

**Motivic Development through Harmony, Rhythm,  
and Instrumentation in the Music of *Family Guy***

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## **Abstract**

The objective of this paper is to provide an analysis of how music is used in an episode of *Family Guy*. My approach to this analysis will be to examine the compositional approaches taken by Walter Murphy and Ron Jones. There are significant differences in how these two composers score episodes for the same series and create two very distinct yet effective musical environments that support and add to the picture.

The analysis is based on my own transcriptions through watching the episodes (as viewed on Disney+). These transcriptions have been arranged into standard one or two-piano orchestral reductions, with instruments being labelled in shorthand next to their respective melodic lines.

### Important Notes:

The season and episode numbers may differ depending on the source. I will be referring to the episodes in my examples based on their season and episode in Disney+.

Full transcriptions can be found in the appendices, and the bar numbers I refer to are based on the scores of my transcriptions.

## Biographies

### Seth MacFarlane

Seth Woodbury MacFarlane was born on October 26, 1973, in the town of Kent, a small town of 3,000 in western Connecticut, about 3 hours away from Providence, Rhode Island. Born to Ronald MacFarlane and Ann Perry (née Sager), he possessed an interest in animation from an early age, starting out like many future animators by developing his skill with the creation of flip books. After graduating high school in 1991, MacFarlane attended the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), studying film, animation, and video. 1994-95 saw him complete an animated film as part of his thesis work titled *The Life of Larry* which premiered at RISD<sup>1</sup>. MacFarlane also voiced many of the characters himself. *The Life of Larry* follows a man named Larry Cummings, his wife Lois, his talking dog Steve, and his son Milt. The film was the primary inspiration for what eventually became *Family Guy*. After his professor submitted *The Life of Larry* to studio and production company Hanna Barbera, he was offered a job in 1995. Interestingly, a biography on MacFarlane purports that he was hired for the quality of the writing, as opposed to his animation ability<sup>2</sup>. Shows he worked on during his time at Hanna Barbera included *Johnny Bravo* and *Dexter's Laboratory*. In 1996, he created *Larry and Steve*, a sequel to *The Life of Larry* and the Fox Broadcasting Company soon asked him to develop a series around the characters.

His life in New England played a significant role in the creation of *Family Guy*, with the principal setting being the fictional city of Quahog, Rhode Island; not far from Providence. He stated that a major influence on the character of Peter Griffin were the people of New England; as he recounts in an interview on *The Graham Norton Show*<sup>3</sup>, “I knew a thousand Peter Griffins growing up in New England, guys who would not think before they spoke”. In the same interview, he also discussed how his exposure to 1940-50s theatrical and radio dramas during his childhood influenced the creation of the voices for Stewie Griffin (based on Rex Harrison) and Glenn Quagmire (an impression of 50s radio drama ad men).

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<sup>1</sup> Contributors to Family Guy Fanon Wiki, “The Life of Larry,” Family Guy Fanon Wiki, accessed April 23, 2023, [https://familyguyfanon.fandom.com/wiki/The\\_Life\\_of\\_Larry](https://familyguyfanon.fandom.com/wiki/The_Life_of_Larry)

<sup>2</sup> Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, ‘Seth Macfarlane,’ Encyclopædia Britannica, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Seth-MacFarlane>

<sup>3</sup> Graham Norton Show, ‘The Graham Norton Show with Tom Cruise, Emily Blunt, Seth MacFarlane, Charlize Theron, Coldplay,’ Youtube, uploaded by Demetris, 15 June 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=irbszpgpdYM>

Although he continues to voice his many characters on *Family Guy*, he is no longer actively involved in writing new episodes, a role he stepped down from in 2011. In the early 2010s, he began to move into producing live action works. In 2012, he released his first live-action feature film *Ted*, followed by *A Million Ways to Die in the West* in 2014, and the 2015 sequel *Ted 2*. 2017 saw the release of *The Orville*, a television series created by MacFarlane and inspired by his love for Star Trek. He stars as Captain Ed Mercer, on the titular ship *USS Orville*. He acts as executive producer alongside Cherry Chevapravatdumrong, a frequent collaborator of his as a producer for *Family Guy*. *The Orville* pays homage to the Star Trek franchise, rather than bring a comic parody of the franchise's style, with an approach to humour that is present yet relatively subtle and reserved, playing with the same themes of exploration and diplomacy found within each Star Trek series in an original way. In fact, his love of Star Trek has been an influence for numerous episodes of *Family Guy*, as well as the frequent appearances of actors including Patrick Stewart, who voices Joe's baby Susie. Alongside *Family Guy*, MacFarlane is also known for the animated series *American Dad*; a show revolving around the life and family of patriotic CIA agent Stan Smith, whom he also provides his voice to. In addition to these, he has also acted as executive producer for several other shows, including *Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey* through his production company Fuzzy Door Productions.

### Walter Murphy

Walter Anthony Murphy Jr. was born on December 19, 1952, in New York City. Growing up in Manhattan, he began studies in various instruments under Elizabeth Raub which included piano, and he also composed for his high school orchestra. He attended the Manhattan School of Music, majoring in composition with additional studies in classical and jazz piano, graduating with a composition degree. Whilst attending university, he worked with jazz trumpeter Doc Severinsen, writing music for the Tonight Show's resident orchestra. His early years as a professional were as a jingle writer and arranger for the children's series Big Blue Marble. He first found success on the airwaves for 'A Fifth of Beethoven'; one of numerous records that adapted classical works and reimagined them in various styles, this being disco oriented. It was a hit, reaching number 1 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 in the latter half of 1976. In 1977, it was featured in the film *Saturday Night Fever*.

