

47. James Horner

'Take her to sea Mr Murdoch' from Titanic

(For Unit 6: Further Musical Understanding)

Background information and Performance Circumstances

- James Horner (born 1953) is one of America's foremost Film composers.
- His score for Titanic won two academy awards (for best dramatic score and best song), and he has won many other awards for his work.
- Horner has had a long working relationship with the director James Cameron, who made both Titanic and Avatar, to date two of the highest-grossing films in the history of cinema.
- Other scores include A Beautiful Mind, Cocoon and Aliens.
- Horner was 'classically' trained initially in California and at then at the Royal College of Music, London.
- Horner included Celtic elements in this score, perhaps to reflect the Irish passengers in steerage class, from whom the Leonardo di Caprio character is drawn.

Performing forces and their handling

- Titanic uses a large symphony orchestra, augmented by a real choir and by synthetic vocal sounds.
 - Double woodwind, (including the darker sounding A clarinet), plus double bassoon.
 - 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones and tuba, i.e. a conventional symphonic brass section.
 - Timpani, suspended cymbal, bass drum, tubular bells, bell tree, side drum, glockenspiel, sleigh bells.
 - 2 harps, piano and synthesiser (voice sound).
 - SATB choir.
 - Strings.
- Traditional symphonic/Romantic treatment of the orchestra with much doubling of parts.
- Few uses of solo timbres
- Middle and lower ranges of instruments are favoured, with little above the staff for either Flute or Violins

1-3	Imitative opening.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doubling of lines across strings/wind/SATB in each part. • Synth voices combined with 2nd Violin. Harps play enharmonic Bb/A#s and G#/Abs in order to produce repeated semiquavers.
4-7	Eb major repeated idea in 3/4	

8-10	Change to 4/4 and increase in forward movement by use of semiquaver arpeggio figures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Violin semiquaver figures, with overlapping Harp broken chords. • Rapid crescendo -diminuendo brass chords. • Off-beat viola pedal doubles lower note of Violin broken chords. • Bass drum roll leads into next section.
11-14	Pedal on D continues Shots of the engine room and engines starting to move.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Widely doubled D pedal across basses/cellos /bassoon/contrabassoon/Piano/Violin 2. • Diagetic connection to the action in the use of a Tubular bell D, which is associated with the ringing of the ship's bell on the screen. • Horns/Violas play rising and falling quaver figure in thirds. Violas play tremolando. • A rapid suspended cymbal roll crescendo leads into next section.
15-18	Pedal on B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pedals continue in basses. • Quaver figure stays in Horns, but string tremolandi figure moves into Violin 2. • Clarinets and muted Violin 1 add broken chord figure. • Section transition marked by timpani.
19-24	Pedals shift every two bars from A flat to E then C. Tension, volume and speed increases as the engines on the screen get up to speed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quaver broken chord figure in viola, broken chord figure then conjunct line in violin I and clarinets. • Rising figure in thirds at bars 21-22 in violin II, viola, horn and trombone. • Upward continuation of this idea at bars 23-24 (Violins, horns, trumpets, oboe, clarinet and flute).
25-29	Music arrives at first climax point. Titanic under full steam.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full Brass chords at bars 28-29. • Insistent repeated note rhythms in upper strings, oboe and clarinet. • Synth organ adds weight at bar 28. • Horns and Viola in unison at bar 28 with upward figure from the opening. • Bell tree colours chord at same point. • Violin semiquavers provide link to next section in bar 29.
30-36	Gentler, more lightly-scored writing. Irish male characters run to the front of the ship.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combination of two lines and pedal. • Folk tune 'The leaving of Liverpool' in Flute/wordless Sopranos. • Countermelody (sometimes in thirds/sixths, sometimes in contrary motion) in Alto/Clarinet/tremolando Violin I. • Tonic pedal in Viola, supported by Choir tenors and Horn. • Side drum demi-semiquavers introduce next section.

