

2019

The Marvel Sonic Narrative: A Study of the Film Music in Marvel's The Avengers, Avengers: Infinity War, and Avengers: Endgame

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The Marvel Sonic Narrative:
A Study of the Film Music in
Marvel's The Avengers, Avengers: Infinity War, and Avengers: Endgame

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Dissertation submitted to

the College of Creative Arts
at West Virginia University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Musical Arts
in Music Performance

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Morgantown, West Virginia
2019

Keywords: Marvel, Avengers, Infinity War, Endgame film music, comic book, comic book
movie

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ABSTRACT

The Marvel Sonic Narrative:
A Study of the Film Music in *Marvel's The Avengers*, *Avengers: Infinity War*, and *Avengers: Endgame*

Anthony James Walker

This document explores the music of three films in the *Marvel Avengers* enterprise: *Marvel's The Avengers*, *Avengers: Infinity War*, and *Avengers: Endgame*. It does not examine the second film of the series, *Avengers: Age of Ultron*. The document seeks to uncover and further understand the music's function in each film and to determine its continuity throughout all three films. This study uses a combination of film music studies and theory-based analysis to support the findings with the aim of identifying connecting musical elements that stretch throughout these three films. This includes the use of leitmotif/themes, previously introduced music, musical similarity and contrast, as well as ways the music fits in the larger dramatic scheme of each film and the overall function of film music. Ultimately, this document will uncover vital themes that progress the sonic narrative in the *Avengers* soundscape.

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THE MARVEL CINEMATIC UNIVERSE FILMOGRAPHY

For the purposes of this document, the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) refers to the universe's live action feature films. It does not include television shows, animated movies, or "One-Shots". It includes films from Paramount Pictures, Universal Pictures, Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, and Sony Pictures Releasing, however, only the films that are a part of the shared universe – produced by Kevin Feige. Release dates are listed by U.S. releases.

Phase One

Iron Man (2008)
The Incredible Hulk (2008)
Iron Man 2 (2010)
Thor (2011)
Captain America: The First Avenger (2011)
Marvel's The Avengers (2012)

Phase Two

Iron Man 3 (2013)
Thor: The Dark World (2013)
Captain America: The Winter Soldier (2014)
Guardians of the Galaxy (2014)
Avengers: Age of Ultron (2015)
Ant-Man (2015)

Phase Three

Captain America: Civil War (2016)
Doctor Strange (2016)
Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2 (2017)
Spider-Man: Homecoming (2017)
Thor: Ragnarok (2017)
Black Panther (2018)
Avengers: Infinity War (2018)
Ant-Man and the Wasp (2018)
Captain Marvel (2019)
Avengers: Endgame (2019)
Spider-Man: Far From Home (2019)

Phase Four

Black Widow (scheduled for 2020)
The Eternals (scheduled for 2020)
Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings (scheduled for 2021)
Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness (scheduled for 2021)
Untitled Spider-Man: Far From Home sequel (scheduled for 2021)
Thor: Love and Thunder (scheduled for 2021)
Black Panther II (scheduled for 2022)

INTRODUCTION

Film score study is fairly new in the scheme of music research, and there are glaring gaps in the literature. There has been much research into silent films and westerns, as well as into large franchise films like *Jaws*, *Indiana Jones*, *Superman*, *Star Wars* (all titles with music by John Williams)¹, and *Lord of the Rings* (Howard Shore).² The MCU spans over twenty-plus films (and is still growing), however, aside from film score reviews and critiques, there has not been any substantial research into its music.

Comic book films have grown extremely popular over the past twenty years, to the point that *Avengers: Endgame* was the highest grossing film of all time. Research into comic book films is somewhat unique in that there is various source material for the films and its scores. For Marvel specifically, there is an eighty-year treasure chest of comics; characters; animated shows and movies; live-action films outside the MCU; and the twenty-two films in the MCU. The films that are the focus of this study could also have possible influences of about fifteen different film scores with different composers.

The nature of film music enables directors and studios to have substantial input on how the music should and will sound. The music takes on a life beyond a composer's control which creates a sonic palette that often stretches across films in the same franchise. This creates a sonic sound for a particular film's universe. One well known example of this type of soundscape is the *Star Wars* films. The Marvel Cinematic Universe is comprised the same way.³

¹ Emilio Audissino, *John Williams's Film Music: Jaws, Star Wars, Raiders of the Lost Ark, and the Return of the Classical Hollywood Music Style*. (Wisconsin Film Studies. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014) Accessed September 5, 2019.

² Vincent Rone. "Scoring the Familiar and Unfamiliar in Howard Shore's the Lord of the Rings." *Music and the Moving Image* 11, no. 2 (2018): 37-66.

³ The MCU was created as part of Marvel Studios, LLC, and is owned by The Walt Disney Company.

The MCU began with the release of *Iron Man* in 2008. Since then, the MCU spans twenty-three films with more on the way. All of the 23 films to date have been co-produced by Kevin Feige and they have had several different directors and composers. All the films and characters are based on Marvel comics, which have been in existence since 1939. Thus, Marvel and the MCU have been around for decades and show no signs of slowing down. This is also true for the “comic book” film craze. Andy Hill has observed:

Certain films have the capacity – in concept, script, in visual realization – to alter the way we see the world. . . . Everyone who loves cinema has had the experience of leaving a theater with a slightly different walk, talk and attitude, feeling they’ve carried a bit of the character away with them.⁴

Marvel films are unique, in that, they have a vast eighty-year history, packed with characters and stories that fans have grown to love. They also have the ability to capture new fans, because despite larger-than-life stories and characters, people can always relate to some aspect of their identities or natures.

While printed comics stimulate readers with exquisite visuals and scintillating stories, films have to incorporate additional elements like sound and motion. For sound, this includes both sound effects and screen music. Alan Silvestri (born 1950), the composer for the three films discussed in this study, is a well-established Hollywood composer, having won several awards for his compositions and having composed for over one hundred films, most notably: all three of Robert Zemeckis’s *Back to the Future* films (1985, 1989, and 1990), James Cameron’s *The Abyss* (1989), John McTiernan’s *Predator* (1987), Robert Zemeckis’s *Forrest Gump* (1994), and Steven Spielberg’s *Ready Player One* (2018). In the MCU, he composed the music for *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011), *Marvel’s The Avengers* (2012), *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018), and

⁴ Andy Hill, *Scoring the Screen: The Secret Language of Film Music. Music Pro Guides* (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard Books, 2017), 160.

Avengers: Endgame (2019). Furthermore, Silvestri can be accredited with “streamlining” the sound of the universe. While it is unclear whether he worked with some of the later composers, other composers worked off what he created in *Marvel’s The Avengers*, or whether it was a studio decision, elements of Silvestri’s music can be heard in many of the films after the 2012 *Marvel’s The Avengers*.

To truly understand the sonic landscape of the MCU, it is important to understand the music of the *Avengers* films, a series of four films within the broader 23 films. These four films are the combination of all the things that these characters experience, combining character and plot storylines of several more films and creating the climax of an eleven-year narrative, running from 2008 to 2019. As the composer for three of the four films, Silvestri needed to not only lay the groundwork for Danny Elfman (composer for *Avengers: Age of Ultron*), but he also created a sonic narrative that spanned the music of four films.

This document explores the music of the films in the *Avengers* enterprise: *Marvel’s The Avengers*, *Avengers: Infinity War*, and *Avengers: Endgame* (subsequently referred to as “the three films”).⁵ The study excludes the second film in the series, *Avengers: Age of Ultron* due to the film having a different composer. Also, the second film is outside the narrative theme that is present throughout the other three films. Films one, three, and four all have a plot on a galactic scale and are centered on storyline’s “infinity stones,” and more specifically the villain Thanos. The second film, however, has a plot centered on Midgard (earth), and although there is an infinity stone present in the plot, the villain Thanos is not directly involved in the events of this film.

This study uses a combination of film music studies and theory-based analysis to support the findings with the aim of identifying connecting musical elements that stretch throughout these

⁵ The soundtracks were recorded by the London Symphony Orchestra.

three films, including the use of leitmotif, new themes that are based on old themes, music introduced later that is used with respect to previously introduced music, musical similarity and contrast, as well as ways the music fits in the larger dramatic scheme of each film, and the overall function of film music.

CHAPTER ONE

The Music of *MARVEL'S THE AVENGERS* (2012)

Loki, brother of Thor, wages war on Midgard (Earth). His ultimate goal is to take control of the Tesseract and harness its power to bring an army (the Chitauri) to subjugate all humanity. In effort to combat Loki's actions, Nick Fury (director of S.H.I.E.L.D.) must call on Earth's mightiest heroes: Iron Man, The Incredible Hulk, Thor, Captain America, Hawkeye and Black Widow. The team must overcome their differences and work together to defeat Loki and his Chitauri forces.