In 1979, he released the album *Walter Murphy Discography* with the record label RCA Records (now owned by Sony), a branch of electronics company RCA. In the same year, he formed the band Uncle Louie with Eddie and Frank Dillard, and Gene Pistilli, whom he worked with on a previous concept album called *Phantom of the Opera*. They released one album, *Uncle Louie's Here* with TK Records. This spawned the release of three singles: "I Like Funky Music", "Sky High", and "Full-Tilt Boogie", which made it to number 19 on the *Billboard* R&B chart. In addition to his own work, Murphy and Pistilli also acted as producers for other artists, including for three-time Grammy winner Harry Belafonte's 1981 single "Something to Hold Onto".

In 1982, he recorded the album *Themes from E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial and More*, building on his approach to previous records, he arranged various well-known themes from films such as *E.T.* and *Indiana Jones* in a disco and pop style; with the single "Themes from ET (The Extra-Terrestrial)" reaching number 47 on the *Billboard* Hot 100. During the 1980s, Murphy began to move away from recording original studio albums and touring, and into writing music for film and television as well as continuing his work producing for other artists.

He has been composing the music for *Family Guy* since its first season in 1999 as co-composer, and then as the principal composer following co-composer Ron Jones' departure following the show's twelfth season in 2014. For his work on *Family Guy*, he has received numerous awards, including Outstanding Music and Lyrics alongside MacFarlane at the 2002 Emmy Awards for the song, 'You've Got a Lot to See' from Season 3, Episode 17. He has also worked with Seth MacFarlane on the music for *American Dad*, as well as on his films *Ted*, and its sequel *Ted 2*.

## Ron Jones

Ron Jones was born on July 7, 1954, in Kansas City, Kansas. After completing his undergraduate degree in music composition and theory, he then enrolled in (DATE) to the Dick Grove School of Music in Los Angeles; an institution founded in 1973 by musician Richard Grove whose students included Michael Jackson and Barry Manilow. He studied there with Lalo Schiffrin, a composer who had been nominated for both Academy and Emmy awards for his work. Like MacFarlane, he worked at Hanna-Barbera for a time, as a composer, working there for a total of five years, composing the music for more than a

hundred episodes of the various shows produced by the company. After departing, he worked with composers Mike Post and Pete Carpenter on the music for shows including *The A-Team* and *Magnum, P.I.* Well-known themes that Jones has arranged or written include *The Fairly OddParents*, *The Smurfs*, and *The Snorks*. He also wrote the music for Disney's first syndicated cartoon series: *Ducktales*. Jones composed the music for 42 episodes of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* over the first four seasons from 1987-1991 but has been an outspoken critic of executive producer Rick Berman's approach to music, stating that Berman "always considered music to be an intrusion". Interestingly, Berman was the executive producer for the *Big Blue Marble*, which as mentioned previously, Walter Murphy worked on. Ron Jones concluded his work as co-composer for *Family Guy* in 2014, after the show's twelfth season. His additional work with Seth MacFarlane includes work on *American Dad* in collaboration with Murphy.

## INTRODUCTION

*Family Guy* was created by MacFarlane based on characters appearing in his short films *The Life of Larry* and *Larry and Steve*. It premiered on January 31, 1999, after *Super Bowl XXXIII*, with the episode gaining a total of 22 million viewers, with average ratings for the first season being about 12.8 million. After the airing of three seasons the show was cancelled by Fox in 2002, with Cartoon Network eventually acquiring the rights to reruns. *Family Guy*'s rerun premiere came on April 20, 2003, on Adult Swim. In addition to its rerun premiere, the show's first two seasons were released as a DVD set, becoming one of the bestselling television DVDs ever, and the top seller of 2003. This success did not go unnoticed, and in mid-2004, negotiations with Fox resulted in the ordering of 35 new episodes. The show's fourth season premiered on May 1, 2005. As of the writing of this thesis, *Family Guy* has released a total of 22 seasons, comprising of 417 episodes.

Incidental music within animated television shows varies in its role and prominence and within *Family Guy*, it plays a very significant role in the plot within any given episode compared to shows such as *The Simpsons* and *South Park*. *South Park* for example, although featuring many original songs, contains very little incidental music to accompany scenes, much of it being repeated or containing very limited variation with its primary significant role being purely as an accompaniment for establishing shots.

This paper examines how Walter Murphy and Ron Jones score various parts of an episode of *Family Guy*. My examples are selected from the episodes of the 20 seasons currently available on Disney+. Walter Murphy and Ron Jones' compositional styles and approaches differ in their own unique ways. I will examine some ways in which Walter Murphy integrates and transforms the main theme of *Family Guy* in his scores, and how he also uses leitmotifs, representing various elements of an episode's story. Some of these elements include characters' actions, feelings, emotions, or the settings and relationships portrayed on screen. I will compare Murphy's approach to how Ron Jones writes for *Family Guy*; in contrast, he rarely incorporates motifs from the main theme, although he sometimes takes musical features in them, and uses them to create a very original sound. My examination of these features of Murphy's and Jones' music in this thesis will be through establishing shots and actions scenes, as well as examining how Murphy uses two important leitmotifs.

