**St Mary’s Catholic School: A Level Music**

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**Bridging Course – Week 2**

**Re-Cap Task:** Thinking back to last week and the vocabulary researched in the opening task – listen to this performance of ‘Star Wars’ and describe how the following terminology from last week are used in the performance:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_D0ZQPqeJkk>

***Timbre/Sonority - (not just instruments but how the composer has used them, playing techniques etc)***

***Leitmotif***

***Perfect fifth***

***Chromatic (ism)***

***Concord/discord***

*You will continue to use all this terminology in your work on further pieces of film music.*

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**This week in your bridging course, as you will know from the outline of the course, we will be looking at film music from *Batman Returns.*** Specifically ‘Birth of a Penguin parts 1 and 2’, ‘Batman vs the Circus’ and ‘The Rise and fall from Grace, by the composer Danny Elfman.

1. **Below is a comprehensive article on the life and musical output of the composer Danny Elman. As with last week read the article carefully and make detailed notes that will give you an excellent overview of the musician’s influences and compositional output.**

[Danny Elfman](https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/literature-and-arts/film-and-television-biographies/danny-elfman)’s exotic collection of folk objects—ranging from Ecuadoran shrunken heads to Mexican [Day of the Dead](https://www.encyclopedia.com/sports-and-everyday-life/days-and-holidays/days-months-holidays-and-festivals/day-dead) figures—has often inspired him in his musical creation of a dark, humorous, and fantastic world. Elfman has scored over 15 films, concocted numerous television themes, and until 1990 was writing songs and performing with the rock band Oingo Boingo. Despite his successes with film music, however, he is largely considered an amateur composer. He explained in *American Film*, “It is a generally accepted feeling within the music industry, of composers and would-be composers and wanna-be composers, that I don’t write my own music, that I hire ghosts.” But Elfman has successfully exorcised his ghosts with the orchestral works *Batman* and *Edward Scissorhands*, thus firmly establishing himself in the realm of contemporary film composers that includes giants like [John Williams](https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/philosophy-and-religion/protestant-christianity-biographies/john-williams) and [Jerry Goldsmith](https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/literature-and-arts/film-and-television-biographies/jerry-goldsmith).

In 1971 Elfman returned home to [Los Angeles](https://www.encyclopedia.com/places/united-states-and-canada/us-political-geography/los-angeles) after a yearlong trip through Africa, where he had unearthed the musical roots for both his film work and the sound that would define his band, Oingo Boingo. Upon his return, Elfman’s brother Richard asked him to join a theater ensemble called the Mystic Knights of the Oingo Boingo. The Mystic Knights performed a multimedia theatrical revue, initially in the streets, then moving on to more elaborate indoor shows. After eight years with the troupe, Richard redirected his efforts toward independent filmmaking, leaving Danny to form Oingo Boingo from the remaining Mystic Knights. The group had its first Top 40 hit in 1985 with the theme song from the film *Weird Science*. Despite his eventual triumph in [Hollywood](https://www.encyclopedia.com/places/united-states-and-canada/us-political-geography/hollywood), Elfman continued to write songs for the group as well as perform guitar and percussion duties. All of Elfman’s scores are orchestrated by Steve Bartek, Oingo Boingo’s lead guitarist, who also assists Elfman in producing his soundtrack albums. Dividing his time between scoring and songwriting, Elfman nonetheless allowed in *American Film* that songs reach “people on a much more personal, direct level” than does orchestral music for film.

**Piqued Pee-Wee’s Interest**

Elfman composed his first score in 1980 for his brother’s cult film *Forbidden Zone;* it included several songs by the Mystic Knights. Actor [Paul Reubens](https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/literature-and-arts/music-popular-and-jazz-biographies/paul-reubens)—more popularly known as Pee-wee Herman—saw the film; it piqued his interest in acquiring a non-traditional composer for his project *Pee-wee’s Big Adventure*, which was released in 1985. This became Elfman’s first full orchestral score. He told *Keyboard* in 1987 that he

**For the Record…**

Born May 29, 1953 (some sources say 1955), near [Amarillo](https://www.encyclopedia.com/places/united-states-and-canada/us-political-geography/amarillo), TX; married, two daughters.