The term leitmotif is most associated with the operas of Richard Wagner, most notably, his cycle of four operas – *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, in which he represented characters, places, situations, and cyclical ideas with a short musical phrase.⁶ Since Wagner, many composers have utilized leitmotifs, however, it has largely been used in musical spectacles. Over time, this compositional technique found its way into film, where it is utilized in many films (such as: *The Abyss*, Alan Silvestri; *Star Wars* series, John Williams; *The Lord of the Rings* series, Howard Shore; *Harry Potter* series, John Williams). Like many hero-oriented films, the *Avengers* films contain many leitmotifs. These motifs or themes can symbolize characters, objects, places, and emotions. These films themes serve different purposes: they reveal when a character has the upper-hand in an exchange; foreshadow the direction of the next scene; reinforce what the viewer should be feeling or paying attention to; and in some cases, hint that what the viewer is seeing is not really happening. Themes can be transposed, and they often are, however, the tonal centers of the films

⁶ Willi Apel, *Harvard Dictionary of Music*, (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979), 467-68. For more information.

are used as expressive tonality.⁷ Expressive tonality occurs when a modulation of a tonal center is used to reinforce what is happening on screen, modulating up to increase the intensity and down to create a sense of relaxation or sadness. Thus, most themes in this document will be presented with the scale degrees and pitches that they first appear in. Each chapter will end with a table; these tables are cue sheets related to each film and are intended to be used in conjunction with this document and the film. The cue sheets can be used to follow along with the film providing a detailed listing of all the music and the presentations of themes. They also provide precise timings of all the themes, where they happen, and what is happening visually.

The first motif that is heard (at 00:13) is what I name the Tesseract theme. This theme later becomes the Infinity Stone theme, but, at the time of this film, the existence of the infinity stones is not yet revealed to the audience. This theme consists of a descending line based in G minor $\hat{3}, \hat{1}, \hat{1}, \# \hat{7}, \# \hat{7}, \hat{7}$ (Bb, G, G, F#, F#, F). This theme is heard when the Tesseract is on screen or the center of focus. The next themes introduced are both of Loki's themes. The first theme is an ascending melodic line (E, F#, F#, G); this theme is more about the minor motion than the scale degree. Loki's second theme is $\hat{3}, \hat{1}, \hat{3}, \hat{2}$ (Bb, G, Bb, A), this theme is usually present when Loki is doing something more sinister or when the overall feeling is ominous.

For the heroes, many characters have their own themes. The first theme that is presented is Black Widow's theme. This is slightly different from the rest of the team's theme. It has a longer melody and is more exotic with the use of a $b\hat{2}$, the whole theme is in G minor $\hat{5}, \hat{5}, \hat{4}, \hat{5}, \hat{6}, \hat{1}, \hat{5}, b\hat{2}, \hat{5}, \hat{1}$ (D, D, C, D, Eb, G, D, Ab, D, G). The next theme introduced is the Iron Man theme. This theme is similar to Loki's theme in that it is built on a minor third (D, E, F, A,

⁷ Frank Lehman, *Hollywood Harmony: Musical Wonder and the Sound of Cinema*. Oxford Music/media Series, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), 54-55.

D, E, F). It usually continues to ascend through two octaves. The second aspect that is unique to Iron Man's character is that he is one of the few characters that is tied to diegetic music.⁸ An instance of this is in the scene when Iron Man hacks S.H.I.E.L.D's transport known as the Quinjet, when entering to help Captain America fight Loki. The song is "Shoot to Thrill" by AD/DA, this is the same song he uses in an entrance in *Iron Man 2* (2010).⁹ There is also a theme for Tony Stark; it is based on the progression i-VI-v-IV and the melody is the thirds from each chord. Captain America's theme is very similar to the theme introduced in *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011; Alan Silvestri was the composer for this film), however, in this film it is heard in minor. The change in his theme signifies that this character has changed; the theme is $\hat{1}, \hat{1}, \text{low } \hat{5}, \hat{1}, \hat{4}, \hat{3}, \hat{6}$ (G, G, D, G, C, Bb, Eb). Thor's theme is (E, G, B, C, G, B), but he also has a second theme that only occurs when he is preparing a "god blast" (Ab, Db, E, F). Finally, Hulk's theme is Gs in octaves, a reference to composer Craig Armstrong's musical theme from *The Incredible Hulk* (2008), because it only occurs once in the film¹⁰ (Such cross-film references also serve as cues for viewers).

The last theme is the Avengers theme itself. This theme can be broken down into two parts. The first part is the theme that is introduced when the helicopter flies over the mountains (at 1:19). This part is rhythmically driven by sixteenth notes with two different melodies: first, in minor $\hat{1}, \hat{1}, \hat{2}, \hat{3}, \hat{4}, \hat{1}$; second, $\hat{5}, \hat{4}, \hat{3}, \hat{3}, \hat{4}, \hat{5}, \hat{5}, \hat{1}, \hat{5}, \hat{4}, \hat{3}, \hat{3}, \hat{2}, \hat{1}$. The second part of the theme is first heard at the title screen at (11:39). The theme is only heard in its entirety when the team is fully

⁸ Diegetic music is music in the film that is part of the setting and can be heard by the characters.

⁹ AD/DA's music was also used in *Iron Man* (2008), however, with a different song "Back In Black"

¹⁰ Christopher Bill, *Marvel Music Analysis: Avengers (2012) by Alan Silvestri - Complete Leitmotif Breakdown*, 2019. Accessed October 24, 2019. <https://youtu.be/k6ubic0mWUE>, 18:14. All themes discussed in this paper were derived by Anthony Walker, with the exception of Hulk's theme.

assembled. In this part the rhythm is augmented, eighth notes rather than sixteenths, with a broader melody $\hat{1}, \hat{5}, \hat{4}, \hat{3}, \hat{2}, \hat{1}; \hat{1}, \hat{5}, \hat{6}, \hat{4}, \hat{5}; \hat{1}, \hat{5}, \hat{4}, \hat{3}, \hat{2}, \hat{1}, \hat{2}, \hat{1}$.

Outside of all these themes, Silvestri uses tritones throughout the film.¹¹ These tritones always signal that something bad is either happening or about to occur. The direction of the tritone often symbolizes the direction of something that is happening. This use of tritones is similar to a commotional style called word painting – commonly used in vocal music – the music reflects the literal meaning of the text.¹² Another technique Silvestri uses is the combining of character themes with other music when characters are working together; for the viewer this makes the scene more impactful. It also solidifies the feeling of this being a superhero team film and not just another solo hero film. Furthermore, it reinforces the idea of teamwork; this is shown through how masterfully the full Avengers theme starts once the team is fully assembled.

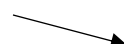
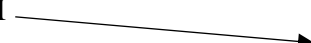
¹¹ Tritone is an interval composed of three adjacent whole tones, i.e. an augmented fourth or diminished fifth


¹² Apel, *Harvard Dictionary of Music*, 928. For more information.

Table 1. Cue Sheet for *MARVEL'S THE AVENGERS* (2012)

Composer: Alan Silvestri

Director: Joss Whedon

Timing	Visual Cue	Music	Notes
:02	Marvel comic strips	Ominous	
:13	the Tesseract	Tesseract theme 	Descending line Full theme (Bb, G, G, F#, F#, F).
:35	Up the steps	Loki theme I And II 	Ascending melodic line (E, F#, F#, G) (Bb, G, Bb, A)
1:11	Flash into the Tesseract	Ascending line (part of Iron Man theme)	Music question/answer (Iron Man)
1:19	Helicopter flying over the mountains	Avengers theme I	
2:03	Fury starts talking	Creates a sense of unease	Descending motion D to C
2:15	Talking about the Tesseract	Tesseract theme	Descending motion continues after
3:05	Tesseract reacts to touch	Stop	Large section of dialog
3:42	Hawkeye appears	Ascending motion D to Eb	1 st avenger, contrary motion, sense of hope?
3:50	Talking about the Tesseract	Tesseract theme	
4:19	Tesseract	Stop	The portal is opening
5:10	Loki's face is shown	Ominous music with Loki theme II	Descending motion Bb, G, Bb, A
5:35	Fighting begins	Stop	
5:48		Ominous music extended with larger orchestration	
6:03	Loki grabs Hawkeye	Stop	
6:10	Loki turns Hawkeye	Ominous	
6:38	Conversation between Loki and Fury	Subtle tension with harmonic motion	Climaxes at big moments (turning Selvig) most "dead space" during dialog
6:59	End of introduction	i-V-vi-iv-V in D minor	Melody-A, Bb, G, A
8:22	Barton shots	Chase music	Musically more active creating suspense
9:54	explosion	Stop	Builds tension before the explosion

10:06	Ground collapsing	Similar to the chase music Without the faster rhythmic sections	Creates a sense that it isn't over, however, the chase has past the climax
10:50	The helicopter is shot down	Stop	
11:09	Survivors are checking each other's status	Creates a sense of defeat	
11:39	Avengers title	Avengers theme II	
11:49	Train	Stop	
12:05	Natasha being questioned	Soft, barely auditable Black Widow theme 	Music is background, under the dialog (D, D, C, D, Eb, G, D, Ab, D, G)
13:26	Phone rings	Stop	
14:18	Fighting starts	Percussion driven	With the Black Widow theme
14:55	Phone	Stop	
15:21	Running through the streets of India	Middle Eastern sounding create a feeling of being somewhere else	Change in music with the location change
16:28	Banner	Stop	
18:08	Photo of the Tesseract	Tesseract theme	
18:40	Banner hits the table	Stop	
20:30	Captain America	Remembering/longing	Triumphant sounding but in minor
21:06	Brakes the bag	Stop	
22:40	Talking about the Tesseract	Tesseract theme	
23:20	Iron Man	Iron Man theme	Built on minor thirds
24:15	Tony Stark coming out of the suit	Tony Stark theme	i-VI-v-IV
24:50	Pepper and Tony	Stop	
27:17	Romantic moment between Tony and Pepper Potts	Romance- lightens the mood	Different than anything previously heard
27:46	Tony grads the "Tesseract"	Stop	
29:17	Loki's forces mobilizing	Ominous music with Loki theme II	
29:54	Loki's projection	Tesseract theme	
31:30	The Other touches Loki	Stop	
31:37	Helicarrier	Avengers theme I, varied	The team starts to assemble

