

Silvestri – Theme to ‘The Avengers’

Listening

Orchestra Performance ►

Musical Score ►

Context

Alan Silvestri (born 1950) is an American composer who has written music for films including *Back to the Future*, *Forrest Gump* and *The Avengers*, where he wrote the main theme song, as well as lots of other music used in the film. The Avengers are a team of superheroes who work together to protect Earth from various different attacks. Tony Stark, Thor, Captain America, the Hulk, Black Widow and Hawkeye are all characters within this universe. It's highly likely your students will be able to tell you more!

The Avengers as we know it today started in 2012 – an important year for the Philharmonia, as this was the year of their first *Orchestra Unwrapped* concert. The music uses a full symphony orchestra, with the brass and percussion featuring heavily to give an epic and heroic sound world – perfect for superheroes! Films often use different instruments to create different sounds and characters – for example:

- String chords = romance
- Woodwind trills = comedy
- Brass = heroism
- Percussion = suspense and drama

Short 5-minute task: what happens next?

This task is based on playing from 0:18-0:26 on the orchestra performance video above and asking your students to describe what they can hear and imagine what happens next.

What can I hear?

- Repeated rhythms in lower strings
- Percussion – drums, timpani accenting first chord
- Melody rises and falls – possible link to James Bond theme?
- Tempo – fairly fast

What happens next?

- Any ideas are good, but some guidance below
- Repeats, layers added, gets louder
- Builds to include brass melody
- Heroic, major key

Stretch and Challenge

- Include musical vocabulary
- Dynamics – forte (loud), piano (quiet), crescendo (get louder), diminuendo (get quieter)
- Melody – ascending, descending
- Tempo – Allegro, no changes

Support and Scaffold

- Give direct choices for example
 - Is the rhythm at the start repeated?
 - Does the melody stay on the same note or change?
 - Are the woodwind or strings playing the opening rhythm?

Medium 20-minute task: Superhero Melodies!

Many themes from action movies use the same interval – the distance between two notes. The interval of a fifth is common to many film tracks. The notes C – G are a fifth apart, as are a D and A, E and B and so on. There are many examples of this – including the theme to *The Avengers*.

The video below looks at some examples of this – the opening section gives some examples before the video looks at why this interval is so important to this kind of music.

Watch here ►

Other examples of music using the interval of a fifth:

- **John Williams – Superman ►** (opening)
- **Michael Giacchino – the Incredibles ►**
- **John Williams – Jurassic Park ►**
- **Alan Silvestri – The Avengers ►**

In this composition challenge, students experiment creating their own melody to represent a superhero, using the interval of a fifth. Students could use their voices, or, if available, use classroom instruments to support their learning.

Stretch and Challenge

- Encourage more able students to understand why the interval of a fifth is so important, using the full video above.
- Consider why the interval B-F is not the same (hint, it is a smaller interval as it only has 6 semitones between the B and F, rather than 7 in D-A, and as such it sounds different. B-F sharp is a fifth.)

Support and Scaffold

- Ask students to use the notes C and G to create a heroic theme.
- Add in dynamic contrasts and changes in pitch for variety.

Longer 45-minute task: Performing The Avengers Theme

Get your class used to reading musical notation by trying this vocal warm up which is based on rhythm ideas from *The Avengers*:

[Watch here ▶](#)

Having done this, using pitched instruments, or voices, try playing/singing along to the main tune, using the scrolling video below:

[Watch here ▶](#)

Section 1: 0:00-0:52

This section is based in G minor. It uses the notes G A B flat C D. Ask students to use the following fingering:

Note	Play with this finger
G	First (Thumb)
A	Second
B flat	Third (Middle)
C	Fourth
D	Fifth (Little)

Section 2: 0:52-end

This section is a little harder, based around the key of E minor:

Note	Play with this finger
E	First (Thumb)
F sharp	Second
G	Third (Middle)
A	Fourth
B	Fifth (Little)

There are some notes that fall outside of this – for example a low D and high C sharp – which can be left out if your students find this too much, too soon. However, practice makes perfect and the melody is likely one that will be known by some of your students, so give it a try!

Stretch and Challenge

- Try playing the melody at the same times with both hands
- Support others if working in pairs or small groups

Support and Scaffold

- Consider using a keyboard or instrument which has the names of the notes on to help, learning the A section first

Listening Guide

Timings based on the video link at the top of this section

Timings	Musical features to listen out for
0:18-1:17	Repeated rhythm in low strings (ostinato) with percussion, tremolo violins = excitement! Brass melody based around notes of G minor, initially in horns then adding trumpets.
1:18-end	Horns have short motif using a perfect 5th with string accompaniment – sounds loud, heroic. Full orchestra added to end.

Links to other subjects

This piece can link well to these other areas of the school curriculum:

Subject	Links
English and Art	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Create a short comic strip featuring a superhero and a villain, complete with a story and associated drawings.
Drama	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Consider dressing up as a superhero and acting out their signature moves and musical themes during the day.
PSHE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Working as a team in the performance challenge, exploring how music can enhance a scene and make people feel emotions.
Computing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">If students have access to computing software, they could compose the medium task using available software. The video here ► is a really short guide on how to do this