With their two styles, I will be examining their approaches to harmony and rhythm, as well as the ways in which these two composers use instrumentation as a means of transformation and development in colours through timbral variation. As Seth notes in the 200<sup>th</sup> episode special (S11E5), the show employs a 100-piece orchestra, which provides Murphy and Jones with a substantial amount of textural and timbral opportunities. Before I move into the main body of this analysis, I will begin by first breaking down the Family Guy main title into the motifs and fragments which I will refer to throughout this paper. The complete colour-coded and labelled transcription can be found in Appendix One.

This is my transcription:

## Family Guy Main Title

Melody with instrumental line

Seth MacFarlane and Walter Murphy

*Trans. Alex Jefferies*

Swing  $\text{♩} = 120$

Lois

It seems to day that all you see is vi-o-lence in mo-vies and

4

Peter

sex on T V But where are those good old fash-ioned val-ues on which we used to re-ly

8

Lu-cky there's a Fam-i-ly Guy

Lu-cky there's a man who

12

Stewie

Po-si-ti-vely can do all the things that make us Laugh and cry!

15

All

He's our Fam-ily Guy!

*mf* ————— *f*

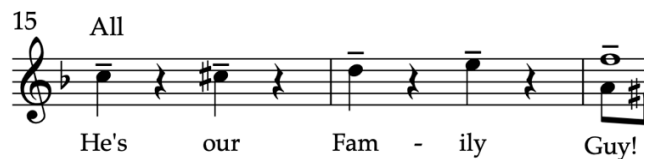


For this paper, I have chosen to break this theme up into 8 motifs, named alphabetically from A-H:

### **Motif A**

Lois



**Motif G****Motif H**

Within these motifs are four commonly used fragments: there is one within Motif A and two in Motif B, which I have named A1, and B1, and B2 respectively:

## Motif A

A1: “seems today”

## Motif B

B1: “is violence in movies”

B2: “and sex on TV”

When motifs A and B are played together as one phrase, I refer to them as Phrase 1:



I will also refer to bars 11 – 13 as Sequence 1:



There are a couple of techniques that Walter Murphy likes to use to integrate the title theme of *Family Guy* into his music. In this thesis, I will discuss how he plays with fragmentation,

harmony, and rhythm, as well as cadence. In addition to this, I will look at how he uses different instruments and their ranges to capture various emotions and feelings of the characters, as well as the overall atmosphere the location of the scene has.

### **Establishing Shots**

Establishing shots have a long history in film, both in live action and animation. This kind of shot is commonly associated with classical film styles. Well-known practitioners of it include Stanley Kubrick and contemporary examples like Wes Anderson. It is used to set and ‘establish’ the location of a scene to the audience and is a key element that separates *Family Guy* from other animated shows like *The Simpsons*. The context of an establishing shot in *Family Guy* is determined by the music that accompanies the shot. Murphy and Jones both use their music to establish a deeper context of the nature of the scene beyond the visual; the music is dependent on things like what emotions, feelings, or actions are being portrayed in the scene, and which characters are present during it. In *Family Guy*, establishing shots come in short and long forms, as well as stationary or moving shots.

In addition to some external examples, I will primarily examine a small selection of common locations that are frequently introduced with establishing shots; they are the following:

- Griffin residence (31 Spooner Street)
- Pewterschmidt mansion (in Newport)
- The Drunken Clam
- Pawtucket Brewery

When it comes to scoring the music for an episode, Murphy approaches points of cadence in two ways: he quite often likes to add suspensions to the final chords in order to add texture and provide a bit of dissonance and additional colour, whether he chooses to end in a cadence or not. This is often influenced by jazz harmony, as his most common suspensions are 2<sup>nd</sup>s and 9<sup>th</sup>s, although he also uses stacked 4<sup>th</sup>s quite commonly too. He also likes to vary the placement of the final chord; as seen in these examples, he sometimes places a concluding chord at the beginning of a bar or halfway through, or on the quaver before the next beat. This final case resembles motif E the clearest. Rhythmically, he also preserves the swing rhythm that the original main theme has, meaning that when he writes for motifs to be played

as straight quavers, this is a point of contrast and emphasis that Murphy takes advantage of for evoking the atmosphere of an upcoming scene.

In ‘Family Guy Lite<sup>4</sup>’, we open to an establishing shot at the Pawtucket Brewery, where Peter is going into the elevator to head up to his office. The music begins with a version of motif A in Bb major rather than beginning in C major. He also does not open with the pickup of motif A like the original, instead opting to being straight at the beginning of the bar. Since this shot is straight after the main titles, it is appropriate since it opens the episode strongly right on the downbeat, rather than leading into it.

**Family Guy Lite (S17E14)**  
Brewery Establishing Shot (0:30-0:34)

Walter Murphy  
Trans. Alex Jefferies

Flutes I and II and percussion

Brass

Double bass

As opposed to having the top voice in the flutes start on the Bb, like the original begins on C, Murphy instead harmonises the motif in 3<sup>rd</sup>s, with the top voice on the D, and the brass filling out the 5<sup>th</sup>s of the chords underneath. The overall atmosphere of the scene is positive, it's the morning and Peter's gone to work and starting his day. The range that the wind and brass play provides a very bright timbre which reinforces this feeling. Murphy concludes the sequence halfway through bar 2, with a quasi-half cadence which is made clear by the bass line finishing on an F.