Singer, songwriter, guitarist, and percussionist for group Oingo Boingo, 1979—. Composer of film scores, including *Pee-wee’s Big Adventure*, Warner Bros., 1985; *Batman*, Warner Bros., 1989; and *Dick Tracy*, Buena Vista, 1990; and television themes, including *The Simpsons*, Fox-TV, and *Batman: The Animated Series*, Fox-TV. Contributor to soundtrack of film *Buffi; the Vampire Slayer*, Twentieth Century Fox, 1992.

Elfman learned how to communicate with an audience from some of the great soundtrack masters. He revealed to *Egg*, “As a kid I would see movies five, six, seven times if I liked them, and I learned early on that a lot of my favorite ’50s and ’60s fantasy films had wonderful music by [Bernard Herrmann](https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/literature-and-arts/film-and-television-biographies/bernard-herrmann).” As a teenager he “would go out at least three nights a week, see every Truffaut, every Fellini—[Nino Rota](https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/literature-and-arts/film-and-television-biographies/nino-rota)’s music became like second nature to me.” His awareness at such a young age of the intimate relationship between a film’s soundtrack and elements of mood and character made writing soundtracks a very personal endeavor. Composers like Rota, whose work includes the venerable *8 1/2* and *The Godfather*, and [Bernard Herrmann](https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/literature-and-arts/film-and-television-biographies/bernard-herrmann), the genius behind the scores of both *Psycho* and [*Citizen Kane*](https://www.encyclopedia.com/literature-and-arts/performing-arts/film-and-television/citizen-kane), are still his inspiration, and their styles are echoed in many of his works. In *Fanfare*, Elfman wrote of *Pee-wee’s Big Adventure* that he “was looking for a type of music that was very innocent and light. Bringing in the [Nino Rota](https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/literature-and-arts/film-and-television-biographies/nino-rota) element felt right for me.... I wanted to find something that immediately put [Pee-wee] over as something from another world living here.” Herrmann’s influence, too, is evident, particularly in the film’s dream sequences.

**Fruitful Collaborations With Burton**

*Pee-wee’s Big Adventure* marked Elf man’s first collaboration with director [Tim Burton](https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/literature-and-arts/film-and-television-biographies/tim-burton), with whom he has enjoyed a strong partnership. His relationship with Burton began early on to resemble those of other filmmakers and their composers—Fellini and Rota, Hitchcock and Herrmann. Elfman told *Fanfare*, “Tim puts me into areas that are very challenging and fun to work with, and yet he allows me the creativity of figuring out how to make it come alive musically.” Their second film together was 1988’s *Beetlejuice*. Often cited as Elfman’s finest work, the *Beetlejuice* score combines circus, calypso, and horror motifs to create a discordant musical montage that skillfully complements the comic film. “A funnier, more boldly innovative or more manic score would be virtually impossible to imagine.... Elfman’s work is as joyous and rollicking as the film itself,” wrote Frederic Silber in *Fanfare*.

Then, in 1989, Elfman and Burton collaborated on *Batman*, one of the most commercially successful movies of all time. Burton’s tale of the Dark Knight was tailor-made for Elfman’s dark, visionary style. The score earned the composer a Grammy nomination for best score and the prized statuette, for best instrumental, in 1990. In an interview with *Keyboard*, Elfman remarked that the visual imagery of the film helped him create the score, which is filled with driving percussion, energetic horns, and haunting organs. “As soon as I saw Gotham [the setting of the film], I heard the music,” Elfman professed. “Tim and I had talked about doing a kind of darkly operatic and Romantic score.... I got my major thematic ideas right there, sitting in the theater and singing into this [tape recorder](https://www.encyclopedia.com/science-and-technology/computers-and-electrical-engineering/electrical-engineering/tape-recorder) the very first time I was seeing the movie.” Once again, Elfman’s musical sensibilities were easily wed to Burton’s highly developed visual perceptions. *Keyboard* contributor Robert L. Doerschuk noted in 1989 that *Batman* could change the face of the movie soundtrack forever. “By writing a soundtrack that stands on its own as an album release *and* could challenge the [*Star Wars*](https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences-and-law/political-science-and-government/military-affairs-nonnaval/star-wars) theme in pops concert programs, Elfman demonstrates that with sufficient talent and dedication... [he] can transcend the idiom formerly defined by the technology of his studio and write effectively for orchestra.”

