



The Analysis of *One Summer's Day* Composed by Joe Hisaishi

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze the concepts and techniques used in the composition of an award-winning original soundtrack, *One Summer's Day*. This music piece is composed by Joe Hisaishi, a Japanese composer, featuring in the internationally-acclaimed Japanese film animation, *Spirited Away* (2001). The composition using the technique of thematic transformation and runs for 5.40 minutes in length. The analysis shows that the composition builds its unity by using the technique of the fourth interval. Melody and harmony are constructed by many concepts, such as the quartal chord, the suspended chord, the extended chord, the 4-note group of a minor pentatonic scale, and Lydian mode. Aside from the left-hand and right-hand melody, many concepts, such as upper structure chord, blocked chord, arpeggio, and the bass line have also been incorporated to enrich the sound dimension.

Keywords: *Original soundtrack, Spirited away, Quartal chord*

1. Introduction

Original soundtracks are indispensable in filmmaking now, so they have become a crucial part of the film industry. Not only could these soundtracks help the audience to grasp the feelings of the characters or the mood of each scene, but, if well-made, could also be impactful. The films may be getting old, but the soundtracks never lose their charm. They could convey moods and emotions to new viewers every time those films are on the screen.

Studio Ghibli is one of the biggest studio animations in Japan. It is globally famous for its animated films such as *My Neighbor Totoro*, *Howl's Moving Castle* and *Princess Mononoke*, etc. *Spirited Away*, written and directed by Hayao Miyazaki (b.1941), the studio founder, released in Japan in 2001 and became the highest-grossing film of Japan for 19 years before toppled down in 2020 (Mgr Online, 2020). It is also a recipient of the Golden Bear prize at the 2002 Berlin International Film Festival and won the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature in 2003. It is an adventure, fantasy story about a girl who accidentally travels to the land of the spirits. She has to work in a public bathhouse regularly visited by gods because it could save her parents from being cursed into pigs. It is an entertaining yet moral and philosophically depth tale.

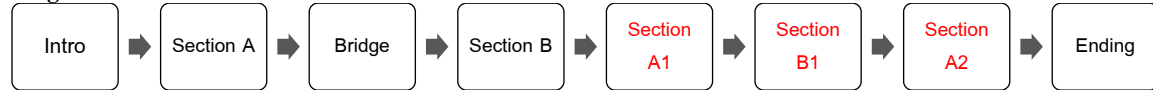
One Summer's Day, composed by Joe Hisaishi, a world-renown Japanese composer dubbed as the 'John William of Japan' (Gerber, 2017), is one of its soundtracks and serves as the opening theme. His work of composition is best-known for its simplicity, harmony, and Oriental-affiliated themes. It is the reason why his works gain worldwide recognition and international fans.

2. Objectives

This article aims to analyze the concepts and techniques used in the composition of an award-winning original soundtrack, *One Summer's Day*.

3. Musical Structure

One Summer's Day contains two main melodies—A and B. As shown in Diagram 1, this composition using the technique of thematic transformation—introduction, A, bridge, B, A1, B1, A2, and the ending. It has ninety-three measures. The tempo is quarter note = 80. The whole composition is approximately 5.40 minutes in length.

**Diagram 1** The Musical Structure

4. Introduction (Measures 1-4)

The introduction begins with four chords—FMaj⁹, CMaj⁹/E, Bbmaj⁹/D, and Bm¹¹/C#, respectively. It is fascinating to see a lowering motion on the bass line, starting from F to E, D, and C#, respectively. It also uses quartal and quintal chords. The first three chords—FMaj⁹, CMaj⁹/E, and Bbmaj⁹/D—use the fourth/fifth interval, while the last one—Bm¹¹/C#—uses the quartal chord (Figure 1).

**Figure 1** The Four Chords (Measures 1-4) (Musicnotes, n.d.)

5. A Section (Measures 6-12)

The A section is a rendering of A theme. The melody forms unity through the techniques of sequence and repetition. From measures 6-9, it uses the sequence technique. From measures 10-12; however, the composer switches to the repetition. The harmony uses a quartal chord. Also, this chord provides richness for sound dimension by adding the augmented fourth and perfect fourth (Figure 2 below). The left-hand part uses the lowering motion in the bass line. It starts by changing from B (measures 6 and 7) to A (measures 8 and 9), and later to G, F, E (measures 10-12). Please look at the cursors in Figure 2.