The establishing shot, from ‘Paternormal Activity<sup>5</sup>’ at 2:21 – 2:27 is the first shot of the Griffin residence in the episode. Stewie and Lois are having breakfast in the kitchen, as Brian walks in with his new glasses; this becomes a major plot for their day, as Stewie tries to destroy them because of how Brian now acts with them. The music in this shot is a version of Sequence 1, with swinging quavers, and beginning in the original Bb now accompanied by a

<sup>4</sup> Kim, Mike, dir. ‘Family Guy Lite’, *Family Guy*, Season 14, Episode 14, Disney, 2019

<sup>5</sup> Colton, Greg, dir. ‘Paternormal Activity.’ *Family Guy*, Season 14, Episode 4. Disney, 2015.

bass guitar. Instead of the opening key being in Bb major, it is in Eb major, and the bass guitar opens with a arpeggiated G minor chord, the mediant (iii) of this key. The French horns harmonize the 7<sup>th</sup> of each chord to create a jazz feel to the music. Because of this new tonal centre, this version of Sequence 1 now fits Eb major, so rather than going from Bb to A $\sharp$  to G, it is now Bb to Ab to G. He also compresses the chord progressions into 1 every half bar. He moves through the sequence by tonicizing the next chord. This version goes Gm<sup>7</sup> – C<sup>7</sup> – Fm – Bb<sup>7</sup> – Eb<sup>7</sup> – C<sup>5</sup>. Like the previous example at the brewery, Murphy concludes with a cadence on the half bar, but this time, rather than a half-cadence (I – V), he finishes with a deceptive cadence (V – VI or V - vi). In order to fit the scene, he also chooses to end on an open C chord, without making the 3<sup>rd</sup> clear, thus making it ambiguous to whether we have finished on a major or minor chord. This suits the scene, since it is the beginning of the day, when the characters present in the scene do not know about how the day will go.

### Peternormal Activity (S14E4)

Griffin residence establishing shot (2:21 - 2:27)

Walter Murphy  
Trans. Alex Jefferies

Flutes

French horns

Bass guitar

Sequence 1:

Lu-cky there's a man who Po - si - ti - vely can do all the things that make us

The episode 'Stewie is Enceinte'<sup>6</sup> provides an interesting example in variation of rhythm. In this example, he uses motif E, and instead of concluding the phrase with the final upbeat of the bar, he finishes the phrase on the downbeat of the next bar. The melody in Flute I still

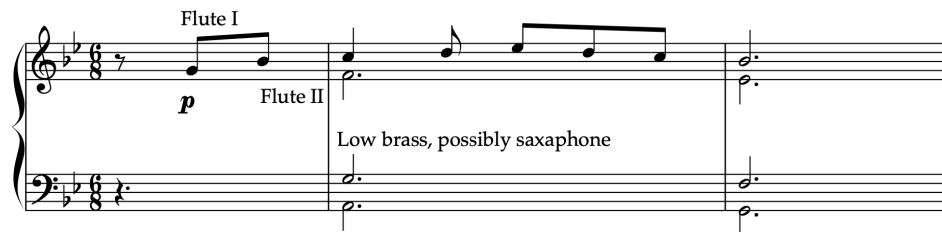
<sup>6</sup> Robertson, Steve, dir. 'Stewie is Enceinte,' *Family Guy*, Season 13, Episode 13, Disney, 2015

resembles motif E quite clearly, but instead of maintaining the swing rhythm, he preserves the melody and its contour, and changes it into 6/8 rather than 4/4.

### Stewie is Enceinte (S13E13)

Griffin residence establishing shot (8:58 - 9:02)

Walter Murphy  
Trans. Alex Jefferies



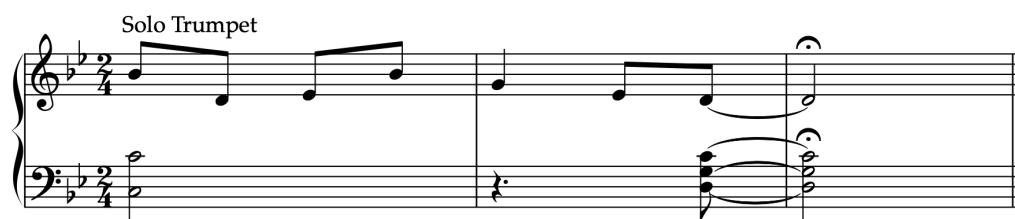
This also shifts the emphasis of the downbeat. Just like the previous two examples, he uses suspensions in his chords. The chords in my view, appear to be first inversions of F, followed by Eb that are suspended with added 9<sup>th</sup>s. This is appropriate as during the scene, Brian has become concerned after Stewie reveals he has impregnated himself with Brian's own DNA. His new feelings are being established musically. The quieter dynamic, simpler accompaniment with the brass, and the flute playing lower in its range further emphasises this.

The establishing shot at the Drunken Clam at 7:17 – 17:20 is interesting, because although the melody appears different at the surface level, there are small elements that make it feel familiar to the viewer. In this scene, Peter is having a beer with the guys and is a bit sad and deflated about how overweight and unfit he is, after the events previously described for the brewery establishing shot from the same episode (at 4:15 – 4:18). The instrumentation is just brass, with a trumpet playing the solo with a simple accompaniment of trombones.

