



# Pearson

## **Danny Elfman: Batman Returns Birth of a Penguin Part 1, Birth of a Penguin Part 2, Batman vs the Circus, The Rise and Fall from Grace (For component 3: Appraising)**

### **Background information and performance circumstances**

#### **The composer**

Danny Elfman (b. 1953) is a self-taught composer and is unusual because of his parallel career as a rock musician with the band Oingo Boingo. He grew up in Los Angeles and is the youngest son of two teachers. While at school, Elfman wanted to be a filmmaker. 'I always thought that some way or other I'd end up in film, but somehow I ended up in music.'

Tim Burton and Elfman had a close working relationship and collaborated on a number of films including *Beetlejuice* (1988), *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993) and *Planet of the Apes* (2001). Of all the films they have made together, *Batman* remained Elfman's biggest grossing film until *Spider-man* (2002). More importantly, *Batman* brought Elfman to public attention and established him as a creditable film composer.

Elfman often scores much of his music around leitmotifs then develops them through the use of variations. The use of thematic development illustrates Elfman's influences from composers such as Bernard Herrman (*Psycho*, 1960) from the Golden Age of films. Having established the main materials of the score, Elfman works through the film chronologically, using the materials he has developed in a manner which is extremely unmethodical.

*Batman Returns* (1992) is the sequel to *Batman* (1989), directed by Tim Burton with Michael Keaton reprising the role of Bruce Wayne/Batman. It also introduces the characters of the Penguin (Danny DeVito), who tries to take over Gotham City, as well as Catwoman (Michelle Pfeiffer). It was a much darker adaptation of the cartoon character, certainly when compared with the original film and the TV show of the 1960s. The darkness of Batman's past was seized upon by Burton, who created a character

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with almost a dual personality – one that had the potential to be both villain and hero. *Batman Returns* is a classic example of that duality.

Each of the three main characters – Batman, Catwoman and Penguin – has their own theme. The Catwoman and Penguin themes are very similar and it could be argued that they are a variation of each other. However, it is in the orchestration/arrangement of the theme that the differences occur. For Catwoman, Elfman uses a ‘1960s slinky, bending style of strings’, as well as high string glissandi and dissonant clusters. The Penguin theme is given a more ‘theatrical’ orchestration using a choir as well as pipe organ and full orchestra. For Batman, as in the original film, brass is used to identify the theme.

## Performing forces and their handling

Elfman’s approach to film scoring has a strong resemblance to classic film scoring and to that of John Williams. The main themes are written in a large orchestral score, including pipe organ, harp, celeste, accordion, vibraphone, temple blocks, tubular bells, sleigh bells, xylophone, marimba, piano, fairground steam organ, synth choir and choir.

Elfman gives very detailed performance directions with regards to dynamics, articulation and phrasing. The orchestral writing here includes many playing techniques (these are outlined in detail, with the symbols used on the score, at the beginning of the piece):

- Arco
- Pizzicato
- Use of *tremolando* bowing
- *Glissandi* (smooth slides) between notes
- Con Sord
- Oboe extreme vibrato
- Horns stopped
- Trumpet extreme lip trill
- Cymbal and timpani roll
- Flutter tonging
- Snare drum with snares off
- Percussion rolls.

## Structure

All pieces of music are through composed.

### Birth of a Penguin, Part I

Bars	Tempo	Comments
1–2	♩ = 60	Very start of the film with the Warner Brothers’ logo. The music plays Batman motif, which identifies the film. Key of F minor. Low, thick texture with pipe organ subdominant pedal with horns playing motif. Leads into a plagal cadence.