37-48	Folk-like dance, with apparent doubling of speed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homorhythmic writing in the string section doubled by synthesised voices. • Real bass voices add punctuating 'poms', with interjections on side drum and bass drum.
49-50	Linking section	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quavers in Violins I and II. • Choir Sopranos/Tpt/Glock begin reprise of 'The leaving of Liverpool' theme.
51-56	Rescored version of 30-36	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two lines retained – this time top line in Choir Soprano/Glock/Trumpet; countermelody in Clt/Vln 2 tremolando.
57-63	Development of 'The leaving of Liverpool' in D major	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oboe and Violin have melody at first. • Triplet countermelody in Viola and Horn. • Tonic pedal Bass, Cello, Tuba and Bassoon. • 'Spiky' off-beat elements introduced in woodwind, glockenspiel, sleigh bells and piano from bar 61.
64-67	Link	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rhythmically displaced repeated figure in two parts over D tonic pedal in harp.
68-75	Rescored and modified version of passage from bar 37 in 6/4 metre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strings and Synth choir texture returns, punctuated by side drum and bass drum. • String tremolandi. • Harp and piano arpeggios colour the end of the first phrase. • Tonic pedal in double bass and cello.
76-79	Link material from 64 developed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Spiky' woodwind and upper string figures leading to • Crescendo on chord in trombone, strings and double bassoon. • Tubular bell Cs. • Harp glissando up C Lydian scale, bell tree and suspended cymbal roll aid transition back to
80-83	First phrase of Folk-dance idea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Return to Strings and Synth choir texture with percussion.
84-85	Link material returns briefly, slowing down towards the change of key	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rising figure in 3rds in violins, violas, horns and trombones. • Suspended cymbal roll leads in to next section.
86-105	Further development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broad melodic line in violin I, supported by string section. • Countermelody introduced in viola and horn. • 'Dark' supporting lower brass chords. • Simple chordal texture broken by cello broken chords 94-97.
106-110	Short coda, restating the opening rising motive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rising motive firstly in horn, then in unison clarinet with flute and glockenspiel. • Sustained string tonic pedal (B) over three octaves. • Harps exchange arpeggios

Texture

- A wide, rapidly changing variety of textures are used in this extract.
- Imitative opening using the rising motive that permeates the extract.
- A variety of pedal textures:
 - Articulated pedals in violin and viola, bars 8-10.
 - Pedals featuring octave leaps, bars 11-30.
 - Sustained bass pedals, bars 57-60.
 - Tonic pedal B over three octaves in strings, bars 106-110.
- Ostinato textures in violas and horns, bars 12-14, and violin II and horns, bars 15-18.
- Straightforward two-part melody/countermelody supported by pedals bars 30-36, and 52-60.
- Homorhythmic textures, bars 37-48.
- Homophonic string writing, bars 98-105.
- Heterophonic texture, bars 21-24, with string semiquaver rhythm simplified to crotchets in woodwind and brass.

Structure

- The music up to bar 30 follows the action on screen closely, as the ship's engines grind into life. The build up of excitement here is matched in the music by rapid changes of key, increases in tempo and rising ideas that culminate at bar 25.
- From bar 30 the ship is under 'full steam' in the open sea. The music here alternates between two ideas – one lyrical, and the other more dance-like. The music is less tied to the action here, and more traditional musical shapes appear.
- Two and four bar phrases are common, and the phrase ends are usually quite clear.
- The frequent changes of key and textures creates quite an episodic structure on the surface, but the repetition of ideas, and the careful development of melodic material, creates unity.
- The extract opens and closes with sections based on the rising 'Lydian' motive.

Tonality

- Horner's music is traditionally tonal/diatonic for the most part, as opposed to the style adopted in e.g. Goldsmith's score for Planet of the Apes.
- The tonal relationships here are not traditional, particularly in the opening sections, where tertiary relationships of keys are more important than those a fifth apart.
- Opening in E flat major, with 'Lydian' raised fourth.
- Modulations, largely without cadences, occur at bars 8, 15, 19, 21, 23 describing a journey (mostly by thirds) as follows: D-B-A flat (G#)-E-C-A (all major).
- Tension 'relaxes' at bar 28 as the music 'sinks' into G major.
- The 'Leaving of Liverpool' theme appears in G major in bars 30-36.

- 'Dance' theme, also in G major at bars 37-50.
- 'Leaving of Liverpool' in G in bars 52-56, followed by an abrupt move to D at bar 57.
- 'Dance' idea at bar 68 in D major.
- Music slides into B major (another tertiary relationship) at bar 86.
- Final chord holds open fifth B-F# - but plenty of D#s in preceding bars anchor music clearly to the major.