32:10	Cap and Natasha speaking	Stop	
33:02	Helicarrier	Hopeful theme, elements of the Avengers theme	Hope for success, showing all the things at their disposal
34:55	Fury	Stop	
35:57	Loki's forces discussing plans	Ominous music with Loki theme II and theme I	
36:41	Back at S.H.I.E.L.D.	Stop	
37:22	Loki at the event	Schubert-String quartet No. 13 (Diegetic music)	Both diegetic and not, it enforces that it is all happening simultaneously
39:16	Hawkeye pull out the iridium	Stop	
39:30	Loki "changes" back to his normal cloths	Builds the tension	Music tops during car crash
40:07	Loki yells "kneel"	Stop	
40:20	Loki's speech	Variation of Loki theme	
40:50	Older man stands up	Music becomes more hopeful	Changing the mood
41:15	Cap appears	Captain America theme	Same theme from <i>The First Avenger</i> but in minor (G, G, D, G, C, Bb, Eb)
41:43	Fight between Loki and Cap	The music follows the flow of the fight	Sounding more triumphant when Cap seems to be winning and more sinister with Loki has the upper hand
42:12	Iron Man talking	"Shoot to Thrill" by AD/DA	same from Iron Man 2, at the expo Diegetic music
42:32		Stop	dialog
42:49	Transporting Loki on the quinjet	Ominous music	Creating a sense of unease
43:00		Stop	dialog
43:43	Thor lands on the quinjet	Thor theme/use of the tritone right before Thor hits Iron Man	1 st :(E, G, B, C, G, B) (E, B, C, Bb) question
44:06	Thor grabs Loki	D, Eb, F, G, Ab ascending a tritone	Represent bad decisions and increasing tension
44:49	Thor drops Loki	Stop	Dialog
46:22		Loki theme I and II	
47:02	Iron Man tackles Thor	Stop	

47:49	Thor and Iron Man start fighting	Loki themes transposed and use of Tritones Combination of Thor and Iron Man themes with undertones of Loki themes	Breaks in the music for dialog and to increase the tension Lots of half step motion
49:57	Thor hits Cap's shield	Stop	
50:39	Loki looks at Banner	Loki theme II	
50:54	Door closes	Stop	
52:00	Fury walking	G, A, Bb, D, Eb, D Followed by Loki theme	Loki in control
52:54	Monitor turns off	Stop	Large section of dialog
58:16	Stark talking about hacking SHIELD	Very low – Loki themes	
58:58	Cap	Rhythmic pattern	Represents Cap's mind turning
59:10	Banner	Stop	
1:00:30	Banner and Tony	Iron Man theme	
1:00:43	Cap	Loki theme II	Doing what Loki wants
1:01:15	Salvig working with the Tesseract	Tesseract theme	
1:01:30	Change in location	Stop	
1:02:30	Thor reminiscing	Solo horn	Thor putting the weight on himself
1:02:54	Talking about what Loki wants	Loki theme I	
1:03:40	Loki talking to Black Widow	Stop	
1:04:33	Black Widow sits down	Black Widow theme and Loki themes playing against each other	The shifting themes represent a "fight" with words...the God of mischief vs the spy
1:06:23	Loki's threats	Long crescendo with rising glis	
1:06:48	Widow looks up	Stop	The spy won
1:06:54	Talking on the radio	Hopeful theme twisted and in minor Mixing Loki theme	Stops or gets quiet for dialog...stop for dramatic pause, decreased volume to increase the tension
1:12:35	Hawkeye Blows one of the engines Hawkeye's (Loki) team moving	Action music Ascending lines to create a sense of angst Lots of dissonance Thor theme varied	Melodic line C, G, Ab, Db Hints at tritones

1:14:06	Widow talking to Banner/Hulk	Stop	
1:14:44	Bruce turns into Hulk	Sadness	D, Bb, C, A
1:15:07	Widow vs Hulk	Chase music Tritones and half steps	Ab, A, D Stops when the on Loki's face
1:15:26	Fury giving orders	Rhythmic focus, no melodies	
1:15:45	Cap and Iron Man working on the engine	Start with Avengers theme II Mixes Cap theme and Iron Man theme	
1:16:32	Widow vs Hulk	Stop	
1:16:52	Hulk chasing Widow	Chase music Heavy horns Tritones and half steps	
1:17:06	Hulk hits Widow	Stop	Some dissonance on F (F# sus resolving to F) builds the tension before Thor saves Widow
1:17:19	Hulk vs Thor	Crescendos and glisses	(D# sus resolving to D)
1:17:44	Cap and Iron Man	Mixes Cap theme and Iron Man theme	
1:18:16	Hulk vs Thor	Rhythmic focus	
1:19:05	Fury	Rhythmic focus with dissonance	
1:19:34	Hulk vs Thor	Rhythmic focus with dissonance	
1:19:39	Fury	Rhythmic focus with dissonance	
1:20:49	Cap and Iron Man	Mixes Cap theme and Iron Man theme	
1:21:34	Fury	Tritones	
1:22:26	Cap and Iron Man	Cap/Iron Man theme	
1:22:55	Thor vs Loki	Stop	Mostly dialog
1:23:18	Hawkeye vs Widow	Percussive music	
1:23:43	Thor vs Loki	Stop	Mostly dialog
1:24:30	Loki points at the blood	Ominous music	
1:24:52	Thor falls	Stop	
1:25:00	Hawkeye vs Widow	Percussive music	
1:25:19	Widow wins	Stop	
1:26:33	Fury	Rhythmically active	
1:26:47	Cap and Iron Man	Cap/Iron Man theme	
1:27:21	Iron Man hit the blade	Stop	

1:27:33	Iron Man starts flying	Cap/Iron Man theme	
1:27:46	Loki escapes	Loki theme II	
1:27:56	Fury talking to Colson	Stop	
1:28:30	Colson dies	High strings - longing	
1:31:04	Thor	Stop	
1:34:44	Nat and Barton	Black Widow theme	
1:35:17	Cap and Iron Man talking	Stop	
1:36:15	Tony and Cap talking	Loki theme and Iron Man theme	
1:37:10	Thor	Avengers theme variation	
1:39:11	Iron Man lands	Loki and Iron Man themes	
1:39:50	Loki	Stop	
1:40:35	Tony	Loki and Iron Man themes	very quiet
1:41:10	Scepter touches Tony reactor	Stop	
1:41:41	Suit breaks the window	Iron Man theme II	
1:42:10	Iron Man shot Loki	Stop	
1:42:24	Long fight scene	fight music Very active, combines previous themes	Pauses to add the drama Use of tritones Changing textures and feels depending on who's on screen
1:50:44	Banner pulls up	Stop	
1:51:25	The Avengers fully assemble	Full Avengers theme II	
1:53:32	Thor conjuring lightning	preparing a god blast	<i>Ab, Db, E, F</i>
1:55:09	Hulk	Hulk theme	Octave Gs
1:56:08	Black Widow	Black Widow theme	
1:56:41	Large section of teamwork	Avengers theme II	
1:57:18	Chitauri Leviathan crashes	Stop	
1:57:32	Salvig	Ominous musical question	<i>Bb, G, G, Gb</i> Similar the Tesseract theme/Salvig wondering "What have I done?"
1:57:50	Mirror	Cap theme	
1:58:37	The people	Empty/without hope	Wondering if they can win

1:59:20	Widow	fight music	
2:00:09	Loki's speech	Loki Theme II	
2:00:14	Interrupted but the Hulk	Stop	
2:00:54		Tesseract theme	
2:01:05	Thor and Iron Man	fight music and Iron Man theme	
2:02:10	The team becomes overwhelmed	Solemn Music	
2:04:50	Iron Man	Rhythmically active	
2:06:03	Nuke through the portal	Stop	Dramatic effect
2:06:06	Agent Hill	Solemn Music	
2:07:00	Stops right before Cap says close it	Stop	Dramatic effect
2:07:35	Iron Man is falling	Solemn until Hulk catches him, then triumphant	
2:08:13	Hulk yells	Stop	Dialog
2:09:02	The team in front of Loki	Avengers theme II	
2:09:36	People talking about the Avengers	Grateful	
2:10:45	Fury talking to the council	Tesseract theme/Avengers theme	
2:12:33	Stark and	Avengers theme II	
2:13:03	Credits	Avengers Theme I and II	
2:15:00	Space	Stop	
2:15:42	Thanos	Sinister	

The use of thematic material in this film helps viewers to follow and understand the narrative of the film. Each character (with the exception of Hawkeye) is introduced with his or her respective theme. As the characters grow more dependent on each other, the themes become less pronounced. Silvestri also begins combining themes to reinforce the concept of teamwork (see 1:17:44). This scene where Captain America and Iron Man are working together to repair the Helicarrier is the first scene where the heroes stop acting as individuals and began working as a team. Once the team is fully assembled, Silvestri virtually abandons character themes, only using them in moments where a hero was doing something that only they could: Thor preparing a “god

blast” (1:53:32); Hulk smashing the biggest “bad guy” (1:55:09); Black Widow “infiltrating” the enemy (1:56:08); and Captain America’s persistence (1:57:50). These short recalls of the theme reminds the viewers that each member of the team is unique.