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Bars	Tempo	Comments
3–6	♩ = 72	<p>The scene changes to the Cobblepot home, in winter with snow on the ground.</p> <p>The ‘Penguin’ motif is heard for the first time in the choir and violins. Music remains in F minor with the use of a dominant seventh chord in bar 4.</p> <p>Bars 5 and 6 are a repeat of 3–4 played <i>fortissimo</i> with the addition of a string counter figure and richer texture. A tone cluster in bar 6 (D flat, E, F and G) muddies the water.</p>
7–13	♩ = 60	<p>We see the father looking out the window as his wife is giving birth. The doctor leaves the room in horror (bars 11/12) as the husband sees the child for the first time. The music changes key to A minor (bar 7) (tertiary relationship). Texture thins to just strings. From bar 11 there is a shift to G minor and the penguin motif appears in the strings with celesta ornamentation. There is a change to 3/8 in bar 13 for one bar and as the father screams there is a false relation on the second quaver.</p>
14–26	♩ = 108	<p>We see the parents at home looking out of the window. The baby is unseen but we can tell it is being kept in a cage. It sees a cat, catches it and pulls it into the cage. The parents look on without reaction.</p> <p>The music is now in C minor. The original motif from bars 3 and 4 is ‘augmented’ in bars 14–15. (although the crotchet tempo has also changed)</p> <p>Bar 18 introduces the celesta and harp, both playing broken chord figures in contrary motion. A variation of the Penguin motif is played by the low wind. Bar 21 contains a ‘flurry’ ending with an accent as ‘the baby catches the cat’. Bars 22–25 have a unison texture played by the synthesiser, tuba, timp and low woodwind ranging over four octaves. A harp glissando and cymbals lead to the next section.</p>
26–41		<p>The scene moves to a zoo and we see the parents throw the pram over the bridge and it floats away into the sewer.</p> <p>Sleigh bells play throughout this section. The music is now in D minor. The choir sing ‘La’ to the Penguin motif.</p> <p>In bar 32 the dynamics drop as the parents talk to another couple.</p> <p>By bar 38 the parents have reached the bridge and the motif plays in the low wind and strings (bars 39/40). As the pram is thrown off the bridge, the music builds to a D major chord, via F minor.</p>
42–end	♩ = 72	<p>The scene concludes with the baby floating away down to the sewers with his parents looking on. The woodwinds play the ‘Penguin’ theme. Arpeggios are played by the harp and strings (pizzicato). The accompanying music shifts by a semitone and changes to triple time (typical Elfman idea). The music feels like it</p>

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		is drawing to a conclusion with a dominant seventh chord (bar 45); however, instead of resolving the music, Elfman uses a chord made up entirely of fifths ( G, D, A, E) before resolving in bar 46 with a D pedal by low strings with the harp playing the Penguin motif.

## Birth of a Penguin, Part 2

This cue follows the film's main titles with the baby's journey through the sewers until at the end of the cue the pram is found by penguins.

Bars	Tempo	Comments
1-11	♩ = 130	Key of D minor. This cue starts with a pedal (D) in strings and woodwind. A rising and falling arpeggio motif is played by the cellos in bar 1 and violins in bar 2. The cello figure is based around a tonic major seventh chord and in bar 2 a tonic sixth with added second. Over this is an altered version of the Penguin motif, again augmented in the violins. The texture increases with the addition of the synth choir and a bass ostinato played in thirds. A 'hint of the 'Batman' motif appears in bars 5 and 6, before the horns enter at bar 9 with the full motif (as Michael Keaton's name appears on screen) before a trumpet 'fanfare'.
11-20	♩ = 130	Music has modulated to Bb minor with chord changing between Bb minor and Gb(7)/Bb (first inversion). A new accompanying figure in both the violins and percussion (bars 12-19). This figure is syncopated and uses both semiquavers and triplets. There is also a tonic pedal throughout this whole section. Bars 12 to 15, Batman motif (over this accompaniment) played by the bassoon and bass clarinet. This motif is taken over first by stopped horns and clarinets and then the horns. In bar 16 we can see a descending triplet phrase (Based on an idea from the first 'Batman' film main theme) played with accents creating a cross rhythmic effect against the accompaniment. Bar 17 in beats 3 & 4 we can hear the batman motif condensed from a full bar to two beats – use of diminution. Bar 19 Batman motif in octaves between the Horns and Bass Trombone Bar 20 the Batman motif finishes on the chord of Gb/Bb with the violins playing a descending arpeggio figuration. Time signature changes for one bar to 5/4. The final beat of the bar slows down with the trumpets (with mutes) playing a Bb minor chord in ascending arpeggio.

