

Star Wars: The Musical Experience, Part 2

Bringing Balance to the Music

Patrick Stutzman

Have you ever found yourself sitting in your car, listening to a favorite song, when another car pulls up next to you with the driver's music turned up so loud that you thought it would shatter windows? To say the least, that can be rather annoying and disruptive of your own personal musical enjoyment. Now, ask yourself if you've experienced a similar situation in a *Star Wars* roleplaying game. Probably not -- most games don't have a soundtrack built for them, let alone played during the game. However, that doesn't give you the excuse to create a disruption once you have incorporated music into your own game. In this article, we look at the proper use of music in your games as a complementary element and ways to minimize any musical disruptions.

Undeniably, adding music can bring your game to a whole new level. It can evoke emotions and moods while bringing a more cinematic feel to the stories that you and your players create. However, it's important to know how much music is appropriate. As Master Yoda said, "Control! You must learn control!" Knowing where to apply that control will help keep the music a blessing and not a curse. To that end, we'll focus on three aspects of music that could make it disruptive -- volume, style, and quantity -- and we'll look at how we can keep it from causing trouble.

Volume

John Williams did a masterful job of composing the music for the *Star Wars* movies, and you probably enjoy listening to it just as much as the next fan. However, playing the music too loudly during your game can cause problems. The most obvious problem is that you and the other players can't hear each other as well as you should, causing communication breakdowns at the table. Depending on your location, this can occur even if the volume isn't very high. If your gaming room doesn't have a carpeted floor, curtains, or similar furnishings, you may find that your players are competing with the music to be heard. Another problem becomes apparent if you're running a game at the local gaming store or hobby shop. If other groups are present while you're playing music too loud, it can disrupt their games as well and could lead to awkward social situations in which your plastic lightsaber will not help you very much.

Finding the right volume for your music is vital to keeping it from overpowering the game. The best way to gauge this is to set the volume below the level at which you speak normally. Keep in mind that the right volume may depend on the device being used to deliver the music. If you use a stereo system or portable CD/MP3 player with speakers that face the players, your volume will need to be lower than if you use a laptop computer with the speakers facing you. The important thing is to make sure that you don't drown out your voice or the voices of the other players.

Style

The [previous article](#) mentioned that the style of music playing in the background can affect the mood of the players. Playing a lighthearted piece of music during the adventure's climactic lightsaber duel will quickly turn the final battle into a slapstick comedy. In fact, studies of mood and its reactions to music showed that people demonstrated differences in spatial reasoning after listening to a Mozart sonata as compared to a relaxation instruction tape. It seems likely that this reaction could carry over to other activities and musical genres.

In the case of *Star Wars* roleplaying, musical styles that contribute to the activity taking place in the game are better than those that might distract from the scene. Do a little homework -- find which tracks work best for the scenes you want to have take place during your gaming sessions, and prepare them ahead of time. Create a playlist on your computer or burn a CD with the specific tracks you want, and write notes indicating when to start and stop each track. Setting up your music in advance can keep the game from bogging down or going off the rails.



Quantity

Determining the right amount of music to use during a game is just as important as having the right selection of tracks. As with just about anything, too much of a good thing can ruin it. For example, avoid playing the same track repeatedly during the same scene. The movies are very good at providing music all the way through a scene. However, a single combat in your game might take longer to unfold than you expected, and most of us don't have a musical composer at the ready to fill in the gaps. To put it simply, don't worry about filling an entire scene with music, especially if it would mean using the same track over and over again. Playing your chosen piece once through should be sufficient to set the mood and help the players focus on what is about to transpire. If a track seems too short, try finding another track with a similar sound and play them back to back.

At the same time, don't use too little music during a game. If you play music only during combat or important events, the players won't have a chance to get used to it, and the tracks might distract them. The idea is to let the music's presence feel natural instead of something you've thrown in. To that end, play music at other times to emphasize other scenes in the adventure that may not be highly intense or combat oriented. For example, playing a quiet track to underscore the importance of arriving at a key destination may help the players get into the scene as you describe the setting.

Using music in your games can be a great tool to help make the experience more exhilarating and memorable. If done incorrectly, it can be more trouble than originally anticipated and become more of a nuisance. When preparing tracks for your next session, keep volume, style, and quantity in mind to help create a good balance, and you may find your players craving more time at the game table.

(Not So) Fast Tracks

In the [previous article](#), we focused on musical excerpts that would work well with fast-paced scenes like combat and chases. This time around, we'll look at pieces of *Star Wars* music that might be better suited for scenes that aren't as intense. These not-so-fast scenes can be classified as celebrations, encounters (with aliens or enemies), and views (of establishments and landscapes).