CHAPTER TWO

The Music of *AVENGERS: INFINITY WAR* (2018)

Immediately after the destruction of Asgard, the mad titan Thanos – already possessing the power stone – and his Children (The Black Order - Proxima Midnight, Ebony Maw, Corvus Glaive and Cull Obsidian) begin their hunt for the Infinity Stones. While traveling across the cosmos, the fractured Avengers must overcome the events of *Captain America: Civil War* while bolstering their ranks with allies such as Dr. Strange, Spider-Man, Black Panther, and the Guardians of the Galaxy to try and stop Thanos in his goal to wipeout half of all existence. As stated previously, this document will not discuss the second film, *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, because it is outside the narrative theme that is present throughout the other three films.

Avengers: Infinity War is a distinctive film and soundtrack. What makes this film so different is that the heroes are not the protagonists. This film centers on Thanos's journey to overcome the Avengers to bring about his ultimate goal of the "salvation" of the universe. Understanding this plot point is crucial in understanding the music. Furthermore, like *Marvel's The Avengers*, much of this music in is set in minor tonality, which can make "good and bad" somewhat ambiguous. This directly contradicts most people's impressions on how film music should sound. "The hero swoops in to the sound of a brash major fanfare...A screechingly dissonant stinger announces the arrival of the villain...A bold modulation hurtles across tonal space, just as the camera pans over a fantastic new landscape."¹³ Silvestri takes a "newer" approach. Much like Hans Zimmer's soundtracks for the *Dark Knight* film trilogy (2005, 2008, 2012), the themes are more about world building than "good and bad." Sonic world building is a

¹³ Frank Lehman, *Hollywood Harmony: Musical Wonder and the Sound of Cinema*. Oxford Music/media Series, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), 15.

common goal of most fantasy film composers. Much like the visual building of a world, sonic world building is creating a structural sound that is closely aligned with the world at large. By doing so, viewers are “transported” to this new world and are more likely to suspend belief.

Starting with Thanos, the film starts with a vi – i (*Eb* minor to *G* minor), with half step contrary motion *Eb* to *D* and *F#* to *G*. This is Thanos’s first theme, and it can be heard anytime a character is discussing him or when he is on screen. His second theme is only heard once. It occurs when he places the space stone in the gauntlet *B, Bb, B, Db, B, G, D, Eb, Ab, Bb, B, Db, D*. Although this theme is only heard once, it is extremely important. The music in this whole scene is contradictory to the concept of superhero soundtracks. This section begins when Ebony Maw presents Thanos with the Tesseract (i.e. Space stone). Here, the viewer is presented with a beautiful melody in the high string. When Thanos puts the stone in the gauntlet, Thanos’s theme II is sweepingly triumphant, not doom and gloom. This is the first hint that give insight into whose journey this film is about. The next piece of music pertaining to Thanos is the Thanos “just” motif. Thanos believes he is on a noble quest to save the universe before it destroys itself because he believes the ends justify the means, so he will do whatever is possible. The motif that coincides with this ideology can be heard at about (1:05:57). The motif is in *Db* minor $\hat{5}, \hat{6}, \hat{1}, \hat{5}$ (*A, Ab, Db, Ab*). The impactful aspect about this theme is it can be heard when Gamora is talking about Thanos and his actions, however it is through her eyes, so the theme is changed and contains tritones (*Bb, A, Eb, A*). The use of the tritone makes the motif sound more menacing. Contrasting, through Thanos’s eyes, the tritones become a perfect fourth; this is also another instance of Silvestri using expressive tonality. The motif is transposed down a half-step creating a sense of relaxation and piece, while the perfect fourth creates sense of contentment. After all these themes, if viewers are still not convinced that this film is about Thanos’s journey, Silvestri spells it out plainly with the

music after “the snap”. When Thanos gets to “The Garden”, the music that is presented is triumphant and serene; it is one of the largest melodic sections in the film. The section ends with a smile on Thanos’s face 4-3 sus Picardy third¹⁴ in G, signifying a happy ending for Thanos.

The next big theme present in this film is the magic theme, $\hat{1}, \hat{2}, b\hat{6}$ or $\hat{1}, b\hat{2}, b\hat{6}$ or $\hat{2}, \hat{1}, b\hat{6}$ or $b\hat{2}, \hat{1}, b\hat{6}$. The presence of these intervals were used when there was something “supernatural” occurring (i.g. magic, mind reading, Spidey senses, or sometimes even infinity stones). A few examples of this theme are: Ebony Maw using magic to bind Thor, Spider-Man’s Spidey senses on the bus, and Mantis reading Thor’s emotions. The most crucial use of this theme, however, comes in the scene where the Guardians go to Knowhere to defeat Thanos. When the team is watching Thanos question the Collector, this theme can be heard right before Thanos steps on him. The presence of this theme is actually meant to alert the viewer that this is not real.

The last theme introduced in this film is the sacrifice theme. It can be heard twice: when Thanos sacrifices Gamora to get the soul stone and when Scarlet Witch sacrifices Vision to prevent Thanos from getting the mind stone. The theme is the same both times, showing that both characters truly believed there was no other way to achieve their goal (getting all the stones or preventing him from obtaining them). It also shows that although many believe Thanos to be a “monster”, he sincerely loved Gamora, even as much as Scarlet Witch loved Vision. This theme is in G minor: **Bb**, A, C, A, then **G**, A, *Bb*, *Bb*, G, C, A, then **E**, D, C, **B**, then **B**, *Eb*, *Ab*, *Bb*, B, *Ab*, **B**, *Bb*.¹⁵

¹⁴ Picardy third is when a musical section ends with a major chord of the tonic, while the preceding music is either modal or in a minor key.

¹⁵ The chord changes are marked by bold note names and the chords progression is: pedal G, Gm, C/G, Am, GM, Abm, Ebm sus⁶⁻⁵

Table 2. Cue Sheet for *AVENGERS: INFINITY WAR* (2018)

Composer: Alan Silvestri

Directors: Anthony and Joseph Russo

Timing	Visual Cue	Music	Notes
:15	Comic strips	Thanos theme I	vi – i, half step motion Eb minor to G minor
3:03	Thanos gives Loki a choice	Eerie, creating tension	
3:33	Loki, “Stop”	Stop	
3:44	Loki revise the Tesseract	Embellished Loki theme II (from Avengers)	Bb, G, Bb, A Use of downward tritone preceding D, Eb, A
4:15	Hulk vs Thanos	Fight music, full of action Thanos theme I	The mood of the music flows the battle, Hulk-trumpets Thanos-low brass
5:11	Ebony Maw using magic	Magic theme	1̂, 2̂, b6̂ D, E, Bb
5:20	Heimdall praying	Dramatic, Heimdall theme	A, Ab, Gb, F
5:34		Stop	
5:39	Thanos looking at Heimdall	Dark, preceding something “bad” Thanos theme I	G, A, Bb
5:50	Thanos kill Heimdall	Sorrowful	
6:07	Maw cover Thor’s mouth	Magic theme	1̂, 2̂, b6̂
6:15	Maw presenting Thanos with the Tesseract	Minor thirds, with a hit of beauty, high strings	Hinting at Thanos’s “dark” victory not just in the moment? Harp
7:06	Stone drops	Thanos theme II	B, Bb, B, Db, B, G, D, Eb, Ab, Bb, B, Db, D
7:33	Loki	Stop	Dialog
8:00	Loki’s introduction	i-V-vi-iv-V in G minor (quote from 1 st movie)	Melody-D, Eb, C, D
8:24	Thanos vs Loki	Half steps and thirds, creating a sense of unease	
9:15	Thor’s mouth is covered	Sorrowful	
9:40	Thanos uses a stone	Large and dramatic	Show the scale of Thanos’s power with the stones

10:07	Panning out from the ships	A final Loki theme I Broad symbolizing Loki is dead	<i>Bb, C, C, Db</i>
10:16	Hulk traveling through the Bifröst	Avengers theme I	Theme is a mix of the original and Danny Elfman's take. Giving a sense that the characters have grown
10:40	Wang	Stop	
11:09	"Thanos is coming"/Title screen	Avengers theme II	Theme is a mix of the original and Danny Elfman's take.
11:29	The city	Stop	
12:10	Tony talking about a bright future	Avengers theme variation	Hopeful sounding
12:50	Dr. Strange "Tony Stark"	Stop	Dialog
13:03	"We need your help"	Tension	
13:09	Bruce walks through the portal		<i>D, C, Db</i>
13:25	Wong explaining the infinity stones origin	Infinity stones theme	Was the Tesseract theme
14:00	Eye of Agamotto opens	Stop	
14:08	"Thanos"	Thanos theme I	
14:33		Stop	Dialog
15:50	Talking about Cap	Reminiscence	Use of tritones to signal how bad it is
16:51	Cell phone	Stop	
18:15	Parker's hair moves	Magic theme	$\hat{1}, b\hat{2}, b\hat{6}$ Spidey senses
18:21	Spider-Man getting ready	Spider-Man theme or Avengers theme variation	
18:58	Tony	Stop	
19:05	Dr. Strange	Strong Chords Dm, D#m, Em	Showing the scale of his power
19:14	Tony looks back	Stop	
19:24	Part of the black order	Ominous	
19:58	Dr. Strange ready for a fight	Music livens still with empty space, creating a sense of angst	Ends with a heavy tritone motion, basically saying something bad is about to happen (<i>Ab, D, Db, C</i>)
20:20	Stark and Banner	Avengers theme II	