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		Extending the bar by one beat from a regular phrase to an irregular phrase is called 'interpolation'.
21–51	♩ = 146	<p>The climax of the cue is when the title of the film appears on the screen with bats flying towards the viewer. There is a <i>fortissimo</i> C major chord with 'stabs' which leads in to the 'military-like' quaver triplet ostinato at bar 25. This rhythmic accompaniment features throughout this section with the motif being passed around the different sections. Interestingly the second half of the motif is used which has a 'sighing' quality to it.</p> <p>The second Batman motif appears at bar 34 and is legato in style to contrast with the first motif.</p> <p>Throughout this 'military-like section' the use of triplets is paramount as the accompanying ostinato as well as 'fanfare figures' (e.g. bar 41).</p> <p>In bar 48 is the first appearance of the falling third motif in the voice, which features in the next part accompanied by the original batman motif.</p>
52–84	♩ = 136	<p>The pram starts to slow down. Use of D<math>\flat</math><sup>7</sup> first inversion, and bass chromatic shift to F<math>\sharp</math> minor with <math>\sharp</math>6. There is a falling minor third pattern in the voice at bar 55 – again an almost 'soothing/comforting quality'.</p> <p>Bars 57–62 follow three two-bar phrases which move unpredictably. The pattern has been joined by low wind and strings which swell in dynamics. The section ends at bar 62 in A<math>\flat</math> major, which Elfman changes to A<math>\flat</math> minor in bar 63.</p> <p>This time instead of the triplet motif from earlier, Elfman uses four semiquavers. The main Batman motif is heard along with the falling vocal thirds (Idea 2). Bar 75 contains a rhythmic variation on the Batman motif (use of crotchet triplets), first played by trombones and tuba, and then echoed by horns in bar 76 and trumpets in bar 77 (back to the original rhythm).</p> <p>There is a long <i>diminuendo</i> from bar 81 which settles the mood before the final section.</p>
85–96		<p>In this final section, the pram comes to rest and we see penguins coming to look at it. The section starts with an open fifth chord (B and F<math>\sharp</math>), which leaves the tonality open. The snare drum provides a new ostinato – with snares off. There is a hint of an augmented Penguin motif by muted brass (bars 85–87). There is a long pedal B in bars 85–92.</p> <p>Bars 93–96 are made up of two-bar phrases using a C<math>\sharp</math> major chord followed by E minor. The second playing uses first inversion chords to give an almost chromatic feel to the music.</p>

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97	♩ = 108	Finally while the flute plays using 'flutter tongue', there is an open chord (no third) of C# and G# and the tam tam is struck just as the screen states 'Gotham City – 33 years later'.

## Batman versus the Circus

Bars	Tempo	Comments
1–12	♩ = 66	The opening section describes the Bat signal being lit and Bruce Wayne seeing it. A low pedal (B) begins. The Batman motif is played first in the brass and then passes to the low wind before being taken over by the horns just before the loud full tutti chord (C# major) as Bruce stands in front of the Bat signal (bar 7). The tempo increases. The completely unrelated chords from bar 9 – E minor and C# major (first inversion) – are used in bars 10 and 11 with a long <i>crescendo</i> .
13–25	♩ = 104	The second section has a comical feel to it to represent the 'Circus Gang' causing chaos on the streets of Gotham. The music represents this through the use of cross-rhythms, frequent changes in time signatures, syncopation and fragments of ideas.  Bar 13 starts in E minor. There is an 'Om pah' ostinato bar 13 played by trombones (Idea 3) which is the Circus motif. There are cross-rhythms (bar 13). Rhythmic displacement (by one crotchet, bar 15).  At Bar 18 the tempo increases to 170, the key changes to C minor (unprepared) and the dynamics become very quiet ( <i>pp</i> ), which enhances the rhythmic side of the music. A three-note motif appears in the bass (C, Eb, D) which becomes fragmented (bars 19 and 20) and is accompanied by a brass chord made up of the notes A, Bb and D (bar 22), which unsettles the piece harmonically.  The time signature changes from 4 to 2 to 3 and back to 4 (bars 22–25). The section ends with high glissando on the beat played by the violins and a muted triplet figure in the trumpet.
26–46	♩ = 170	A new ostinato in octaves appears in the piano (Idea 4) and the xylophone starts the next section accompanied by the snare drum and temple blocks.  In bars 30–34 the bassoon joins the ostinato and the trumpet adds an accompanying figure (Idea 1).  At bar 34 Elfman uses a diminished seventh to represent the chaos the gang is causing on the street.