### Family Guy Lite (S17E14)

Drunken Clam establishing shot (7:17-7:20)

Walter Murphy  
Trans. Alex Jefferies



The way Murphy depicts Peter's feelings leading up to the scene, is by having a melody with quite large leaps for the trumpet rather than something scale based; at bar 1 the soloist must leap a minor 6<sup>th</sup> from Bb to D, and then a perfect 5<sup>th</sup> from Eb to Bb, and also by writing it with the lower-middle portion of its range. This part of the trumpet's range can be played quietly and sounds brassier, with a lot more overtones and partials able to be heard. The D below treble clef is close to the portion of the trumpet's range where it begins to sound muddy. This is effective, because the viewer can feel Peter's dejection through the timbre of the instrument, but also with the association of a melody being in a lower register as sometimes feeling sadder or more melancholy than a melody in a higher one. Even though this melody sounds original and unconnected to the main theme, Murphy maintains key elements from motif E that make it feel familiar. The melody is played swing and because of that, the 4-quaver leaping phrase's rhythm in bar 1 is recognizable with motif E. Although it ends up on a crotchet, Murphy continues the familiar rhythm by concluding with the recognizable 2-quaver stepwise fragment that concludes the original motif:



Original:



ly Guy

He concludes with a suspended chord with a root of D and stacked 4<sup>ths</sup> of G and C as is common in jazz harmony. If there was a tonal centre for this melody, I would say G minor, but the music concludes with a quasi-half cadence in D minor, or chord v. This indicates a lack of resolution for the upcoming scene.

Murphy also uses instrumentation and rhythm as a means of imitating other genres in an establishing shot in order to fit the location of a scene. In the episode 'Take My Wife<sup>7</sup>', Peter, Lois, and the guys with their respective wives (except for Quagmire who found a woman named Kimi to join the trip) go on a couple's retreat to an unnamed island in the Bahamas.

<sup>7</sup> Holmquist, John, dir. 'Take My Wife', *Family Guy*, Season 13, Episode 19, Disney, 2018

This long form establishing shot features saxophones and a bass guitar, as well as a piano, in addition to the very recognisable Hammond organ. The instrumentation and way in which these instruments play and are featured is very much in the reggae genre. A particular feature of the genre being the Hammond organ.

Murphy has the saxophones play a variation of Phrase 1, with a larger gap between the phrases ‘seems today’ and ‘that all you see’, in addition to ‘is violence’, and ‘[sex] on T-V’, which like in this music, begin on the strongest downbeats of the bar. Murphy also fragments the B1 and B2 even further, into the lyrics that begin the bar, rather than playing motif B entirely. The bass guitar underneath plays a series of arpeggios in the chords of Phrase 1: Bb (bars 1-2), C (bars 3-4), F (5-6), and Bb (7-8) before concluding in a clear Bb major. This arpeggiated figure is very associated with the reggae sound, and a good example of it in other music is in the reggae-inspired song ‘Ob-la-di Ob-la-da’ by The Beatles.

## Take My Wife (S13E19)

Island establishing shot (3:58-4:15)

Walter Murphy  
Trans. Alex Jefferies

The musical score is written for three instruments: Saxophones, Bass guitar, and Piano. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats) and the time signature is 4/4. The Saxophones part (top staff) features a melodic line with eighth and quarter notes, including rests. The Bass guitar part (middle staff) plays a rhythmic arpeggiated pattern. The Piano part (bottom staff) provides harmonic support with chords and a steady bass line. A measure number '5' is indicated at the start of the Bass guitar staff. The score concludes with a double bar line.

Murphy evokes this genre through the instrumentation to highlight the location that this shot establishes. They are at an island in the Bahamas, and reggae is the most popular and one of the most important genres in the history of that part of the world, particularly in Jamaica, whose artists include revolutionary musicians like Bob Marley.

Another place in which Murphy evokes a specific genre and style of music, can be seen in establishing shots of the Pewterschmidt mansion. Murphy approaches cadence quite



differently compared to other establishing shots. Rather than adding suspensions such as 4<sup>th</sup>s or 9<sup>th</sup>s in the chords themselves, his chords are clear triads, with melodic suspensions in the Baroque style through use of neighbour tones. Murphy very clearly incorporates counterpoint into the musical sequence for this establishing shot. This is a compositional technique that is most closely associated with the Baroque era, although it is an element that many composers from the Classical and Romantic eras and further incorporated into their music, including Beethoven, Mozart, and Haydn. This is shown particularly through the oboe and bassoon melodies which are linked together harmonically through the keys that the music cycles through but are very clear independent melodic lines rhythmically and in terms of melodic contour.

Murphy is using this kind of Baroque treatment of harmony and melody as a means of symbolising the nature of the location. Because Carter and Babs are significantly wealthier than the Griffins, and live a very upper class privileged lifestyle, the Baroque-style approach to harmony is used to represent this musically. For example, in the episode ‘The Finer Strings’<sup>8</sup>, Brian is tasked with helping a temporarily blinded Carter around his house. From 8:18 – 8:23, there is an establishing shot of the Pewterschmidt mansion. The harmonic progression is Dm – G – C – F – Bb and is done through a sequence of rapid tonicizations.

The musical score is written for four instruments: Solo Oboe, Solo Bassoon, Violins, and Cello. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats) and the time signature is 4/4. The score is divided into six measures, each corresponding to a chord: A, Dm, G, C, F, and Bb. The Solo Oboe and Solo Bassoon parts are marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The Violins part is also marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The Cello part enters in the final measure (Bb) and is marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The Solo Oboe and Solo Bassoon parts play a melodic line that moves through the chords, while the Violins and Cello provide harmonic support. The Solo Bassoon part includes fingerings: 5, 7, 4, 6, 5, b7, 6, b7.