21:17	Black order vs Avengers	Pulsating, Becomes more active when Iron Man fights Cull Obsidian, Stopping for big moments, elements of the Avengers theme	Creates a sense that this is a different kind of fight, not about brute strength...also doesn't favor either side in the beginning, however, begins to as the fight progresses
24:33	Cull Obsidian falls through portal	Stop	
24:49	Iron Man takes off	Continues	Mostly heroic
25:54	Iron Man is in the ship	Stop	
26:38	Spidey is still on the ship	Continues	
26:57	Banner picks up the phone	Stop	
27:18	Steve Rogers number	"Rubber band Man" by the Spinners Diegetic music	Hinting to where the next scene is
28:37	Groot	Stop	
29:05	The Guardians arrive	Gloomy music	G, Ab, Gb
29:27	Thor on the table	Infinity stones theme	
29:57	Mantis	Magic theme	$\hat{1}, b\hat{2}, b\hat{6}$ Mantis mind reading
30:28	Mantis waking Thor	Magic theme	$\hat{1}, b\hat{2}, b\hat{6}$ Mantis waking Thor
30:35	Thor breathing	Rhythmic, heartbeat like	
30:50		Stop	Large section of dialog
33: 15	Discussing the stones	Infinity stones theme	
34:03		Stop	No longer discussing the stones
35:00	Assembling into teams	Hero's theme variations Minor third motion G, F, Ab	
35:44	Thor, Rocket, Grot depart	Stop	
36:27	Wanda and Vision	Sacrifice theme	Originated in Captain America, using now to symbolize sacrificing past commitments
37:31	Wanda starts walking	Tension	
37:44	The ship on the TV	Dramatic	

38:01	Vision is stabbed	Action, Hero's theme	Minor third motion Ab, Gb, A (Avengers) Downward tritones motion (Black order)
39:50	Fall through the roof	Stop	
40:15	Proxima Midnight and Corvus Glaive come through the roof	Ominous	
40:40	Cap catches Proxima Midnight's staff	Avengers theme I	
41:44	Black order leaves	Stop	
41:48	Cap talking to Vision	Continues	
42:20	Gamora's past	Stop	
42:43	Chitauri	Thanos theme I	
43:42	Thanos talking to Gamora	High strings	The beauty in the string represent how Thanos believe he's just
44:29	Present Gamora	Stop	Dialog
45:11	"Kill me"	Creates tension	
46:24	Drax	Stop	Added silence to make the moment more awkward
47:06	Arriving at Knowhere	Dramatic, building tension	
48:00	Drax walking	Stop	
48:11	Thanos stepping on the Collector	Magic theme	$\hat{1}, \hat{2}, b\hat{6}$ Alerting the viewer, this isn't real...
49:15	Mantis puts Drax to sleep	Stop	
49:27	Thanos throw the Collector	Low string create tension, strong chords	
50:08	Thanos falls	Sorrow/remorseful	Similar to the music when Loki is killed
50:51	Thanos talks	Ominous/Thanos theme I and II	
51:44	Gamora reaches for her sword	Chords on big moments	
52:01	"let her go"	Sorrowful	
53:33	Bobbles	Stop	
53:48	Thanos leaves	Dramatic	
54:05	Quinjet	Stop	
54:43	Cap walks in	Avengers theme II	

55:34	Rhodey closes the call	Stop	Dialog
55:59	Banner	Avengers theme II variation	
56:25	Rhodey	Stop	
57:04	Vision talking to Witch	Infinity stone theme Thanos theme I	Discussing destroying the mind stone
57:54	Banner talking	Music becomes more hopeful	
58:29	“Find someone fast”	Black Panther theme	Change in music/change in location
59:35	Dr. Strange	Stop	
1:00:12	Torturing Dr. Strange	Half step motion	
1:00:40		Stop	
1:01:37	Back to Torturing	Magic theme	$b\hat{2}, \hat{1}, b\hat{6}$
1:01:53	Iron Man	More rhythmic/Avengers theme	
1:02:42	Ebony Maw	Stop	Dialog
1:04:30	“we go to him”	Minor third motion G, F, <i>Ab</i>	
1:04:54	Dubbing Spidey	Avengers theme II	Spidey officially an Avenger
1:05:08	Thanos’s ship	Stop	
1:05:17	The throne room	Thanos theme I	
1:05:34	Thanos offering food	Stop	
1:05:57	Thanos justifying himself	Thanos just motif <i>A, Ab, Db, Ab</i> Perfect fourth instead of a tritone because to Thanos, he is just	Music starts with Gamora’s view which contains a tritone (<i>Bb, A, Eb, A</i>), This theme is a direct response like Thanos’s words
1:07:30	Thanos walking	Thanos theme I	
1:09:01	Thanos using a stone	Magic theme	$\hat{1}, b\hat{2}, b\hat{6}$
1:09:19	Thanos pulling his arm away	Thanos theme I	Pause for the recording and dialog
1:10:53	Team Thor	Stop	dialog
1:13:23	Thor sitting	Hopeful	
1:14:01	“up my”	Stop	
1:14:16	Nidavellir	Mysterious	Hollow in texture
1:15:32	“Stop”	Stop	
1:16:37	Eitri describing what Thanos did	Thanos theme I	
1:16:47	Thor talking of killing Thanos	Heroic	
1:17:06	Nebula	Stop	

1:17:15	Nebula's eye	More rhythmic	
1:17:51	The ship Stark is on	Tritones Ending with Minor third motion <i>Ab, Gb, Ab, A</i>	The ship is crashing
1:18:51	Dialog	strings, lighthearted	Spidey comedy, <i>Ab, Gb, Ab, A, Ab, Gb</i>
1:19:08	Bomb goes off	Action music	
1:20:03	"Where Gamora"	Stop	Dialog
1:21:02	Nidavellir	Dramatic	
1:21:29	"The Bifrost"	Thor theme	<i>D, F, A, Bb, A</i>
1:21:51	Titan		Change in location
1:22:07	Tony looks back	Stop	Dialog
1:23:52	Dr. Strange using the time stone	Magic theme	$\hat{1}, \hat{2}, b\hat{6}$
1:24:13	Vormir	More rhythmic	
1:25:00	Red Skull	Mystic and empty	
1:27:17	Laughing	Stop	
1:28:22	Thanos turns around	Empty	Percussion
1:29:06	Gamora realizing what is about to happen	Sacrifice theme II	
1:30:33	Thanos with the soul stone	Infinity stone theme	
1:31:06	Team Cap	Avengers theme I	
1:32:00	"Should we bow"	Stop	
1:32:22	Bucky	Avengers theme variation	
1:33:25	Earth's Atmosphere	Tremolos and glisses Avengers theme variation continues	Eerie
1:36:46	Thor jumps	Action music	Mood changes with depending on group
1:37:55	Proxima Midnight	Stop	Dialog
1:38:16	"you are in Wakanda"	Minor third motion <i>G, F, Ab, D, F</i>	This minor third motion is present in most battles, Foreshadowing what's to come?
1:38:28	Pods open	Stop	
1:38:50	Forest	Stagnant, building tension	
1:39:47	Shots fired	Battle music Rhythmically more active Minor third motion Avengers theme variation	Volume decreases for dialog, pauses for affect, mood changes when location changes, but the main elements of the music stays the same. This creates a feeling that

			it is all happening at the same time
1:44:32	Bucky	Mood is darker	the tide of battle has turned
1:45:18	The Bifrost opens/Thor arrives	Avengers theme II	The tide of battle has turned again
1:45:56	Thanos arrives on Titan	Thanos theme I	
1:47:00	Reality stone	Thanos just motif	
1:48:08	Thanos looks up	Battle music	
1:50:30	Mantis lands on Thanos	Stop	
1:51:28	Nebula	Sacrifice theme II	Thanos morning over Gamora
1:52:40	Thanos looks at the moon	Dramatic, large texture	
1:53:03	Wakanda	Battle music	Texture, volume change for dialog
1:54:00	Witch see something	Stop	
1:54:25	Witch decides to join the fight	Continues	Same elements
1:57:12	Cull Obsidian's hand	Stop	
1:57:28	Proxima Midnight	Continues	
1:59:15	Dr. Strange vs Thanos	Music changes, more whimsical	Do to the nature of the fight...magic vs magic
2:00:08	Iron Man lands	Stop	dialog
2:00:25	Rockets	Battle music Continues	
2:01:28	Stark gets stabbed	Stop	
2:01:32	Tony backing up	Sorrowful, high strings	
2:02:10	"Stop"	Stop	
2:02:26	Dr. Strange giving up the stone	Sacrifice theme	
2:03:13	Stone in the gauntlet	Bb minor to A minor	
2:03:22	Quin shoots	Battle music Continues	
2:03:32	"Where is he"	Stop	
2:03:56	M'Baku/Wakanda	Battle music Continues	
2:04:18	Witch lands	Stop	The lack of music creates an eerie filling, that and the added sound effects
2:05:00	Thanos	Menacing chords G minor, Eb minor, D minor, Db	Thanos theme backwards i – vi
2:05:54	Vision and Witch	Outline of the Avengers theme	Augmented
2:06:34	"I just feel you"	Sacrifice theme II	