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		<p>A quick <i>crescendo</i> leads to a change in time signature (bar 35) and following a quiet snare drum roll the music returns to quadruple time with the ostinato from bar 26 and a new countermelody on the xylophone.</p> <p>Bar 35–36 contain very versatile horn playing (including quick change to <i>stopping</i>).</p> <p>At bar 43 Elfman uses the whole-tone scale in the harp followed in bars 45–46 with the ostinato from bar 26 combined with the Circus motif (Idea 3) played on a fairground steam organ.</p>
47–55		<p>Another unprepared modulation to C# minor (bar 49). There are fragments of the Batman motif (bar 47) as he appears on the screen interspersed with the circus motif (bar 50). A new musical feature appears in bar 55 in the left hand of the piano – a descending four-note phrase.</p>
56–66		<p>The music returns to B minor with the Batman motif taken over by a brief oboe phrase (which ascends and descends – this is developed later in bars 60 and 63) played with extreme vibrato.</p> <p>Bar 59 has the descending figure in the strings – which is extended in bars 61 &amp; 62.</p> <p>Bar 60 contains cross-rhythms with quavers triplets against two semiquavers and quaver. A Woodwind ‘flurry’ appears on top.</p> <p>In bar 64 the main Batman motif enters over a chord of E<math>\flat</math> played in the strings.</p>
67–end		<p>Music has changed key to E minor. Interestingly Elfman uses a cross-time signature idea. Even though the music is written in triple time, it sounds in quadruple time. The harmony in this section changes constantly to represent the action on stage.</p> <p>Bars 67–77 are the most ‘chaotic’ in terms of music. In bar 70 the low instruments play a diminished seventh descending arpeggio followed by a quick flourish in E minor in violins (contrary motion to the descending bass phrase).</p> <p>Bars 73–77 change to 5/4 with sustained chords (including augmented fourth – bar 74) accompanied by a rhythmic ostinato played by temple blocks and stabs on beats 1 and 3, finishing in bar 77 with a mixture of whole-tone scale with a C<sup>7</sup> sextuplet in the piccolo and violin.</p>

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Bars	Tempo	Comments
		<p>In bars 78–81 the music keeps driving forward with the descending four-note ostinato in the low strings. A hint of the xylophone idea (rocking semitone) to be used in bar 85 appears in bar 78. At bar 81 one bar of 2/4 extends the phrase with the xylophone idea in the bass.</p> <p>In bars 82–84 the Batman motif is augmented to the longest version of the first four notes of the motif played by the low brass. This is accompanied by the four-note ostinato to keep the scene driving forward.</p> <p>At bar 85 the time signature changes quickly to 5/4 to accommodate the action on stage. The xylophone has a quick four-note quaver idea, which is inverted on beats 4 and 5. A sustained note from the horn leads to bar 88 one-bar Batman motif accompanied by percussion only.</p> <p>Bars 89–90 contain a full orchestral version of the ‘Om-pah’ ostinato with temple blocks, muted brass fanfare snippet and harp glissando.</p> <p>At bars 91–93 there is a sudden shift of dynamics to <i>p</i> (from <i>ff</i>) with a quick <i>crescendo</i> back to <i>forte</i> by beat 3. At the end of the bar is a four-quaver intro to a variation of the ostinato from bar 26 (two beats long). This is extended to three beats with one beat rests. Muted trumpets and horn accompany, switching from strong to weak beat to help unsettle the pulse.</p> <p>The music starts to <i>decrescendo</i> until the penultimate bar, which is a low E, which <i>crescendos</i> from <i>p</i> to <i>fff</i>. The piece ends on the low E – no harmony played.</p>

