

Nathan's film reviews - May 31, 2023

A Symphony of Stars: The Cinematic Brilliance of "Interstellar"

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1. Introduction

"Interstellar" (2014), directed by Christopher Nolan, is a science fiction epic that is nothing short of a visual and aural masterpiece. It tells the story of a group of astronauts who travel through a wormhole in search of a new home for humanity. The film explores themes such as love, sacrifice, and the indomitable human spirit. This review will focus on the various elements that set "Interstellar" apart from other films, with special attention given to the musical score, cinematography, color palette, editing, types of shots, sound effects, and an overall review.

2. The Power of Music: Hans Zimmer's Score

The partnership between Christopher Nolan and Hans Zimmer is one of the most successful in film history. Zimmer has scored many of Nolan's films, including "Inception," "The Dark Knight," and "Dunkirk." The relationship between director and composer is vital in achieving the desired atmosphere, and this collaboration has proven to be a winning formula.

For "Interstellar," Nolan sought a different approach. Instead of providing Zimmer with a detailed script, he gave him a single page letter describing the film's essence and the emotions he wanted to convey. This allowed Zimmer to create a more personal and emotional score, as opposed to a traditional science fiction soundtrack.

The Organ: A Central Instrument in the Score

One of the most striking aspects of the "Interstellar" score is the use of the organ, an instrument not commonly featured in film scores. The organ's unique sound adds an ethereal and almost otherworldly quality to the music, which complements the film's themes of space exploration and the unknown.

The organ's powerful sound also symbolizes the vastness of space and the forces of nature that the characters encounter throughout the film. Its rich and deep tones evoke feelings of awe and wonder, which are critical in capturing the audience's imagination and immersing them in the story.

Recurring Themes and Motifs

~~The "Interstellar" score features a number of recurring themes and motifs that are woven throughout the film.~~ *The "Interstellar" score features two main ideas that are woven throughout the film.* One of the most prominent is the theme associated with the relationship between the main character, Cooper, and his daughter, Murph. This theme is introduced early in the film and reappears at key moments, helping to underscore the emotional depth of their bond. *Most of the music in the film is based around this theme, providing most of the musical language and material for the other music.*

Cooper & Murph's Theme

283 *a tempo* $\text{♩} = 80$
ppp

296 *pp*

304 *p* *poco a poco cresc.*

311 *(cresc.)*

The image displays a musical score for the Cooper & Murph's Theme, spanning measures 283 to 311. The score is written for piano, with a treble and bass staff. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor), and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo is marked 'a tempo' with a metronome marking of 80. The dynamics range from 'ppp' (pianississimo) to 'p' (piano), with a 'cresc.' (crescendo) marking. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and accidentals, as well as performance instructions like 'poco a poco cresc.' and 'cresc.'.



This theme is based on only three chords: Fmaj⁷, Gmaj⁶, and A minor repeated throughout the score. The upward movement of the chords makes them predictable, making the last chord expected. This means that the score is constantly harmonically resolving, going to a chord that feels secure and expected. The chords follow a VI, VII, I (6th note of the scale to the 7th to the tonic, the root of the scale) progression, constantly resolving to the I chord which gives a sense of resolution. However, Hans Zimmer still manages to build tension by using changes in instrumentation and layering to build tension. Unlike composers such as John Williams who utilize changes in harmonic language to build tension and emotion, Hans Zimmer utilizes layering and instrumentation to build tension. After Cooper returns from Miller's planet and realizes that 23 Earth years had gone by due to time dilation, we hear one of the most minimalist versions of Cooper & Murph's theme, leaving just the melody and a single bass note.



The feeling of incompleteness, instead of representing the emptiness and void of space like previous versions of the theme, it now represents the emotional void Cooper feels as he sees years of stored videos of his children growing up. This theme represents more than just the relationship between Cooper and Murph, it represents the immense force that brings people together and the love that Cooper has for his daughter across space and time. The timelessness of the theme, being found at the beginning, the middle, and the end of the film, represents the spherical nature of the story. It acts as an introduction as well as a resolution to the film, connecting the two main characters throughout the story, and finally giving purpose and understanding to the characters and story to the audience. And as the space between Cooper and Murph reduces to nothing, we hear an ascending line, finally resolving the ascending line we heard at the beginning of the film, taking us back to where it all began.

The Reaching Theme



The reaching theme is found throughout the film, representing anytime something new is learned. Its based around a Cmaj lydian scale, with pulsating strings and woodwind chords built around a C major chord with an added F#, with occasional G and D sharps. When Cooper enters Murph's room and sees the gravitational anomalies for the first time, we hear drawn out strings, a melody that doesn't get resolved until the end of the movie, a melodic line that feels stretched out, not thin but suspended. It's associated with the feeling of discovery, both the exhilarating feeling but also terrifying feeling of not knowing what's to come , it's what drives Murph to learn more about her ghost and is what unites Cooper and Murph, but is also what drives Cooper away on his journey.

Another important motif in the score is the ticking clock, which represents the urgency of the characters' mission and the passage of time. This ticking sound is incorporated into several tracks, such as "Stay" and "Mountains," and serves as a constant reminder of the stakes involved in the characters' journey.

The Impact of the Score on the Cinematic Experience

The "Interstellar" score plays a crucial role in shaping the film's emotional landscape. It not only sets the tone for each scene, but also elevates the audience's connection to the characters and their experiences. By incorporating the organ and various motifs, Zimmer's score adds depth and complexity to the film's narrative, creating a multi-layered and immersive experience for viewers.