The composer’s next film with Burton, 1990’s *Edward Scissorhands*, produced a score that deftly evoked Burton’s fairy-tale imagery. Elfman used a choral backdrop to develop a melancholic vision of the world, producing a work that many feel stands on its own while simultaneously enhancing the title character’s feelings and expressions.

**Approached For “Contemporary Score”**

Between his ventures with Burton, Elfman composed for a wide range of directors and genres. In 1988 he scored *Wisdom*, a box-office bomb written, directed by, and starring Emilio Estevez. *Fanfare’s* Silber wrote of Elfman’s contribution, “Suspenseful, hypnotic, pulsating, dream-like, the score succeeds so admirably in every thematic aspect where the film failed so miserably.” Also in 1988, Elfman composed scores for two comedies: *Hot to Trot and Big Top Pee-wee*, the follow-up to *Pee-wee’s Big Adventure*. But the film Elfman considers a turning point is yet another 1988 offering, the box-office hit comedy *Midnight Run*. The composer noted in *Fanfare*, “Finally, after all those years, I was asked to do a ’contemporary’ score.” His next film, however, 1988’s horror-comedy *Scrooged*, was a composer’s nightmare: Most of his music was either buried in the film or not used at all.

The following year, two film projects, *Nightbreed* and *Darkman*, brought Elfman back to the genre he loves best—horror. Both scores featured shadowy themes combined with tribal chanting and dramatic overtures. Instead of taking the usual route—reviewing scripts to decide which film to score—Elfman sought out director/writers Clive Barker, the mastermind of *Nightbreed*, and [Sam Raimi](https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/literature-and-arts/film-and-television-biographies/sam-raimi), father of *Darkman*. “I wanted very much to work with them, since I love horror,” Elfman wrote in *American Film*. “So I’ve returned to the genre that inspired me in the first place.”

Elfman’s soundtrack for another 1990 film, *Dick Tracy*, directed by and starring [Warren Beatty](https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/literature-and-arts/film-and-television-biographies/warren-beatty), used Gersh-win-esque themes to conjure the 1930s-era setting of the Dick Tracy [comic strip](https://www.encyclopedia.com/literature-and-arts/journalism-and-publishing/journalism-and-publishing/comic-strip). The film earned Elfman a second Grammy nomination for best score. But by 1992, he had again changed directions, this time with the soundtrack for *Article 99*, the story of a [Vietnam](https://www.encyclopedia.com/places/asia/vietnam-political-geography/vietnam) veteran’s hospital. That score took a more traditional approach to film music but still featured Elfman’s signature style. 1992 also found Elfman following up his *Batman* efforts with the score to Burton’s *Batman Returns. Entertainment Weekly’s* Ty Burr, for one, was unimpressed with the results. Asserting that Elfman had run out of ideas, Burr groused: “Here are the same windswept demon choirs, tinkling music boxes, Fellini carny music, and chic Wagnerian pooting that sounded so great in *Edward Scissorhands*, Elfman’s peak. But like *Batman Returns* itself, this new score is neurotically hyperactive. It’s as if Elfman, stumped for new material, simply opted to throw the old stuff at us faster and louder. That’s fine if you’re a punching bag. If not, not.”

In addition to soundtracks, Elfman has composed several television themes for successful shows like Fox-TV’s extremely popular animated *The Simpsons* and HBO’s highly acclaimed *Tales From the Crypt*. These and other television and soundtrack themes were released in 1990 on a compilation album called *Music for a Darkened Theatre: Film and Television Music Volume One*.