2:08:30	Mind stone explodes	Stop	
2:08:56	Thanos looks up	Thanos theme I	
2:10:06	Thanos put the stone in the gauntlet	Triumphant fanfare	
2:10:16	Lighting hits Thanos	lightning theme	C, F, Ab, A
2:10:27	Thor lands	Chromaticism	
2:10:52		High strings	Proceeds something bad
2:11:09	The snap	Stop	
2:11:44	Child Gamora	Spatial/empty texture	Symbolizing the vastness of the Soulworld
2:12:19	Wakanda	Stop	
2:16:33	The Garden	Triumphant and serene Motif: G, D, C, Eb Melody is based off the Avengers theme	Large section of melody Longest melody ending with a true cadence, 4-3 sus Picardy third in G
2:17:30	Credits	Tells Thanos's journey through the movie	starts with music similar to: when he killed Loki, then Sacrifice theme II, then the music from the Garden
2:19:49	Final title screen	Avengers theme II	

During *Infinity War*, Silvestri mostly abandons character themes (with the exception of Thanos) for more large scale themes; he started this idea at the end of the first film. The Avengers endured many challenges (battling Loki, Ultron, and even themselves) that – narratively speaking – the plot is bigger than them as individuals. The only exception is with Thanos. The score for this film is saturated with the Thanos themes because Thanos is the protagonist. Also, everything up to this point has been leading to him. Additionally, Thanos's presence can be felt in almost every moment of this film, whether through his direct actions or through his children. The large-scale themes that Silvestri does focus on (magic, teamwork, and sacrifice), helps the viewers understand the magnitude of the universe, as well as, how connected it is. The use of magic (or extraordinary abilities) speaks to how “trivial” genius-level intellect and super-soldier serum really is in the cosmos. Due to this, individuals have to work together. Thus, individual themes are abandoned for

a higher use of the Avengers themes. Finally, beyond the size of the universe, all living creatures suffer from similar concepts: starvation, death, pride and (in the case of the score) sacrifice.

CHAPTER THREE

The Music of *AVENGERS: ENDGAME* (2019)

After the events of *Infinity war*, the remaining heroes – Iron Man, Captain America, Thor, Hulk, Black Widow, Hawkeye, War Machine, Ant-Man, Rocket Raccoon, Nebula, and Captain Marvel – are scattered across the universe. Each one impacted Thanos's actions differently. However, when presented with a viable plan to reverse the damage, the remaining Avengers and their allies must come together to overcome their defeat.

Typically in superhero films, the hero meets an obstacle or two that they have to rise above to reach their true goal. *Infinity war* flips this concept and makes the villain the protagonist and the heroes the obstacles. *Endgame* also deviates from the standard superhero film story arc. Instead of being an antagonist that the heroes must overcome, much of the film is spent overcoming their self-doubt and failure. The heroes do not interact with the “big bad” until two hours into the film. This element in the plot can be heard throughout the score.

The first theme presented is Tony’s rest theme; this theme starts with a pedal G and the melody is $\hat{3}, \hat{4}, \hat{1}, \hat{7}, \hat{5}$ (Bb, C, G, F, D). The second part of the theme is $\hat{5}, \hat{4}, \hat{5}, \hat{6}, \hat{5}, \hat{1}$ (D, C, D, Eb, C, D), it occurs while Tony is putting on his jacket. This theme can be heard while Tony is recording a message to Pepper right before he goes to sleep for what he believes to be the last time. This theme is extremely important because the only time it is heard again is after Tony snaps away Thanos and his army. Additionally, the second part of this theme is transposed to G major. This occurs because Tony completed his goal, whereas at the beginning of the film, he felt he was dying in failure. The last theme that pertains to Tony/Iron Man is his motivation theme or his motivation to correct his failure. This theme is G, A, C, Bb, Eb, D and can be heard twice, always relating to Peter/Spider-Man, first when Tony looks at a picture of Peter and second when Peter comes back.

There are several other new themes introduced in this film, one of which is a majestically regal statement in F minor $\hat{1}, \hat{1}, \hat{5}, \hat{5}, \hat{3}, \hat{2}, \hat{7}, \hat{1}$ (F, F, C, C, Ab, G, Eb, F); this statement signifies the team reuniting. The only other time this theme is represented is when T'Challa, Okoye, and Shuri walk through the portal to aid Captain America. The next new theme presented is the longing theme. This theme is used to convey a character's emotion with dealing with the snap. The full theme can be heard when Natasha is talking to Steve at the Avengers compound. It is in two parts: part one, $\hat{3}, \hat{4}, \hat{3}, \hat{2}, \hat{7}, \hat{1}$ (Bb, C, Bb, A, F, G) and part two, $\hat{3}, \hat{2}, \hat{1}, \hat{7}, \hat{3}, \hat{2}$ (Bb, A, G, F, Bb, A). This theme can be heard throughout the film. It is often partial or varied and occurs several times like $\hat{1}, \hat{2}, \hat{3}, \hat{2}, \hat{7}, \hat{1}$ which is the $\hat{3}, \hat{2}, \hat{1}$ in retrograde from part two and the $\hat{2}, \hat{7}, \hat{1}$ from part one combined.

When understanding the plot of the film (overcoming self-doubt and failure), there are a few musical elements that help the viewers to understand the struggles of the characters. One of these elements is the confusion motif, $\hat{5}, \hat{1}, \hat{5}$, followed by a tritone. This theme is heard when the viewers see the Avengers who are having the hardest time dealing with their new reality, Thor and Hawkeye. Thor is suffering from PTSD and has lost himself. The theme, in G minor, is heard after Professor Hulk mentions the name, Thanos. Another instance of the music showing brokenness is when Rocket is trying to get Thor to be himself. After crying Thor says he can do it, however, the music tells a different story. The viewers are presented with a fragmented Thor theme which shows he is not ready. Shortly after, he leaves Rocket. Hawkeye completely changes his identity (becoming Ronin) to deal with losing his family. The character confusion can be heard when Natasha approaches him in Tokyo; the viewers hear the confusion motif in Db minor.

When Tony is awoken from his sleep, the two pitches that are heard in the beginning are G to F. This minor seventh is the first two notes of the Captain Marvel theme. The whole theme –

in C $\hat{1}$, $b\hat{7}$, $\hat{6}$, $b\hat{7}$, $\hat{1}$, $\hat{6}$, $\hat{5}$ (C, Bb, A, Bb, C, A, G) – can be heard when she destroys The Sanctuary 2. Another character theme reintroduced in this film is Ant-Man’s theme. This theme can be heard when Ant-Man comes out of the quantum realm, the theme is augmented in the strings. Black Widows theme is also reintroduced, with the same treatment as Loki’s theme in *Infinity War*. The presentation of this theme feels final.

The treatment of Thanos’s themes are somewhat unique. There are two themes pertaining to Thanos at the beginning of the film (the one from the original timeline). These themes are Thanos theme I and the garden theme. However, both of these themes have been altered, so Thanos theme I is now G minor to Bb instead of Eb minor to G minor. This change is attributed to the fact that this Thanos has lost his menacing presence. The second change is in the garden theme; much of the music is the same except the ending stays in minor – this ending is not pleasant for Thanos. When the Thanos from the past is introduced, however, his theme returns the dramatic Eb minor to G minor.

