

"Thematic Transformations in Star Wars: Techniques, Critiques, and Misconceptions"
Frank Lehman
Tufts University

With seven thematically interlinked films and counting, the Star Wars saga stands as the widest leitmotivically-driven canvas in the history of cinema, yet John Williams's usage of recurring motivic material clearly differs in some fundamental ways from precedents in Nineteenth Century music drama. This presentation takes as its starting point the observation that Williams's leitmotivic process in Star Wars is a profoundly different animal than Wagner's in some important (and sometimes infrequently discussed) respects, particularly in terms of intermittency and the function of non-leitmotivic material. However, these discrepancies should not stymie investigation of the more subtle aspects of Williams's thematic design.

I will consider a variety of topics in leitmotivic interpretation as it pertains to the Star Wars series, focusing on devices that compare with Wagner in terms of sophistication—but also as tendencies that pose significant frustration to analysts expecting coherence and consistency in thematic transformation. Special attention is given to differences in strategy across the eight films, particularly between original, prequel, and sequel trilogies. Throughout, the hermeneutic impulses behind leitmotivic analysis are examined and critiqued, particularly with respect to Rey's theme in Episode VII. I conclude with closer case-studies of a variety of instances of "concealed" repetition, including Yoda's death scene, transformations of the "Rebel Fanfare" in *The Force Awakens* and mutations of the "March of the Resistance" in *The Last Jedi*.