

Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan

music composed by James Horner
(original Star Trek theme by Alexander Courage)
Directed by Nicholas Meyer
Produced by Robert Sallin
Paramount Pictures, 1982

Story.

James T. Kirk is now an Admiral, and is responsible for overseeing the training of a replacement crew for the starship Enterprise. All of the old crew, except Chekov, are involved in this process. Training as prospective Captain is Lieutenant Saavik, a Vulcan protégée of Spock – now a Captain himself.

Commander Chekov is now serving aboard USS Reliant under Captain Terrell. Their current mission is to find a suitable planet for the testing of the ‘Genesis Device’. This device, developed by Dr. Carol Marcus, a former lover of Kirk’s, and their son David, has the ability of turning a dead planet into a living one. If, however, it were used on a planet where life already existed “it would destroy such life in favour of its new matrix” (Spock). Chekov and Terrell beam down to what they think is Ceti Alpha VI to check out an anomalous reading. Actually they beam down to Ceti Alpha V, where they encounter Khan.

Khan Noonien Singh is a genetically engineered human who attempted to gain control of earth in the last part of the twentieth century. Kirk found him and his followers drifting in cryogenic freeze fifteen years ago. When he tried to take control of the ship Kirk was forced to leave him and his crew to establish themselves on a nearby planet – Ceti Alpha V. Six months after they were left there, Ceti Alpha VI exploded. The shock disturbed the orbital pattern of Ceti Alpha V and it was rendered a virtually uninhabitable desert. But Khan managed to survive.

In the scene which I have analysed, Khan has Chekov – who he remembers from their previous encounter – and Terrell captured. He explains to them the events of the last fifteen years and reveals a deep-seated hatred of Kirk, whom he specifically blames for the death of his wife. She was killed by Ceti Alpha V’s only remaining indigenous life-form – the Ceti Eel. These lobster-like creatures enter their prey through the ear and “wrap themselves around the cerebral cortex. This has the effect of rendering the victim extremely susceptible to suggestion. Later, as they grow, comes madness . . . and death” (Khan). Khan places a baby eel in the ear of Chekov and Terrell and uses the resultant will to co-operate to gain control of Reliant, with the intention of claiming Genesis too.

In the middle of a training mission aboard the Enterprise Kirk receives a distress call from Carol Marcus on Regula I space laboratory. He takes control of the ship and goes to investigate. Khan devastates the Enterprise with a surprise attack, but Kirk is wily enough to counterattack and force Reliant into retreat. When Kirk, McCoy and Saavik beam down to Regula I they find the remaining crew slaughtered. They also find Chekov and Terrell. Together they beam down to Regula, the dead moon which the space station orbits. There they find the surviving scientists from Regula I and the Genesis device.

Kirk is attacked by the son he has never met. When Carol has alleviated the situation, Chekov and Terrell reveal that they are still under Khan’s control and are in

communication with him. He orders Terrell to kill Kirk, but he cannot and instead kills himself. Chekov, battling against the eel inside him, collapses. The eel emerges and is shot by Kirk. Khan leaves them marooned inside Regula. Carol and David then reveal the Genesis Cave, a jungle paradise created by a small-scale Genesis device. They are then rescued by the Enterprise, which was not as damaged as Spock's coded communication had led Khan to believe.

As Reliant can still outrun and outgun Enterprise, Kirk leads Khan into the Mutara Nebula, the atmosphere of which renders shields and tactical useless, hence the odds are even. In a slow, eerie battle Kirk defeats Khan. But Khan sets the Genesis Device to go off. Enterprise has four minutes to escape, but the warp drive is not functional. Spock dies exposing himself to lethal radiation in order to fix the warp drive and they escape just in the nick of time. The Genesis device transforms the gasses of the nebula into a new planet. Spock's body is launched (in a torpedo casing) into space and comes to rest on the new planet. David makes peace with his father, who vows to return to the new planet on the hopeful basis that Genesis 'can create life from death' – does anyone smell a sequel?!

Motivation.

My love of science fiction is undoubtedly connected with the calibre of underscore which the genre can provoke. The effect of the Star Wars trilogy upon my generation cannot be overstated. But Star Trek is not traditional science fiction. It uses the freedom of a technologically-advanced future as a blank canvas upon which to make allegorical representations of contemporary life on earth (albeit from an American point of view). In the case of Star Trek II the underlying subject matter concerns loss of youth. This clearly precludes the gratuitous action of your typical spaceship movie.