<sup>8</sup> Lee, Joseph, dir. ‘The Finer Strings’, *Family Guy*, Season 15, Episode 13, Disney, 2017



In Baroque music, progression via the circle of fifths is often featured in harmonic sequences in music of that time, such as in the episodes of a movement in ritornello form. An example can be found in the Passacaglia movement (measures 1-4) of Handel's *Suite in G minor for Keyboard*. In this excerpt is a clear circle of fifths progression, with one progression per 2 beats:

Gm – Cm – F – Bb – Eb – A° – D – Gm



Murphy also uses the instrumentation as a form of symbolism. In this case, he does it to illustrate the grandeur of Carter and Babs' residence in contrast to the Griffin residence on Spooner Street. The instrumentation in this example is highly idiomatic to a Baroque ensemble; it features a small wind section of solo instruments (solo oboe and solo bassoon), in addition to a small string ensemble, and a harpsichord. By complementing the music with a Baroque-style ensemble, Murphy further adds to the atmosphere of sophistication and grandness which the visuals depict.

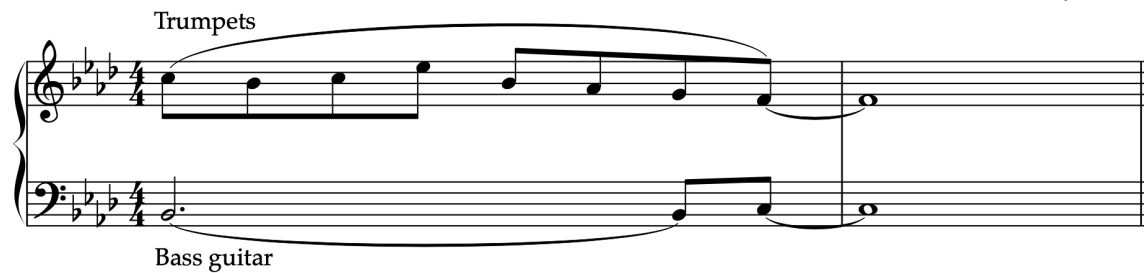
There is an exception to shots at the Pewterschmidt mansion that can be seen in the episode 'Absolutely Babulous'.<sup>9</sup> In this episode, the Griffins move in temporarily after the house is burnt down, the establishing shots of the mansion feature the same sound and reference motifs that we often hear in establishing shots at the Griffin residence. This acts as a musical indication of their presence at the mansion, and that they have a featuring role in the happenings at the mansion during the episode in comparison to the previous example from 'The Finer Strings' where Carter is the protagonist, with Brian having a smaller role. One example is at 13:35 – 13:39 where we hear the trumpets play a variation of motif E with a simple single note bass line with the original swing rhythm:

<sup>9</sup> Kim, Mike, dir. 'Absolutely Babulous,' *Family Guy*, Season 18, Episode 3, Disney, 2019

## Absolutely Babulous (S18E3)

Pewterschmidt mansion establishing shot (13:35 - 13:39)

Walter Murphy  
Trans. Alex Jefferies



In many episodes of *Family Guy*, the final scene that wraps up an episode is often at the Griffin residence. These are commonly short form establishing shots, and the family is often in the living room gathered around the couch during which resolutions or reflections to the plots of an episode. The family can appear together in the scene, but sometimes not everyone is present; characters involved together in one of the key plots to an episode might be the only ones there. However, because it's concluding the episode at the family residence, part of the title theme is played. Quite often, this is motif E, because it is in the latter portion of the title theme, indicating that it is nearly the ending of an episode but has not quite been concluded; the role of a musical conclusion is left to the end credits. In the episode 'Family Guy Lite' (S17E14), the concluding establishing shot at the Griffin residence has Brian reflecting with Stewie on his attempted pursuit of Lois during the episode. This example features a transposed version of motif E, and as with previous examples, Murphy adds suspensions to chords to add some colour and light dissonance.

## Family Guy Lite (S17E14)

Griffin residence establishing shot (19:57-20:00)

Walter Murphy  
Trans. Alex Jefferies

Flutes

Piccolo

Trombones

Bass

The musical score is written for Flutes, Piccolo, Trombones, and Bass. It is in 2/2 time and the key of B-flat major (two flats). The flute part starts with a whole note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, Bb4, and C5, then a half note D5, and finally a whole note E5. The piccolo part starts with a whole note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, Bb4, and C5, then a half note D5, and finally a whole note E5. The trombone part starts with a whole note G3, followed by quarter notes A3, Bb3, and C4, then a half note D4, and finally a whole note E4. The bass part starts with a whole note G2, followed by quarter notes A2, Bb2, and C3, then a half note D3, and finally a whole note E3. All parts are connected by a slur, indicating they are part of a single musical phrase.

The first establishing shot of the asylum from the episode ‘Peternormal Activity’<sup>10</sup> (4:16 – 4:46), is another example of a long form shot. In this episode, after being disappointed by the film, *Maniac Pope II*, Peter and the guys decide they can write a better horror movie of their own. In order to find inspiration, they choose to go to the long-decommissioned Quahog Asylum. In this establishing shot, Peter is driving up to the old asylum with Quagmire, Cleveland, and Joe, as the camera pans ahead to show the entry sign, followed by the dilapidated building. This longer form gives Murphy an opportunity to write a more extensive musical accompaniment, in comparison to short form shots. He opens with the 2<sup>nd</sup> violins quietly playing a tremolo ostinato in D minor (the violas accompany with quavers) as the solo oboe plays an elongated version of motif E. He has turned this motif from the show’s main title, into its own standalone theme. The melody begins on an A, the dominant of D minor:

The musical score is written for four staves in 4/4 time, D minor. The top staff is for the Solo Oboe, starting with a melodic line on A4, marked *mp*. The second staff is for the Piano, starting with a Dm chord and a tremolo ostinato on F4, marked *p* and *mp*. The third staff is for Vln II, playing a tremolo ostinato on F4, marked *pp*. The bottom staff is for Vla, playing a quaver accompaniment, marked *pp*. The tempo is marked 'Mysteriously' and the metronome is set to 100.