Throughout his composition adventures, whether with Oingo Boingo, in film, or in television, the prolific Elfman has remained close to the origins of his fascination with the theatrical power of music. “Even now, the way I get around my lack of training and technique is by drawing on my having grown up in a world of movies,” he told *Fanfare*. “Very often, when I’m not sure how to approach something, I say, ’How would I approach this if I were thirteen years old, sitting in a theater, and watching the movie?’ In other words, what would make me come alive?” These instincts have, indeed, served him well, which has perhaps given him the confidence to branch out yet again, this time into screenwriting and directing. In January of 1992 *Entertainment Weekly* reported that Elfman was “developing several oddball projects, including an ’over-the-top’ musical titled *The World of Jimmy Callicut* at Fox and ’a strange and stylized ghost story’ he’ll also direct called *Julian*, which [Tim Burton](https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/literature-and-arts/film-and-television-biographies/tim-burton) is executive producing for Warner Bros.”

1. **Now, turning to the music of the film Batman Returns, use the following link to listen initially to the tracks that are included in the A Level, this will give you a feel for the music and prepare for analysing the music more closely.**

 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NivP8u7Yplc&list=RDNivP8u7Yplc&start_radio=1>

**3) Birth of a Penguin part 1 - Read the information below and answer the questions below using your deductions from listening to the musical score to help you.**

One of the key features of the Batman Returns score is its wide-ranging instrumentation. Elfman brings together a huge range of instruments, some common to the orchestra and others less so. As a starting point, get students listening out for the various forces in action in this piece. Alongside the standard orchestra, what else can they hear? This particular section provides a great example of a leitmotif, and also superb use of atmosphere. Elfman has chosen instruments that work well for both the leitmotif and the creation of a dark, mysterious mood. Another key aspect to approaching film music is to consider how its structures, and how they are different from, say, a classical piece in sonata form. Film composers are not concerned with filling a certain number of bars, or creating balanced phrases. Their primary focus in on the screen – they need their music to fit what’s happening in the movie. We therefore see a very different approach to structure. That’s not to say the music isn’t structured, or even random. Instead, the composer is simply fulfilling a different function. Phrases and melodies are still balanced, but the music can take unexpected twists and turns as the on-screen action and mood changes. Texture is another interesting aspect: in film music, we can no longer simply name it, but instead we need to describe it. Students who embark on a film composition need to understand that texture should vary and take various twists and turns. They need to understand the power of texture, and this piece shows one possible approach in starting with a clear leitmotif, to represent not only a character, but also the overall mood of the film.

1. Describe the Batman leitmotif in as much detail as you can.

2. What makes the Penguin motif different from the Batman motif?

3. How does Elfman use vocals in this piece of music, and to what effect?

4. Why is the pipe organ a good choice of instrument for this piece?

5. Describe the music played by the celesta, suggesting why it is appropriate for this piece.

6. How would you describe the harmony for this piece?

**Extension Questions:**

7. How does Elfman approach texture? Describe it – don’t just try and name it.

 8. What is the primary tonality used by Elfman?

**4) Birth of a Penguin part 2 - Read the below information and answer the questions below using your deductions from listening to the musical score to help you.**

 This cue is very similar to the last, so it would be good for students to look at the similarities and differences between them. A good comparison will help them pick out the cues’ key features. What stand out are the way that Elfman uses the main Batman theme in various ways throughout the cue, and also the way that he changes mood. At 1:28, the mood suddenly changes from a driving momentum to a more subdued atmosphere, which then builds up again gradually. Students can think about this in connection with their own compositions, especially if they are composing something cinematic. The use of strings is particularly cinematic in this cue, and scurrying semiquaver string figures provide a charged and driven accompaniment to the main motifs. The strings not only create an exciting textural layer, but also help to spell out the harmony. Elfman then goes on to use the strings to provide rhythmically driven accompaniment – another cinematic feature of the string writing. Cinematic music is not unique, and it brings together ideas from many musical genres. Used in the right context and for the right scene, Stravinsky’s Rite of Spring could be mistaken for cinematic music. That is simply because music has and always will tell stories, evoke emotions and help us to imagine.