At the opening of the movie Kirk is depressed on his birthday. Bones' gift is a pair of antique spectacles – an aged manifestation of an outdated remedy for an effect of old age. Appropriately enough the glasses are later broken during the battle in the Mutara nebula. Bones tells Kirk that he should never have accepted promotion – his destiny is to roam the galaxy. Instead, he is training a fresh young crew to pilot the Enterprise. The Enterprise herself is no spring chicken. Kirk's opponent on this occasion is some 300 years old!

So the movie's appeal is not brash heroism but rather cunning and experience-based stratagem. Khan gains the better of Kirk initially through deception. Kirk responds in kind. The final battle is between two blind crawling ships, and it is Kirk's practical experience which triumphs over Khan's 'superior' artificial intellect.

Music's use in the film as a whole / Main themes and their functions.

As the charm of the film's music lies in its relation to the subject matter, in particular the age theme mentioned above, it seems appropriate to discuss the general character of the score in the context of motivation, going on to elaborate and, to a certain extent, illustrate.

Water under the bridge is not the only aquatic influence upon James Horner's score. Star Trek was originally conceived, by Gene Roddenbury, along naval lines—hence the ranking system (ensign, yeoman, etc.) and registration (United Star Ship as opposed to United States Ship). Nicholas Meyer is said to have encouraged an overall feel of outer space as an ocean. The culminating battle, with its lack of pace or visual contact, is reminiscent of submarine warfare. Horner fulfils this sea-faring vision through the ubiquitous wave accompaniment figure*¹, and through the compound-time (compound-time being associated with sea-shanties) feel of the themes associated with the Enterprise. Horner was also persuaded to doff his cap to the original Star Trek series through quotation of the opening fanfare from the Alexander Courage theme*. He uses this at the beginning of his *Main Title*², and at nostalgic moments early on in the movie³. Interestingly Horner does not incorporate the fanfare at heroic climaxes, as others have done.

These are characteristics which appear in most Star Trek scores, which distinguish them from other space movies. But it is the original conceptions of Horner himself which distinguish this Star Trek movie in particular from any other⁴. The main *heroic* theme*, typically in the score's home key of Db, depicting both Kirk and the Enterprise, is perhaps not as dynamic as one might expect. Although it is introduced by trumpet and the first bar of what I have designated its 'A' section consists of bold tonic-dominant-tonic fanfare harmony, its focal element is subtle chromatic play around the tonic. This is introduced by the climax of section 'A', which, while not itself chromatically related to the tonic, provides the germ for such relation, which is the sole component of section 'B'. Section 'A1' has a twist in the tail as its climax now *is* chromatic. Section 'B1' responds to this by adapting its chromaticism towards a modulation to F.

All of this subtle twisting – and the tendency to modulate⁵ (in particular abruptly through an augmented fourth), which will remain a constant factor - reflects

¹ Asterisks denote musical representation on the manuscript paper accompanying the cue sheet.

² The use of italics indicates a title designated on the soundtrack. This fanfare marked the opening of each episode of the original series. Jerry Goldsmith used it to open his score to the first Star Trek movie, and would use it again for Star Trek V. Horner used it again for Star Trek III. Leonard Rosenman likewise for Star Trek IV, even going so far as to quote, to tear-jerking effect, the actual theme of the original series, when the crew are introduced the new Enterprise NCC-1701-A, Kirk having destroyed the original in the previous movie. Thus the fanfare has a mnemonic function in every movie as it did in the series.

³ When Gene Roddenbury's name appears in the opening credits, when we first see the Enterprise, when Sulu says 'Enterprise', when we first see the turbolift.

⁴ However, it must be acknowledged that Horner uses motifs that appear in some of his earlier film scores (such as *Battle Beyond the Stars*, the space version of the *Magnificent Seven* (the western version of the *Seven Samurai*) and even in later scores (such as *Aliens*, to far lesser effect). Part of the attraction of this score is that it has the distinction of having launched Horner into the 'big time'. Regardless of personal taste, it cannot be denied that he has, through the likes of *Braveheart* and *Titanic*, come to challenge John Williams as the best-known and most widely 'appreciated' film-score composers. This tendency to repeat himself from score to score diminished rapidly from the present score onwards.