Figure 2 The A Theme and the Quartal Chord (Measures 6-13)

6. Bridge (Measures 21-28)

The bridge is a short phrase, consisting of eight measures. It acts as a transitional phase for the B section. What is fascinating here is the right-hand part. The texture uses the interval and blocked chord techniques to elucidate this bridge. It enriches the melody by using the upper structure chord, including



A_m^{11}/F (measures 22 and 24), $C^{Maj7\#11}/D$ (measures 26 and 28), and Dm^7/G (measure 29), as seen in Figure 3.

Figure 3 The Bridge and Upper Structure Chord (Measures 21-28)

7. B Section (Measures 30-40)

The B section is a rendering of the B theme, which consists of many characters—a melodic single line in measures 29-32, blocked chord and harmonic octave in measures 29-35, and harmonic octave in measures 37-38. Occasionally, it also uses the upper structure chord such as $G^{(sus4)}/C$ in measure 35 and Fm/D in measure 39. This added technique helps enhance the richness of the sound. Concerning harmony, it is mostly arpeggio. In measures 30-31, it performs in high pitch. Then, in measures 34-35, the pitch gets lower by one octave to elucidate the melody. At the bass line, there is a hidden concept of lowering note in the whole step (as seen in the introduction and bridge section). All of these happen in measures 30-31 and 34-35, and the note is from A to G, F, and E, respectively. Apart from these steps, there is also a half-step motion. In measures 32-33, the note is from E_b , D, and D_b . In measures 36-37, it is E_b , D, D_b , and C (see the cursor in Figure 4). All these motions are there to create a richer soundscape.

Figure 4 The B Theme



Figure 4 (continue) The B Theme

8. A1 Section (Measures 41-55)

The A1 section is a formation of fragments derived from A theme. In measure 41, the composer takes fragments of the A theme in measure 6 (as indicated by the rectangle in Figure 5) as his material for his new melody creation. He makes a distinction by using the transpose technique. What he does is transposing it to the perfect fourth in measure 42, as seen in Figure 5(a). In measures 52-53, fragments of A theme in measures 3-4 and 6-7 reappear as now used as materials for a new melody. As shown in Figure 5(b), it is a sequence.

(a) The Fragments from A Theme and the Transpose Technique

Figure 5 The A1 Section and the Fragments



(b) The Fragments from A Theme and the Sequence

Figure 5 (Continue) The A1 Section and the Fragments

However, what is remarkable about this phase is its left-hand part. It separates into two periods. The first one is a 4-note group in the pentatonic minor scale, playing by sixteenth note, starting with E pentatonic minor scale (measures 43-44), following by F# pentatonic minor scale (measures 44-45), D pentatonic minor scale (measures 45-46), and, then, again E pentatonic minor scale (measures 46-47). The other is the blocked chord, consisting of four chords, including F^{Maj7(#11)}, Em^{7(b13)}, Fm¹¹, and Am¹¹. In performance, it uses half-note and dotted half-note, both of which slow down the rhythm, preparing it for a new phase, as seen in Figure 6.

Figure 6 The 4-note Group of Pentatonic Minor Scale and the Blocked Chord

9. B1 Section (Measures 56-66)

The B1 section is a repetition of the B theme. Here is the employment of the variation technique. As shown in Figure 7, the B theme in measures 30-31 reappears in measures 56-57, but the original eighth note changes to the sixteenth note, combining with compound melody. This approach creates a more captivating sound and melody. It is a method of making a new melody while retaining the old structure.



Theme B



Compound Melody



Figure 7 The Compound Melody

10. A2 Section (Measures 67-77)

In the A2 section, the change of tempo can be noticed, from quarter note = 80 to quarter note = 104. It derives fragments from the A theme to create new melodies in measures 68-71 by changing the eighth note to the dotted quarter note and the quarter note and triplet. The composer did it to lengthen the augmentation (Figure 8). Suddenly, the melody goes more rapidly. It happens by changing the rhythm to the eighth note and triplet.