To emphasise the sinister nature and the darkness visually of this establishing shot, the violins start on F, harmonising the root note played by the piano in order to highlight the minor quality, rather than playing on the root. Similarly, the violas harmonise this F figure by beginning on A, the interval of a 6<sup>th</sup> which is the most consonant interval along with the 3<sup>rd</sup>.

The oboe, then chromatically descends, in an articulated slide to an F, as the rest of the instruments progress to B-flat minor underneath. Following this, the French horn begins the

<sup>10</sup> Colton, Greg, dir. ‘Peternormal Activity’, *Family Guy*, Season 14, Episode 4, Disney, 2015

melody on the root this time, as the strings continue by filling out the other harmonies of the chord.

4 Bbm Solo French Horn F#m

mp 3

Vln I mf pp

Murphy is using a common film music technique known as the Rule of Thirds, whereby each chord or tonicized key is related to one another by the interval of a 3<sup>rd</sup>. The music begins in D minor (4:16), moving to B-flat minor (4:23), and then F# minor (4:30). Note that when the trumpet takes the melody, it begins on the dominant of F# minor (C-sharp).

8 Solo Trumpet

mp 3

This is followed by a continuation (4:37 – 4:46) to A minor, C minor and then concluding with an unexpected B-flat augmented chord (Bb+), which breaks the progression of 3rds. By beginning on the dominant C-sharp, this allows the trumpet to arrive at A through the scalar melody, which creates a smooth progression to A minor (the melody also opening on the dominant of A minor (E)).

10

Am Cm Bb+

Flutes

French horn

Trombones

Cellos

Vla

*mp* *fp* *f*

*p* *fp* *f*

This technique can be seen in many film scores. Alexandre Desplat for example, has used it in his music. One example from his work can be found in *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012), during the scene when SEAL Team Six boards the two Black Hawks bound for Bin Laden's compound<sup>11</sup> (1:55:24 – 1:56:45), where the tonal centre is F minor, but contains the chord progression Fm – Am. So long as the root note of the next chord is either a major/minor 3<sup>rd</sup> above or below your starting chord, progressions to either the major or minor version of a chord sounds smooth and pleasing to the ear.

In the continuation (4:37 – 4:46) in bars 10-13, we hear an ascending sequence with the progression Am – Cm – B-flat augmented (Bb+). This progression, maintaining the 3rds movement from F#m – Am - Cm develops very organically because the melody does not jump, it moves as an ascending scalar pattern. This continuation is now in the same rhythm as motif A as heard in the title theme, but at a slower tempo.

Original motif A:

seems to day that all you see

<sup>11</sup> Bigelow, Kathryn, dir. *Zero Dark Thirty*, Columbia Pictures, 2012

The continuation:



It acts as a contraction to this establishing shot's elongated version, which up until bar 10, was dotted crotchet – quaver, rather than crotchet - quaver. This increases the musical tension and musical momentum in order to build to a more effective ending. The reason why Murphy chooses to finish on Bb+, is because he chooses to maintain the 3-bar phrase structure and conclude on an unexpected and unstable harmony to evoke the suspenseful moment that the guys open the door. Like his arrival to Am at bar 10, Murphy arrives to Bb+ smoothly through the scalar melodic line as opposed to a jump. Furthermore, using an ascending sequence, he reverses the direction of the original version of Motif A, and plays with the viewer's anticipation because of the recognizable rhythm with an inverted melodic direction. In this example, he also steers clear of a perfect or half cadence to avoid any clear overall tonal centre. The ambiguity musically represents the tension and uncertainty the audience sees on screen.

Additionally, Murphy adds more colour and character to the music by passing the solo between instruments: the solo oboe first, followed by the French horn, and finally the trumpet. All three instruments play in roughly a similar written range, but their variations in timbre help to add new colours and emotions to a melody that is simply repeated in transposition. The oboe is playing in the upper portion of its ideal register, which produces a darker quality that can cut through the string ostinato. In contrast, the horn, is playing near the highest portion of its range, which produces a softer dynamic and a thinner texture which blends very well with the strings. Following this the trumpet, likely fitted with a mute (possibly a metal straight mute by its timbre) has an almost quiet resilience about the melody as it plays in the upper-middle portion of its register, resembling the slow movement of a Bruckner or Mahler symphony. In the concluding crescendo to Bb+, Murphy creates a denser texture with the addition of more instruments as the strings' tremolo grows, which includes a harp glissando. Often when the harp is used, it conveys a sense of the otherworldly, in this case of the more sinister than the angelic.



Note: I did hear that in the F# minor section, there is a change to C $\sharp$  in the violas from the C# prior to and after that sticks out slightly around 4:33-4:36. I have included this in my transcription, because I believe this was likely a choice to add dissonance to the trumpet's C#.

The next establishing shot of the asylum shows Peter driving to it once again, from 18:32 – 18:38, and is similar but shorter. Murphy repeats the melodic progression of Dm – Bbm but alters the theme's point of entry in order to highlight the scene's different atmosphere by beginning the strings' entry as a pickup bar. Instead of going to the location to come up with ideas for their horror film, Peter is going to frame Quagmire for the janitor's murder.