One example of the score's impact can be seen in the film's celebrated docking scene. As the characters struggle to dock their spacecraft with a spinning space station, the tension in the scene is heightened by Zimmer's pulsating score. The music builds in intensity, mirroring the characters' desperation, and culminates in a triumphant crescendo as they successfully complete the maneuver.

In another pivotal scene, when Cooper is forced to leave his family behind to embark on his mission, the heart-wrenching theme associated with Cooper and Murph's relationship plays, accentuating the emotional weight of the moment. The score's ability to evoke such powerful emotions in the audience is a testament to Zimmer's skill as a composer and the symbiotic relationship between the film and its music.

3. Painting with Light: Hoyte van Hoytema's Cinematography

Cinematographer Hoyte van Hoytema was tasked with creating a visual language that would convey the vastness and wonder of space, while also grounding the story in the intimate and personal. To achieve this, he utilized a combination of digital and film cameras, as well as a variety of lenses and lighting techniques.

One of the most striking aspects of "Interstellar" is its use of practical sets and locations. The film was shot on location in Iceland to represent the alien planets, and the crew built life-sized spacecraft interiors for the actors to inhabit. These choices lend a sense of realism and immersion to the film, as the environments feel tangible and lived-in.

The cinematography of "Interstellar" is characterized by its use of wide shots and deep focus. This allows the audience to take in the vastness of the cosmos and the alien landscapes while also emphasizing the isolation and vulnerability of the characters. The camera frequently lingers on the actors' faces, capturing their emotions and reactions to the world around them.

4. A World of Color: The Film's Palette and Visual Style

The color palette of "Interstellar" is a crucial aspect of its visual storytelling. The film utilizes a predominantly cool color palette, with blues, grays, and greens dominating the screen. This creates a stark contrast to the warmth of the Earth scenes, which are characterized by golden hues and lush greens.

The cool colors of space are not only visually striking but also serve to highlight the theme of isolation. The characters are surrounded by a cold, unforgiving environment, and the color palette underscores this. Additionally, the contrast between the warm Earth scenes and the cool space scenes emphasizes the stakes of the mission – the astronauts are fighting to preserve the warmth and life of Earth.

5. Editing: Telling the Story Through Seamless Transitions

The editing of "Interstellar," helmed by Lee Smith, is a masterclass in visual storytelling. The film's non-linear structure and parallel narratives could have easily become confusing or disjointed, but the editing keeps the story coherent and engaging. This is achieved through seamless transitions and careful pacing, ensuring that the audience is never lost or disoriented.

One notable example of the film's editing prowess is the sequence where the spacecraft Endurance is navigating the wormhole. The editing intercuts between the astronauts in the spacecraft and their family members on Earth, using match cuts and clever shot compositions to draw connections between the two storylines.

6. Sound Design: The Aural Landscape of "Interstellar"

The sound design of "Interstellar" is as important as its visual elements in creating an immersive and emotionally resonant experience. The use of silence, particularly in the space scenes, is highly effective in conveying the emptiness and vastness of the cosmos. This is contrasted with the bustling sounds of Earth, emphasizing the distance between the two worlds.

In addition to the silence, the sound design team, led by supervising sound editor Richard King, made extensive use of diegetic sounds to ground the film in reality. The hums and creaks of the spacecraft, the crackling of the cornfields, and the harsh winds of the alien planets all contribute to the film's immersive quality.

The sound effects in "Interstellar" are also noteworthy for their subtlety. Instead of relying on bombastic, over-the-top effects, the sound design opts for more subdued and realistic choices. This is particularly evident in the film's action sequences, where the sound effects are used sparingly to heighten tension and underscore the sense of danger.

7. Conclusion: A Film for the Ages

"Interstellar" is a cinematic tour de force, skillfully combining breathtaking visuals, a haunting score, and a powerful story to create an unforgettable experience. The film's various elements – from Hans Zimmer's majestic score to Hoyte van Hoytema's awe-inspiring cinematography, the carefully curated color palette, the seamless editing, and the immersive sound design – all work in harmony to transport the audience to a world beyond our own.

At its core, "Interstellar" is a story about the human spirit – our capacity for love, sacrifice, and perseverance in the face of the unknown. By expertly weaving these themes into its visual and aural tapestry, the film stands as a testament to the power of cinema and the boundless potential of human creativity.

In conclusion, "Interstellar" is an extraordinary achievement in filmmaking that will undoubtedly stand the test of time. Its technical mastery, emotional resonance, and thought-provoking themes make it a must-watch for film enthusiasts and casual viewers alike. So, sit back, strap in, and prepare to embark on an interstellar journey that will leave you breathless and inspired.

8. Overall review

Interstellar is a visually stunning and emotionally resonant film that is sure to stay with you long after you've seen it. The film's musical score, cinematography, color palette, editing, types of shots, sound effects, and overall storytelling are all top-notch. Interstellar is a film that everyone should see at least once.

Here are some of the things that I loved about Interstellar:

- The visuals are stunning. The film's use of IMAX cameras and Hoyte van Hoytema's cinematography create stunning visuals that help to bring the film's story to life.
- The musical score is beautiful and moving. Hans Zimmer's score perfectly complements the film's visuals and story.
- The story is emotionally resonant. The film explores themes of love, loss, and hope in a way that is both thought-provoking and emotionally engaging.

Overall, Interstellar is a masterpiece. It is a film that is sure to stay with you long after you've seen it. I highly recommend it to anyone who loves science fiction, visual storytelling, or emotionally resonant films.