished from the music. Also, like the opening riff of the march, the harmony Williams uses for the main melody are not your average chord progressions. This is especially clear in the second half of the melody, where the chords are i–#iv–#v–i in G minor. In tonal music, I–IV–V–I is a progression that firmly establishes the key of the music. But in the Imperial March, that progression is subjected to a strange distortion where IV and V are raised up by a semitone. And actually, the #v chord has exactly the same notes as the minor chord we heard in the riff (Eb-F#-Bb is here written as D#-F#-A#). So from this perspective, the chord in the riff is also this strange, distorted #v chord. Notice that both of the distorted chords, #iv and #v, are a very small distance (a semitone up) from being their regular versions: Had Williams used the regular versions of these chords instead, the march would have had a far more normal (and unremarkable) sound. The infusion of chords that almost sound like normal ones, and minor chords at that, gives the impression of a darkly abnormal, evil worldview. Just for fun, I've transposed these distorted chords down a semitone in the recording so you can hear what the march would sound like with the more normal chords. It becomes easier to hear how Williams has distorted the harmonies when this is compared with the original. Here's the "normalized" version: Imperial March – recomposed Now compare that with the original version: Clearly, Williams' original is much, much better. Melodic Shape The shape of the melody is also worth noting. Essentially, the melody breaks down into five short ideas as shown below (the last three ideas are repeated): In the first idea, when the melody finally moves on its fourth beat, it leaps in the downward direction, suggesting a negative influence. And although the melody then rises to a higher note, it immediately leaps down again with two quick notes. These gestures are then repeated, emphasizing the negativity. In the second idea, the melody rises higher than its original starting point, which allows it to fall from a greater height and give it more impact, a bit like dropping a heavy object from higher up. In the third idea, we get an even higher note (the highest note in the melody) that takes much longer to fall, gradually making its way down over the third and fourth ideas. But it doesn't "hit the ground" so to speak, as the fifth idea takes the melody back up to repeat the final three ideas. And this time, it reaches the G it started on, giving the theme a strong sense of finality. Here's a summary of the melody's descending motion: Putting It All Together When we consider all these musical features together, which is after all how we hear the march, we get a pretty clear picture of why the theme is such a fitting musical representation of Darth Vader and the Empire: Rhythmically, the march projects a strong, confident, and forward-driving tone Orchestrally, it emphasizes the powerful brass instruments and the menacing sound of the instruments' low registers Harmonically, it focuses on the dark sound of minor chords and presents distorted versions of what would otherwise be normal progressions Contrapuntally, it makes use of dissonance to give a fearful sound Melodically, the theme is constantly moving in the downward direction, suggesting the heavy hand of the Empire literally bearing down on the Rebels (and us!) Now consider how this musical blend works in conjunction with the film. When the Imperial March is introduced in its full form in The Empire Strikes Back, we see a huge Imperial Star Destroyer passing overhead, which suggests the power of the Empire "bearing down" on us. Also notice how the angular shape of these ships (which we see in the very next shot) are much like the blade of a knife coming at us and therefore have quite a threatening feel. Smaller Tie Fighters then zip by the screen, adding to the threatening atmosphere with hissing and roaring noises. Finally, as Vader observes his fleet, we do not see his face but only the back of his helmet while we hear his ominous breathing. Here is the scene from the film: Since the musical elements are suggestive of something evil and powerful to start with, it forms such a strong bond with the evil and powerful aspects in the scene that music and film become welded together. Without Williams' remarkable alignment of so many of the musical features, it is almost certain that the Imperial March would not be as well known or well liked as it still is today. Coming soon… John Williams Themes, Part 4: The Raiders March.