1. Would you describe this music as polyphonic?

 2. What different key signatures are used in this cue?

3. What is diminution, and where is it used in this cue?

4. Where does Elfman use ostinato?

 5. Where do you find an example of cross-rhythms being used?

6. How does Elfman use the Batman motif in this cue?

**Extension Questions:**

7. Describe in detail the final 20 seconds of this cue.

 8. What does Elfman use in bar 55? Describe it and explain how it is used.

**5) Batman vs the Circus - Read the below information and answer the questions below using your deductions from listening to the musical score to help you.**

This is my favourite of the four cues featured in the Anthology: it explores some new and interesting sounds and ideas; it combines comedy and chaos; and it packs a lot in. A circus is an interesting concept one to consider. It might even be good for you to consider how Elfman creates comedy and chaos in this cue – that will allow you to focus on specific musical elements.

1. How would you describe the music played by the trombones in this cue?

2. Describe the way in which percussion is used in this cue – both tuned and untuned.

3. What qualities of the bassoon make it appropriate for this cue?

4. What is a diminished 7th chord, and how is it used in this piece?

5. What makes the music sound so ‘chaotic in your opinion’?

6. What features of the music give it momentum and forward drive?

**Extension Question:**

7. What instrument do you feel sets the scene the most, and why?

**5) The Rise and fall from Grace - Read the below information and answer the questions below using your deductions from listening to the musical score to help you.**

 This is the shortest of the four cues in the Anthology, and it is very different to the others. **Why? What does Elfman do with the music in ‘The Rise and fall from Grace’ that helps to set a different tone and atmosphere?** This kind of analysis links back to the key purpose of the music – to represent what is happening on screen. A film composer needs to help the viewer to see specific things on screen, and this cue helps to draw attention to very specific things.

1. How does Elfman use woodwind in this piece?

2. How is the harp used in this cue?

3. How does the texture change though out this cue?

4. What different string techniques are used in this piece?

5. Describe the use of the Penguin motif.

**Extension Question**

6. Describe how this cue ends.

**6) To bring this week’s bridging course to a close you are going to complete and essay, similar to the one you completed last week. This is where you will evaluate Elfman’s use of musical features. As with work at GCSE, you should identify a musical feature (AO3) and then evaluate its effect on the listener/audience (AO4) this essay is worth 15 marks.**

**Discuss the use of melody, harmony and instrumentation in the music you have studied from Danny Elfman’s Batman Returns. Relate your discussion to other relevant works (15)**

This means illustrating your points with musical examples from other works – for the purposes of this essay use music that we looked at last week by **Korngold**. For example, a point you make about Harmony in the ‘Batman’ you could then back up by saying Korngold uses the same technique to highlight action in ‘The New Adventures of Robin Hood’.

**Further work you could complete:**

**Selected Discography – This is quite an extensive list of further music composed by Elfman. It could be an idea to listen to a selection of these, firstly to appreciate the evolution of his compositional style but also to make notes on his use of instrumentation, texture, harmony etc, so you can make comparisons with other set works. This skill is important for the A Level Course.**

**With Oingo Boingo**

*Oingo Boingo* (EP), 1RS, 1980.

*Only a Lad, A&M*, 1981.

*Nothing to Fear*, A&M, 1982.

*Good for Your Soul*, A&M, 1984.

*Dead Man’s Party*, MCA, 1986.

*BOI-NGO*, MCA, 1987.

*Boingo Alive*, MCA, 1988.

*Skeletons in the Closet*, A&M, 1988.

*Dark at the End of the Tunnel*, MCA, 1990.

*Best O’Boingo*, MCA, 1991.

**Film scores**

*Pee-wee’s Big Adventure/Back to School*, Varese Sarabande, 1985.

*Beetlejuice*, Geffen, 1988.

*Big Top Pee-wee*, Arista, 1988.

*Midnight Run*, MCA, 1988.

*Wisdom*, Varese Sarabande, 1988.

*Hot to Trot*, 1988.

*Scrooged*, 1988.

*Batman*, Warner Bros., 1989.

*Forbidden Zone*, Varese Sarabande, 1990.

*Darkman*, MCA, 1990.

*Dick Tracy*, Sire, 1990.

*Edward Scissorhands*, MCA, 1990.

*Nightbreed*, MCA, 1990.

*Article 99*, Varese Sarabande, 1992.

*Batman Returns*, Warner Bros., 1992.

*Sommersby*, Warner Bros., 1993.

“March of the Dead Theme,” *Army of Darkness*, Varese Sarabande, 1993.