⁵ In many, or indeed most cases, modulation may not, strictly speaking, occur. It may simply be a question of tonicisation. Regardless of this technical distinction its effect is the same.

the elusive nature of both Kirk and the Enterprise. It is the heroism of a trickster as opposed to that of an out-and-out fighter. A further manifestation of this is alternation between duplet and triplet rhythms – rhythmic variation will also be a constant factor, especially in relation to this main heroic theme. Change in instrumentation, for example the more sentimental string rendition of the heroic theme in F at 0.01.03, also lends what is essentially a narrow scope of simple thematic material greater variety and facility.

All of this chromatic and rhythmic movement is held together by a pedal note – in B it is the Db, in B1 the F. The A sections are supported by a tonic and dominant bass pedal. Thus simultaneously the stability of Kirk's experience is present. So whilst motor-rhythms (provided by various instruments – snare drum at more military-protocol moments) and frequent upbeat scalar flourishes do suggest heroism in its typical guise, the harmonic and rhythmic nature of the theme, coupled with its Andante compound-time feel, create an overall mood of self-assured, almost reluctant heroism⁶.

Apart from a sentimental counterpart to the heroic theme*, there are really only two more themes in the whole score – one for Spock and one for Khan, although the latter is really only a simple leitmotif, coloured by its accompaniment, which can be easily layered over other material. I shall discuss this in greater detail when I discuss my graphic score. Spock's theme* consists of three elements: the main Spock motif; rising whole-tone scale, and; a semi-chromatic fall back to the main motif.

Horner claims to have been attempting to reflect Spock's human side, but the stereotypical 'alien' depiction is still present to some degree. With each section in a different 'key', it can be seen to relate to the modulatory tendency of Kirk's heroic theme. But the small-scale focus on I-#IV alternation, especially in the second section when it is used to produce a whole-tone scale, creates an air of exotic mysticism. This can be justified by the fact that the theme in full is first heard when Kirk interrupts Spock's fully-garbed meditation session. But add to this the ethnic flute, the icy synthesised sound, and the effects which are applied to these (immediate artificial cut-outs of the bass note in the third section, possible reversal of the ethnic flute sound) and the overall effect has definite alien qualities. Horner might be said to have succeeded in his aim in that, despite these, there is sufficient familiarity to make us feel that Spock is a comfortably assimilated alien⁷. Spock's theme is very little heard until the end of the movie when he dies. At this point French horn takes the lead, thus bringing Spock even closer to Kirk.

Approximately 56% of the movie is underscored. This is rather a high proportion, but nowhere near the epic scale of Star Wars. Most of the cues are based upon the four main themes I have identified. It is through application of leitmotif principals of slight variations (colour, rhythm, harmony) and of overlaying and cutting between different motifs, that such limited resources are spread to cover such a vast expanse. But this score is not entirely limited to the classical tradition. In addition to the artificial effects identified in the Spock theme, there is also an electronic bass

⁶ It could be proposed that this reluctant heroism characterises America's view of its own role in history. Starfleet's 'prime directive', frequently underlined in Star Trek The Next Generation episodes is essentially a code dictating non-intervention – a policy which has dictated American politics at many critical points in history, both World Wars for example. This is not an argument that I wish to pursue in this context. Science Fiction is essentially escapist. To dwell on specific political allegory is to miss the point.

⁷ More political allegory?

sound present at various points, and there are some extraneous sound effects which, whilst perhaps not strictly speaking conforming to traditional definitions of music, must be interpreted as underscore.

On the whole the main cues occur, as one would expect, when the dialogue is at its most sparse. William Shatner's 'acting' voice has a definite musical (particularly rhythmical) quality of its own, and it would be difficult to underscore it in more wordy scenes without obstructing its effect. There are several cues, for example Battle in the Mutara Nebula, which verge on music video, and one must conclude that the visuals have, to a large extent, been cut to the music.

Analysis of Graphic Score
KHAN'S PETS – 0.17.02 > 0.21.09

The time scale which runs along the top of the score is not proportional throughout. This is unfortunate, but in the interest of dramatically reducing paper usage and at the same time increasing readability (i.e. not requiring a page turn for every five seconds of music) it was necessary. As a by-product of this pragmatic re-scaling the pulse which, admitting some rubato, is constant throughout the cue (after the glissando introduction) is represented by lines whose varying length do not reflect actual change. The only variation in this pulse, besides pitch and register, is between pizzicato (pizz.) and bowing (arco.). When the latter occurs the pulse line has been thickened. Any sustained string notes and glissandi are bowed. Zig-zags indicate trills. Zig-zags super-imposed over lines denote tremelando in string parts and flutter-tonguing in the flute part. Diagonal lines portray glissandi, vertical lines legato pitch change. The circle at the top of certain harp glissandi represents hand held cymbals.