### Rise and Fall from Grace

Bars	Tempo	Comments
1–7	♩ = 120	The piece starts in C minor with a comical/circus feel with pizzicato arpeggio in the cellos ‘answered’ by the violins. A switch to an aggressive arco phrase is answered this time by the double basses, with accents and staccato. There is a sweeping glissando up to a top G which is held by the violins. The Penguin motif is played underneath by the cello, coloured by the bass clarinet.
8–20		The penguin motif is played by harp and low organ accompanied by very high violins playing a cluster of E $\flat$ , F $\sharp$ and G. This adds a sense of unease and dissonance. The motif changes in bars 17–19 from being in the bass to the middle – played in octaves by the harp with the addition of a countermelody in the oboe.

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Bars	Tempo	Comments
20–39		<p>In bars 20–25 the Penguin motif is played as a waltz in triple time as Max sees the Penguins ‘Clown Gang’. At bar 26 the penguin has stopped his work and looks over to Max. The music has an open fifth chord and the Penguin motif has been augmented.</p> <p>From bar 29 the harp plays the main tune accompanied by the falling thirds idea in the celesta and a descending countermelody in the violins.</p> <p>Max is tempting Oswald with a fish just as the bass clarinet takes prominence in the music (bar 37).</p>
40–46		<p>In this seven-bar section, the music returns to quadruple time. There is an interplay between the bass clarinet and harp using arpeggios.</p> <p>Bar 44 contains a quick flurry as Oswald tries to snatch the fish.</p> <p>At bar 46 a trill on the flute and a rare perfect cadence leads to ...</p>
47–End		<p>The music picking up pace as Max lures Oswald down the stairs with the fish, covering his face with his hat. Firmly in C minor, the music descends in pitch as they come down the stairs. An augmented chord is used with contrary motion (bar 51) as the vibraphone descends and the low string ascends. In bar 52 there is a typical Elfman idea of using a cluster chord with a <i>crescendo</i>. The trumpet enters half way through the bar leading to a triumphant change to C major (bars 53 and 54) where a fanfare-like finish is heard as Oswald is revealed and is greeted by a crowd of election supporters.</p>

## Texture

- Constantly changing
- Use of layering (BvtC – bars 1-6)
- Octaves (BoaP 1 – bars 22–25)
- Rare monophony (RffG 1<sup>st</sup> three beats)
- Melody driven homophony (BoaP 2 – bars 77–78)
- Polyphonic texture.
- Homophony (Final two bars)

## Harmony and tonality

- Use of mostly minor keys throughout
- Pedal notes (BoaP 1 – bar 1-2)

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- Use of whole-tone scale (BvtC – bar 43)
- Use of open chords/bare fifths (BoaP 1 – bar 47)
- Diminished 7<sup>th</sup> (BvtC – bar 34)
- Dominant seventh (BoaP 1 – bar 45)
- Chromatic shifts
- Unprepared modulations of keys
- Parallel chords
- Tertiary relationship between keys and chords (BvtC – bars 10–11)
- Plagal cadence (BoaP1 – bars 2-3)
- Tritone/augmented fourth (BvtC – bar 74).

## Melody and ideas

- Use of leitmotif – individual themes for the three main characters. Only two of them feature in the pieces chosen. Each theme is developed in various ways.



- Batman – mainly brass
- Penguin – theatrical, use of organ



This often appears in the developed version below



- Idea 1 (BoaP 1 bar 34)



- Idea 2 (BoaP 2 bar 55)



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