Table 3. Cue Sheet for *AVENGERS: ENDGAME* (2019)

Composer: Alan Silvestri

Director: Russo Brothers

Timing	Visual Cue	Music	Notes
2:00	Comic strip	“Dear Mr. Fantasy” by Traffic	Diegetic music
3:25	Iron Man’s helmet	Stop	
3:36	Tony recording	Tony’s rest theme Peddle G ♯3, ♯4, ♯1, ♯7, ♯5	Bb, C, G, F, D
5:50	Tony putting on his jacket	Tony’s rest theme II ♯5, ♯4, ♯5, ♯6, ♯5, ♯1	D, C, D, Eb, C, D
7:13	Tony falls asleep	Stop	
8:02	Captain Marvel	First 2 note from the her theme	G, F
8:05	Cap	Stop	
8:23	Captain Marvel caring The Benatar	Majestic/regal F, F, C, C, Ab, G, Eb, F	Signals the team is back together
9:00	Cap and Stark	Sorrowful	hint of joy in the solo interludes
10:07	“where is he now”	Stop	
12:06	Tony puts the nano casing in Cap’s hand	dramatic	Minor thirds B, C, Eb
12:31	“when I get back”	Rhythmically driven	Melody based in thirds Harmony ascending, building the moment
14:37	Thor and Captain Marvel	Avengers theme	
14:59	The Benatar	Rhythmically driven	D, Eb, C, D this movement from Infinity war
15:31	Jump out of hyperspace	Music follows the mood of the scene	Melodies based on minor thirds
16:18	The Garden	Stop	
17:15	Captain Marvel attacks Thanos	Half steps and Tritones G, Ab, D	
17:45	Empty Gantlet	New Thanos theme G minor to Bb	
19:04	Thor cuts off Thanos’s head	Stop	
19:19	“I went for the head”	The Garden theme	Without the Picardy third
19:54	Black screen	Stop	

21:17	Steve shaking his head	Sad but hopeful	Fits the mood of the speech
22:08	San Francisco	High strings	Change
22:35	A rat	Stop	
23:00	Ant-man take off his helmet	Ant-man theme augmented in the string	theme originated in Ant-man, Christophe Beck
23:45	Scott Lang	Stop	New location
24:18	Memorial park	Gloomy, eerie	Glisses and half step movement
24:54		More rhythmically active	“visual painting”
25:33	Casey	Piano and solo viola, longing	
26:15	Avengers compound	Strings	Sense of hope/symbol
26:28	Peanut butter sammie	Stop	Long section of dialog
29:42	Natasha	Longing theme	<i>Bb, C, Bb, A, F, G</i> <i>Bb, A, G, F, Bb, A</i>
30:38	Scott Lang on camera	G, F#, A	
30:56	Scott Lang inside the compound	Rhythmically more active	
32:33	“yeah a time machine”	Stop	
33:19	Morgan Stark	Solo clarinet	
34:02	Cap looks at Tony	Avengers theme	
34:20	Tony starts talking	Stop	
36:14	Tony stands up	Strings	
36:48	Cap looks left	Based the Avengers theme <i>C, Bb, C, D, C, D, Eb</i>	About to change location
36:54	Professor Hulk	Stop	
39:22	Picture of Tony and Peter	Tony’s motivation	<i>G, A, C, Bb, Eb, D</i>
40:07	Tony sits down	Avengers theme	
40:17	Morgan Stark	In G major Harps and piano	Sounds similar to a toy box/representing innocence
40:52	Tony finishes the juice pop	Stop	
42:08	“what”	Longing theme varied	augmented
43:17	Avengers compound	Stop	
43:22	Scott open the van doors	Avengers theme variation	
44:57	Scott comes through the portal	Stop	
47:01	Cap and tony shake hands	Longing varied $\hat{1}, \hat{2}, \hat{3}, \hat{2}, \hat{7}, \hat{1}$	<i>E, F#, G, F#, D, E</i>

47:17	Cap's shield	Cap theme	
47:57	taco	Stop	
48:31	Hulk	"Supersonic Rocket Ship" by The Kinks	Non-diegetic music
49:24	New Asgard	Stop	
51:58	"Like Thanos"	Confusion theme ♩, ♪, ♩, followed by a tritone	In G minor D, G, D, D, C, Eb, E, Bb, A, A, G E, Bb tritone
54:11	Thor drinks	Stop	
54:18	Tokyo	Rhythmic, tension full	Chromatic glisses
56:23	Natasha	Confusion theme	In Db minor Ab, Db, Ab, Gb, D, Ab D, Ab tritone
57:32	Natasha and Barton hold hands	"Doom and gloom" by The Rolling Stones	diegetic music Gets quieter because the camera leave the room
58:12	"Claim down"	Stop	dialog
1:00:10	Barton stands up	Joyful tone	He feel hope after not seeing his family
1:01:12	Barton shrinks	Stop	
1:01:39	Barton shakes his head	Avengers theme I	
1:02:34	Thor	Stop	
1:02:40	Thor talking	Jazz/infinity stone theme/ Avengers theme	Feel of the music changes with each person talking
1:04:00	Rocket talking	Avengers theme II	
1:04:20	Nebula talking	Darker, low strings	
1:04:42	Natasha, Stark, Hulk	Jazz/Avengers theme II	
1:05:08	Cap talking	Avengers theme I	
1:06:42	Overview of the team	Avengers theme II	
1:07:02	Team shrinks	Stop	
1:07:09	New York	Battle music heavy brass, rhythmic	Similar to the 1 st film
1:07:30	Team arrives	Stop	dialog
1:08:13	Chitauri	Heroic and triumphant	
1:08:32	The Ancient One	Dr. Strange theme	Instrumentation not melody
1:09:13	Asgard	More active	Location change
1:09:19	Loki	Outline of the Thor theme ♩, ♪, ♩, ♩ in minor F, Bb, F#, F	Original theme ♩, ♪, ♩, ♩ in minor
1:09:32	Jane Foster	Stop	
1:09:59	Door opens	Slow fiddle then Longing varied	♩, ♪, ♩, ♪, ♩ G, A, Bb, A, F, G

1:11:19	Thor crying	Stop	
1:11:30	Thor stops crying	Fragmented Thor theme	Low strings $\hat{7}, \hat{1}$ High strings $\hat{1}, \hat{3}, \hat{2}, \hat{1}$
1:11:52	Morad	Avengers theme varied	
1:12:08	Widow and Hawkeye	Stop	
1:12:18	Widow hugs War Machine	Nat $\hat{1}, \hat{2}, \hat{4}$ important? Barton $\hat{1}, \hat{2}, \hat{3}$	Thor leave (previous scene) $\hat{1}, \hat{2}, \hat{5}$
1:12:55	War Machine and Nebula	More rhythmic	
1:13:27	Nebula fighting	Similar to Thanos theme II, softer treatment of the Tritone	3, 2, 1, 5, 1, #1 Bb, A, G, D, G, G#
1:14:14	One of Thanos's ships	Stop	
1:14:31	Transport opens	Thanos theme	Tritones
1:15:58	Stark Tower	Upbeat/heroic	
1:16:15	Tony	Avengers theme	
1:16:42	Hydra agents	Darker tone	
1:16:50	Loki's scepter	Infinity stone theme	Percussion adds a sense of tension
1:17:30	Ant-Man	Avengers theme	
1:18:10	Hydra agents	Infinity stone theme	
1:19:11	Cap walks off the elevator	Militarists	
1:19:27	Thor	Playful Avengers theme Pizzicato strings	Fragmentation "visual painting" Ant-Man fall with downward glis
1:19:56	Walking	Militarists	
1:21:23	Loki walks through the portal	Stop	
1:21:59	Cap sees Cap	Cap theme/Battle music from Avengers	
1:23:35	Banner and The Ancient One	Stop	
1:23:51	The Ancient One draws a time line	Music fits the flow on the conversation	
1:24:48	The Ancient One sits	Stop	
1:25:06	"Dr. Strange"	Dr. Strange theme	
1:26:20	Sanctuary 2	Thanos theme	
1:28:20	Freya	Tritones	G, G#, D
1:28:43	Thor yells	Stop	
1:29:12	Freya rub Thor's head	Soft ascending strings Slow fiddle	Hopeful moment
1:31:00	Rocket running	More rhythmic	

1:31:51	Thor call Mjölfnir	Stop	
1:32:04	Rocket	“Come and Get Your Love” by Redbone	Diegetic music, precedes a location change
1:32:52	“so he’s an idiot”	Stop	
1:33:05	Nebula grabs the tool	Repeated interval ♭ ⁶ , ♭ ⁵ , ♯ ³ , ♯ ¹	Creates tension and suspense
1:34:34	Nebula’s memories	Thanos theme	
1:36:28	Nebula running	Rhythmically active	
1:36:56	Cap	Stop	dialog
1:37:35	Tony has a though	Infinity stone theme varied	
1:38:50	Ant-man alone	“Hey Lawdy Mama” by Steppenwolf	Diegetic music, precedes a location change
1:39:16	An office	Stop	
1:39:41	Elevator	Building tension	
1:40:09	Tony running	Infinity stone theme/Avengers theme	
1:40:47	Case closed	Jazzy/Avengers theme II	
1:42:53	The Starks	Stop	
1:43:36	Cap	Avengers theme I	
1:43:59	Cap sees a picture	Sacrifice theme varied	theme from <i>The First Avenger</i>
1:44:53	The Starks	Hopeful	
1:46:32	Sanctuary 2	Stop	
1:47:25	Nebula pull a knife	Ominous music	
1:47:55	Thanos	Thanos theme	
1:48:15	Vormir	Avengers theme II	
1:48:41	Red Skull	Eeriness	Tremolos
1:50:02	Hawkeye waves	Stop	dialog
1:51:15	“get right here”	Sacrifice theme II	
1:54:00	Black screen	Stop	
1:54:11	Hawkeye	Infinity stone theme	
1:55:00	Team growing	Stop	
1:55:28	Close-up on hulk	Black Widow theme	theme introduced in <i>Avengers</i>
1:55:47	The dock	Longing theme	Solemn slightly empty
1:57:41	Stones in the gantlet	Stop	
1:58:46	Hulk	Low voices (string, brass, timpani)	Tritones Bb, A, Eb, A, G, A, Bb
1:59:17	Nebula	Avengers theme varied	
2:01:19	The snap	Stop	
2:01:43	Ant-Man’s back	Relief	In G Major ♯ ¹ , ♯ ⁵ , ♯ ⁴ , ♯ ³ , ♯ ⁷ , ♯ ¹
2:02:33	Explosion	Stop	