This cue introduces us to the villain, Khan, and tells his story-so-far, building his simple leitmotif* along the way. It opens with sul ponticello (at the bridge) tremelando string glissandi (with French horn interpolations), leading upwards towards the psychological sphere⁸ and downwards towards physical fear, which is represented throughout by a slow heart-beat pulse.

The cue's main function is to depict Khan's dull, warped, mature hatred and the grotesque certainty of his efforts to avenge his suffering. This also involves portrayal of the barren desert environment in which this hatred has been forced to fester. So the pulse has another function; as a kinetic analogue it suggests someone dragging themselves warily across endless sand. This becomes even more laboured when the pulse switches from pizz. to arco. It shifts from lower to middle strings when Khan, after the climax of the cue at 2.56, reveals the unforeseeable (on the part of Kirk) details of his fate. This frees the lower strings, who take up a grotesque, almost operatic, tragic-lamenting motif.

Other aspects of the cue which relate specifically to the desert environment are: the middle string desert wind motif, first appearing at 1.47 – a sonic (rising and falling pitch) / kinetic (rising and falling speed) anaphone; the use of a gong – a visual anaphone for the sun; the broad harp glissandi – a visual anaphone for the blur on the horizon (also reflected in the tremelando at the end of the desert wind motif) – and the cymbal rustle at the top of the glissando – a sonic anaphone for the wind, and; the muted French horn 'barren' chords – a visual anaphone for the vast, open expanse. The latter consists of two chords. The first chord collapses inward to become the second. The second is a minor triad. The first chord expands (hence the visual anaphone) the extremes of the minor triad. The second chord's function is to put the first chord into perspective. The harsh muted sound creates a further depictive dimension. It adopts the tradition, established in western movies, of using French horns to depict vast rugged landscapes, and by compressing the sound it removes the features of that landscape, rendering instead a flat, open and hostile plain.

All of these effects relate specifically to the descriptive content of Khan's narrative. This is further reflected at the end of the cue when the Khan motif proper, presented in its raw component parts earlier in the cue, comes to fruition. This is at the

⁸ The high-pitched element comes more to fruition and this cue's counterpart when the Ceti Eels are placed in the ears of Chekov and Terrell to the accompaniment of an icy tinnitus-like sound and high violin harmonics.

point (3.39) where Khan remembers his former glory. The appearance of Khan's motif at this point tells us that it is this memory of power which ultimately continues to motivate him. The echoed trumpet fragment is a more literal reference to the function of memory – echoes of the past.

There are also two non-narrative depictions. The raw Khan motif components are presented by two trumpets and one flute, which all start on the same note. The flute's fluttering reflects the anger of Khan's twisted psyche. It could also be seen to be either an anticipation of the blur anaphones which occur later, or a sonic anaphone for the screams in Chekov's head. One trumpet rises a semitone, creating a harsh dissonance – further reflection of Khan's psyche. This dissonance increases when the other trumpet drops a semitone, producing three consecutive semitones sounding together. This occurs twice – at 0.33 and 0.50. There are also two mid-stage incarnations – at 1.39 and 1.57 – before the Khan motif takes its proper form.

The falling tremelando glissando of the bass pulse, with complementary upper string rising dissonant trills (1.06, 1.25, and, with slight variation, 2.56) seem to react (on behalf of either the audience or of Chekov and Terrell) to Khan. In the first case they react to Khan's recognition of Chekov, in the second to Khan's cutting off Terrell, and in the third to his cutting off Chekov. In the first two appearances the upper string trills and the trombone bass-support anticipate, with a dissonant flute chord arriving at the climax. The second appearance builds upon the first in that the glissandi span greater intervals. The third appearance is climactic in that the horns have taken the place of the upper string trills, with the latter, now a single violin trill and a slower viola alternation, entering at the nadir of the bass glissando, joined, as before, by flutes, now fluttering, and also by trumpet.

The Khan motif produced during this cue is easily inserted amongst and combined with the heroic theme and its variation. It is typically accompanied by aggressive *col legno battuto* (struck with the wood of the bow) regular whip-cracking, and by swelling trombone tonic pedal with flattened 7th upbeat. It usually consists of tonic, flattened 2nd above and 7th below, played by Trumpet. A more robust extended version, played by French horn, revolving around the dominant*, tends to accompany external shots of Reliant.