Harmony

- The harmony is tonal and diatonic, but frequently inflected by the use of the raised 'Lydian' fourth, as in the opening bars.
- Major and minor chords, mostly in root position and first inversion, are used throughout.
- At times the treatment of the harmony is non-functional, perhaps influenced by the 'pan-diatonic' style of American composers such as Aaron Copland.
- Bass pedals are used frequently.
- Traditional perfect cadences are quite rare.
- The music 'slips' from one key to another, without the use of cadences, often falling or rising by a third.
- The E flat major chords of the opening are 'inflected' by a raised 4th, suggesting the Lydian mode.
- The changes of tonality which speed up towards bar 25 are so rapid as to be heard as a chord progression, moving by thirds: B-A flat (G#)-E-C.
- At bar 25, A major is juxtaposed with E flat major (2nd inversion), as far apart on the tonal axis as they can be.
- The most traditional, diatonic harmony is heard in the first dance section (bars 37-50) where the harmonic rhythm speeds up to three chords a bar at times. Bars 40 and 48 come to rest on a dominant chord, forming a clear Imperfect cadence.
- Bars 41-43 describe a circle of 5ths - Bm-Em-Am-D-G.
- The music drops to a modal F major chord (flattened leading note chord) in bar 43, before returning to G major, via D (bars 44-45).
- Modal cadences occur towards the end of the extract, e.g. flat VII - II - I in B major at bars 91-92. The final cadence is preceded by a flat VII chord, but goes on to conventional V-I cadence (bars 104-106).

Melody

- There are three related but distinct melodic ideas used in this extract:
 - The opening rising idea, with its 'Lydian' raised 4th spanning a perfect fifth.
 - Material derived from the traditional Irish ballad 'The Leaving of Liverpool'.
 - A dance melody which appears in both 5/4 and 6/4 metres.
- The opening rising fourth idea is developed by imitation and inversion during the first 3 bars.

- At bar 12 this idea reappears as an ostinato figure, in 3rds, in divided Violas, followed immediately by its inversion.
- This idea can also be traced in the first three notes of the 'Leaving of Liverpool' idea and in the opening stepwise movement of the dance theme, although this melody starts of the third of the scale rather than the tonic.
- The rising fourth idea is used, in augmentation, to close the extract.
- The melody first heard at 30 is based on the first phrase of 'The Leaving of Liverpool'. Horner retains the overall contours of the original melody at the start of both phrases, but adds his own concluding bars in each case. Thus, while the opening outline of the tonic chord and the octave leap are in the original version, the oscillating fifths that follow are not. This kind of motivic working is common in film scores from classically trained composers.
- The simple stepwise contours of the dance style melody first heard at bar 37 work up and down, using sequence to maintain interest in music where the rhythms are deliberately repetitive. Here, the first phrases is roughly inverted in the second bar, and it is this inversion that forms the basis of the downward sequence from bar 41-43.
- At bar 57 this melody, now in D major, is decorated by a viola and horn line in triplets using upper auxiliary notes.
- A linking motive, first heard 62, spans a downwards fourth , divided as a semitone and major third.
- The material from bar 30 is further developed, although the rhythm remains very similar, in B major from bar 86 -104.

Rhythm and metre

- Strong pulse throughout, but the metre varies between 3 and 4 beat to a bar to avoid predictability. The octave crotchets play a vital rhythmic role in the opening section.
- The tempo gradually increases from the opening, to reflect the action of the ship's engines.
- The doubling of tempo at bar 37 does not have as much effect as expected, as the note values of the material that follows are also doubled, meaning that the perceived tempo remains virtually the same.
- The 5/4 metre at bar 37 gives a folk like feel, with the additive 3+2 pattern.
- This is further complicated by the syncopated rhythm across the first three beats of each bar.
- The link motive at bar 63 is rhythmically displaced as it is repeated, so as to start both on the first beat of the bar and the 6th quaver.
- The return of the 'dance' idea at bar 68 is extended by one beat to fill a 6/4 bar. This is done by repeating the first chord for a third time, for a crotchet, producing a more 'settled' symmetrical bar structure.
- The final version of 'The Leaving of Liverpool' is notated in double the lengths of the original, but moving more slowly (60 minims as opposed to 74 crotchets).
- The opening idea is stated twice, in augmentation, in the closing bars of the extract, but now at 60 minims a minute instead of 70 crotchets.