Simply put, celebrations are occasions when a group rejoices over an event. In a *Star Wars* game, a celebration may occur when a group of combatants claims victory in battle. As the fanfares proclaim their triumph over the forces of evil, the players can sit back and revel in their glory.

Examples of good celebration music from the *Star Wars* soundtracks include:

- "Hail to the Winner, Anakin Skywalker" (*The Phantom Menace* Ultimate Edition, CD1, track 34, end at 0:40)
- "The Parade" (*The Phantom Menace* Ultimate Edition, CD2, track 31)
- "Throne Room/End Title" (*A New Hope*, CD2, track 11)
- "Victory Celebration/End Title" (*Return of the Jedi*, CD2, track 10)

Encounters deal with meeting others for a variety of reasons. The *Star Wars* universe includes a wide assortment of alien races and cultures, and we want our music to reflect the mystery and occasional humor that can accompany such encounters.

Examples of good alien encounter music from the *Star Wars* soundtracks include:

- "Jar Jar's Introduction and the Swim to Otoh Gunga" (*The Phantom Menace*, track 4, end at 1:22)
- "The Dune Sea of Tatooine/Jawa Sandcrawler" (*A New Hope*, CD1, track 4)
- "Arrival on Dagobah" (*The Empire Strikes Back*, CD1, track 7)
- "Ewok Feast/Part of the Tribe" (*Return of the Jedi*, CD2, track 11)

In any good gaming experience, the heroes eventually come face to face with the enemy. When that happens, we should have appropriate music ready. To build tension as forces prepare to clash, tracks might feature low, somber tones and slow melodic lines or quick passages with haunting voices or strings rising in volume to a climax.

Examples of good enemy encounter music from the *Star Wars* soundtracks include:

- "Enter Darth Maul" (*The Phantom Menace* Ultimate Edition, CD1, track 16)
- "Zam the Assassin" (*Attack of the Clones*, track 3, end at 0:24)
- "Grievous Speaks to Lord Sidious" (*Revenge of the Sith*, track 13, end at 0:51)



- "Imperial Attack" (*A New Hope*, CD1, track 3, end at 0:59)
- "Imperial Starfleet Deployed/City in the Clouds" (*The Empire Strikes Back*, CD2, track 5, end at 1:13)
- "Shuttle Tydirium Approaches Endor" (*Return of the Jedi*, CD1, track 10)



As the characters travel the galaxy, they will surely find an endless number of locales that draw their attention. Using music to emphasize the wonder of a view should help the players tune in to the description of the scene. Many times, the heroes arrive at some sort of establishment or building, typically a cantina or night club, and look around before they enter. The style of music may vary, depending on the type of location.

Examples of good establishment view music from the *Star Wars* soundtracks include:

- "Mos Espa Arena Band" (*The Phantom Menace* Ultimate Edition, CD1, track 29)
- "Cantina Band" (*A New Hope*, CD1, track 11)
- "Jabba's Baroque Recital" (*Return of the Jedi*, CD1, track 13)
- "Jedi Rocks" (*Return of the Jedi*, CD1, track 14)



Landscapes can provide a breathtaking view of nature's beauty, especially when the heroes first arrive on a new planet. As they peer over the area that they are about to enter, such as a busy starport or a misty mountain range, the right music can enhance their appreciation for the scene.

Examples of good landscape view music from the *Star Wars* soundtracks include:

- "Swimming to Otoh Gunga" (*The Phantom Menace* Ultimate Edition, CD1, track 8)
- "Departing Coruscant" (*Attack of the Clones*, track 5)
- "Return to Tatooine" (*Attack of the Clones*, track 10, end at 1:15)
- "Mos Eisley Spaceport" (*A New Hope*, CD1, track 10)
- "The City in the Clouds" (*The Empire Strikes Back*, CD2, track 5, begin at 3:44)



Feel free to post your thoughts or questions about this article in [this message board thread](#).

About the Author

Patrick Stutzman is a freelance game designer whose credits include *Threats of the Galaxy* and the upcoming *The Clone Wars Campaign Guide* for the **Star Wars Roleplaying Game** Saga Edition. He also maintains his Web site, [Star Wars: The Forgotten Tales](#), and works on [SWRPGNetwork](#) under the name of Jan Tolbara. Currently, he lives in Kansas City with his wife, two children, and an annoying Force spirit that follows him wherever he goes. If you have any tips on how to get rid of this spirit, let him know.

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