2:02:53	Zoom in	Action music	Small intervals creating tension, held pitches and silence compounds the tension at critical moments
2:04:54	Sanctuary 2	Thanos theme	
2:05:49	Gamora and Nebula	Hopeful	
2:06:38	Iron Man walking	Stop	
2:07:00	The big three	Slightly empty, intruding solos	Creates a sense of unease
2:09:29	Fight starts	Action music Highly rhythmic	held pitches and silence compounds the tension at critical moments
2:12:57	Cap welding Mjölfnir	Cap theme	
2:14:19	Cap beaten	Thanos theme	
2:15:00	Transporter opens	Thanos theme II augmented D, Ab, D, Bb, D, B	Second half of the Thanos theme II without the Eb so there is a tritone (Thanos is differently the bad guy)
2:15:28	Thanos	Thanos theme I	
2:15:39	Cap pulls the strap	Hopeful, horn solo	Solo because he standing alone
2:16:01	Cap stops	Stop	
2:16:19	Cap looks back	Majestic/regal G, G, D, D, Bb, A, F, G	Signals the team is back together
2:17:58	Everyone	Full Avengers theme	
2:19:34	Giant-Man steps on Cull Obsidian	Stop	Dialog
2:19:43	Parker and Tony	Tony's motivation	G, A, C, Bb, Eb, D
2:19:58	Starlord	Action music	
2:20:15	Gamora	Dramatic	
2:20:39	Second knee	Stop	
2:20:55	Hawkeye	Action music Elements Avengers theme	Similar to the music from the Wakanda fight scene in <i>Infinity War</i>
2:21:21	Giant-Man shrinks	Action music, Elements of Thanos theme, Ascending lines creating more tension within the scene, held pitches and silence	Upbeat and rhythmic, Use of tritones,
2:25:37	Rocket jumps on Groot	Stop	
2:25:58	Captain Marvel	Captain Marvel theme In C: $\hat{1}, b\hat{7}, \hat{6}, b\hat{7}, \hat{1}, \hat{6}, \hat{5}$	Introduced in <i>Captain Marvel</i> C, Bb, A, Bb, C, A, G
2:26:28	Thanos	Action music	Silence for the dialog

2:27:57	Explosion	Stop	
2:28:02	Iron Man	Action music without the rhythmic attention, Thanos theme, glisses, tremolos, melodic motion in minor thirds	
2:29:51	The snap	Stop	
2:30:32	Dusting	Endgame theme $\hat{1}, \hat{3}, \hat{5}, \hat{7}, \hat{7}, \hat{5}, \hat{6}, \hat{6}, \hat{4}, \hat{5}$ $\hat{3}, \hat{2}, \hat{2}, \hat{5}, \hat{5}, \hat{7}, \hat{5}, \hat{6}, \hat{6}, \hat{4}, \hat{5}$	Same music on the title menu G, Bb, D, F, F, D, E, E, C, D Bb, A, A, D, D, F D, E, E, C, D
2:31:21	Thanos walking	Thanos theme	
2:31:40	Thanos dusting	Stop	
2:32:14	Rhodey and Tony	Tony's rest theme Peddle G $\hat{3}, \hat{4}, \hat{1}, \hat{7}, \hat{5}$	Bb, C, G, F, D
2:33:50	Light goes off	Stop	
2:34:24	Pepper cries	Tony's rest theme II In G major $\hat{3}, \hat{2}, \hat{3}, \hat{4}, \hat{2}, \hat{3}$ Hopeful resolution	Orchestration thins for dialog
2:40:15	Thor	Stop	dialog
2:42:57	Infinity Stones	Solemn	
2:43:26	Sam starts talking	Cap theme	
2:43:57	Cap turns around	More rhythmic	
2:44:36	Hulk grads the screen	Stop	
2:45:03	Bucky and Sam	Builds tension and resolves into hopefulness	
2:47:30	"Thank you"	New Cap theme	
2:47:57	Steve looking off	"It's Been a Long, Long Time" by Harry James	Diegetic music

Much like *Infinity War*, Silvestri did not focus on character themes, however, this film does have more use of character themes. This is due to the amount of characters that need to be introduced into the crossover storyline.¹⁶ Although these character themes are present, they are not used to progress the sonic narrative. This is supported by the fact that none of the main character

¹⁶ A crossover is when two or more otherwise individually separate and distinct characters, settings, or universes are combined into a single story.

themes are used in the manner in which they were used in the first film (transforming or combining themes to show character development) – the only exception is the Thor theme at (1:11:30). Silvestri instead focuses on larger concepts: self-doubt and confusion; longing for the past (pre-Thanos); and the Avengers.

CONCLUSION

Most of the themes and motifs Silvestri presents to viewers serve as “visual cues” meaning there is little to no thematic transformation,¹⁷ however, the themes serve a different purpose. Like the music surrounding the themes, the music in these three films are meant to help guide the viewers through the films’ narrative. The thematic material is more a compass: it reveals when a character has the upper-hand; foreshadows; reinforces emotion; and directs the viewers’ attention.

Where these relatively stable thematic universes paper over some of the stark stylistic contrasts between films, the MCU’s inconsistency highlights differences in creative direction...the MCU consists of 22 films by 17 directors scored by 14 different composers. Incoming composers seem to feel little pressure to honor pre-existing themes for characters, leading to a lingering sense that composers are continually reinventing the wheel. For example, the three scores for the Iron Man films bear little resemblance to one another, each composer offering their own version of a character theme.¹⁸

Many believe that the MCU’s lack of saturated character musical themes is a missed opportunity. However, they fail to consider that by changing themes, composers have helped sonically progress the character development. The Iron Man from *Iron Man* (2008) is a much different man/hero than the Iron Man in *Avengers: Endgame* (2019). Thus, is it really necessary for the sound of Iron Man to stagnate musically?

Much like the characters themselves, their music evolves to suit their new contexts in *Endgame*. Alan Silvestri unravels the franchise’s most recognizable musical cues to ask a simple question: what happens to a character’s music when they grow beyond the ideals that their music once represented? Thanos and Captain America—the moral extremes of the film—typify this musical treatment, as the manipulation of their music signals their evolving characterization and motivations.¹⁹

¹⁷ Thematic transformation or metamorphosis is a compositional technique were a theme or motif is varied through rhythmic alteration, augmentation, diminution, and/or fragmentation.

¹⁸ Grace Edgar, “Theme as Easter Egg: Illusions of Organicism in *Avengers: Endgame*”. *Musicology Now*. Accessed October 29, 2019. <http://www.musicologynow.org/2019/06/theme-as-easter-egg-illusions-of.html?m=1>.

¹⁹ Bradley Spiers, “*Avengers* Disassembled: Music and Unmaking in *Endgame*”. *Musicology Now*. Accessed October 29, 2019. <http://www.musicologynow.org/2019/06/avengers-disassembled-music-and.html?m=1>.

These three Avengers films show that the MCU establish a sonic narrative that spans all the films. However, like the plot and characters of the individual films, the sound evolves. *Marvel's The Avengers* serves as the foundation of the universe, when almost every character is presented with their own theme and the “sound” of the universe is also established. While most themes are not as “singable” as the 1960’s animated *Spider-Man* series, they are still pronounced and defined.²⁰ Most importantly, these themes help to codify the overarching sound of the universe. *Avengers: Infinity War* continues the sonic world-building by exploring the sound of the universe from another perspective, following the character development of Thanos the Mad Titan, who is the villainous protagonist. The universe is bigger than what was previously portrayed and the soundtrack compounds that fact. The Avengers are no longer a group of individuals, thus individual themes were not as pronounced. The “staple sound” of the Avengers theme also changed, creating an amalgamation of Silvestri’s original and Danny Elfman’s later rendition in *Avengers: Age of Ultron*. Notwithstanding, this fits the overall narrative; the team has grown and has improved in its cohesiveness when fighting together. *Avengers: Endgame* tells the story of how the heroes react to complete and total failure and how they rise above it. The team is broken and consequently, the sound follows. Character themes are fragmented, changed, or abandoned completely. Even the Avengers theme is transformed.

Nevertheless, even throughout all the changes, the overall sound of the universe remains. It is not until Thanos wipes out half of existence at the end of *Avengers: Infinity War* that the soundscape becomes “broken,” but once everyone is brought back, that sound is “corrected” and returns. Through all the change, there were still things that remained “pure,” the infinity stones

²⁰ Reza The Rizzler. Spider-Man 1967 TV Show Intro, 2013. Accessed November 10, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xsx3JCw62WQ>. *Spider-Man* was an animated television series that aired from 1967 to 1970. The theme song was composed by Bob Harris with lyrics by Paul Francis Webster.

and the idea of sacrifice. The infinity stones were always an impending threat that caused massive, devastating destruction. Therefore, the sound of these six entities remained the same. Additionally, the idea of sacrifice is universal. The music's function is the same across each film which creates a universal sonic narrative.

This study is, however, somewhat limited by only analyzing three films; the larger soundscape of the MCU (23 major films to date) is only briefly taken into consideration. Nevertheless, the combination of these three films provided a prime starting point in understanding the soundscape of the MCU. These films carry large scale universal consequences as well as a crossover storyline. Understanding the themes set forth in these films will help to guide future works into the scores of the MCU.

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