Theme A



Augmentation



Figure 8 The Augmentation

In the A2 section, specifically in measures 72-75, the composer uses the mode technique to create colorfulness in melody, as changing the mood. In the left-hand and right-hand parts, mode makes a considerable role as seen in the use of Eb Lydian in measures 72-73, F Mixolydian in measures 74-75, and D Phrygian in measures 76-77. At the section end, he also uses the Gm chord to indicate the transition into the new phase. The left-hand and right-hand parts are noted in Figure 9.



Figure 9 The Eight note and Triplet and the Mode



Figure 9 (Continue) The Eight note and Triplet and the Mode

Besides, the A2 section creates a new melody by using a variation technique. It adapts the melodic phrase from A theme by changing the eighth to the eighth-note and triplet, creating a diminution, and turning it into the composition. As shown in Figure 10, the first melodic phrase (measure 6) is adapted into a new melody in measure 78. The second phase (measure 7) is adapted in measures 78-79. The harmony in the left-hand part is performed by the eighth note and triplet in arpeggio form. Moreover, it creates vividness by adding the upper structure chord—including $C^{7(sus4)}/Eb$ and $D^{7(sus4)}/Eb$ —to measures 82-82, as seen in Figure 11.

Figure 10 The Diminution

Figure 11 The Upper Structure Chord



11. Ending (Measures 89-93)

In the ending, the melody gets slower by the whole note to extend the rhythm. The left-hand part changes Db3 to Eb2 (measures 89-90) and retains that note until the end. It also uses the technique called tremolo with the next note to lengthen the bass, simultaneously echoing it. In the right-hand part, it performs with five blocked chords, which is mostly the suspended chord, including C^{7(sus4)}/Db, G^{7(sus4)}/Eb, Eb^{Maj7(#11)}, Bb^{7(sus4)}/Eb, and C^{7(sus4)}/Eb, respectively. In this ending section, the right-hand part is also fascinating. It shows that the notes go up in higher chords, from G to A, Bb, and C, respectively, as seen in Figure 12.

Figure 12 The Ending

12. Conclusion

One Summer's Day is an original soundtrack of the acclaimed animated film, *Spirited Away*, produced by Studio Ghibli. The composition is composed by Joe Hisaishi, a Japanese composer, earning his numerous awards. It is approximately 5.40 minutes in length and uses the technique of thematic transformation—including introduction, A, bridge, B, A1, B1, A2, and the ending. Each phase uses various techniques and concepts in the composition, such as quartal chord, upper structure, blocked chord, pentatonic minor scale, and mode. It could be summarized in Table 1, as seen below.

Table 1 Summary of Concepts and Techniques

Section	Measure	Concepts and Techniques
Introduction	1-4	The Quintal Chord / The Quartal Chord
A	6-21	A Theme / Sequence and Repetition / Quartal Chord
Bridge	22-29	Upper Structure Chord
B	30-40	B Theme / Multiple Texture / Upper Structure Chord / Arpeggio
A1	41-55	The 4-note Group of Pentatonic Minor Scale / Blocked Chord
B1	56-66	Compound Melody on B Theme
A2	67-88	The Augmentation and Diminution on A Theme / Mode / Triplet / Upper Structure Chord
Ending	89-93	The Suspended Chord / Bass Tremolo

The analysis shows that the composer uses the quartal chord in his composition. Its connection with the fourth makes it unable to define if the scale is major or minor. It should also note that, on many occasions, the composer uses the chords similarly. In measures 82-83, 89-90, and 92, he uses the suspended chord (sus4 chord). In measures 3, 21, 23, and 49-50, he uses the extended chord, especially a minor 11th chord, while using the major 7th (#11) chord in measures 26, 28, 47, 49-50, and 91. The uses of a 4-note group of pentatonic minor scale in the A1 section and the Lydian mode in measure 72 also display their connections with the fourth. The unity and uniqueness of this composition depend on these connections. The composer makes use of many concepts deviating from the conventional major and minor scale. He shows that the concepts related



to the fourth are capable of melodic creation. It is the reason that contributes to the success of *One Summer's Day*, making this soundtrack a fascinating piece for further studies.

13. References

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