The musical score is for a 4-measure segment in 4/4 time. The top staff is for Solo Oboe, starting with a Dm chord and a melodic line that moves from D4 to E4, F#4, G4, A4, Bb4, and ends with a Bbm chord. The Piano part starts with a Dm chord and a bass line that moves from D3 to C3, B2, A2, G2, F2, and ends with a Bbm chord. The Vln II part starts with a Dm chord and a melodic line that moves from D4 to E4, F#4, G4, A4, Bb4, and ends with a Bbm chord. The Vla part starts with a Dm chord and a bass line that moves from D3 to C3, B2, A2, G2, F2, and ends with a Bbm chord. Dynamics include *p* for Piano, *mp* for mezzo-piano, and *pp* for pianissimo.

Overall, I have presented several examples of how Murphy writes music for establishing shots. I have shown how he uses harmony, rhythm, and cadence to create variations of the theme in order to fit the atmosphere, action, or emotions of the scene, as well as depicting the setting of it. Murphy also keeps the motifs he uses recognizable by preserving an element from the original within the variation. I have also shown how he incorporates varying orchestrations, and uses the instruments' capabilities and timbre to further illustrate these four aspects of a scene that are highlighted during an establishing shot.

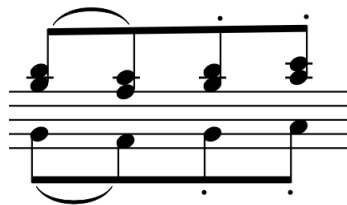
Ron Jones takes a different approach to his music for the show. He rarely quotes the *Family Guy* theme directly in his music but does use fragments of motifs found within it. There are also examples where he plays with the rhythm and melodic contour, also using harmony to make it sound entirely new, almost to the point where the original is difficult to recognize.

The establishing shot at 7:59 – 8:03 of the Griffin residence from the episode ‘Brian Griffin’s House of Payne’<sup>12</sup> provides an interesting example of Jones’ use of rhythm and melodic contour. In a previous scene, Meg ran after Chris for stealing her diary, resulting in Chris accidentally knocking Stewie over and down the stairs, before standing up with a very severe and obvious head wound. The melody is a descending sequence, with two 4-quaver phrases. The contour of these 4-quaver phrases bears a striking resemblance to the first half of motif E.

Original:



Establishing shot:



Full score:

## Brian Griffin's House of Payne (S8E15)

Griffin residence establishing shot (7:59-8:04)

Ron Jones

Trans. Alex Jefferies

Flutes and xylophone

Bassoon

Violins

Double bass, pizz.

<sup>12</sup> Langford, Jerry, dir. ‘Brian Griffin’s House of Payne’, *Family Guy*, Season 8, Episode 15, Disney, 2010

Two flutes play the top line starting on the B above treble clef, accompanied by a xylophone a third below, and bassoon a tenth below, with violins filling out the inner harmony, and pizzicato double basses.

For this shot, Jones also avoids any kind of cadence or tonicization. This is a descending second (D2) real sequence, in which the second 4-quaver phrase is transposed a major second below the first. This creates a harmonic sequence evoking the whole tone scale, since the second phrase is not transposed tonally to fit within the scale of the first. The way in which the strings harmonise the melody is also intriguing. Double bass play a pizzicato descending C arpeggio, followed by a Bb. It is interesting to note that in these arpeggios, the 3<sup>rd</sup> is missing, making it an open 5<sup>th</sup>; although there is a playability factor to this, it also means that there is no confirmation of harmony or an underlying root. In my view, the B – A – G accompaniment by the violins represents the stronger and clearer scale root note despite being in a higher register, rather than the double bass' arpeggio. In this way, Jones is playing with unique modal harmonies. Rather than major or minor modes, Jones employs the Locrian mode. The accompaniment by the double basses could be seen as further playing with modal harmony and listeners' harmonic expectations, as it juxtaposes the implied root of the major (Ionian) mode of the scale in the sequence underneath Locrian. The first 4-quaver phrase is in B Locrian, and the second phrase is in A Locrian.

#### B Locrian



#### A Locrian



He does however, still incorporate major and minor within this passage, because the double bass arpeggios are consonant with the melody in the winds, either acting as the 5<sup>th</sup> of the

chord (the first C and first Bb), the root (the first G and first F), or a doubling of the third (the final C and the final F).

Due to the nature of the sequence and his use of modal harmony, there is no cadence or harmonic resolution which is very appropriate to this scene. The scene is a continuation of what has happened since Stewie got his head injury, and the emotions have changed from shock, to panic and dread between Chris and Meg over what to do with him. To add to the sense of panic and tension, Jones concludes with an E minor chord over G, with a chromatic slide in the bassoon down to a C#. Because the G is in both the wind and violin parts, it is emphasised, and Jones does this to highlight the tritone interval of G and C#. The tritone is an interval between two notes separated by three tones, hence the name. Because this interval sits between a perfect 4<sup>th</sup> and perfect 5<sup>th</sup>, it is a dissonant and uncomfortable harmony, which is very effective for the scene.

This example shows that although Jones does not necessarily quote or incorporate motifs from the *Family Guy* title theme directly, he often uses fragments of motifs found within the theme and transforms them, so they sound entirely original. For this case, he has incorporated the rhythm and melodic contour found in the first half of motif E and expanded it in a unique way. This is particularly important in this establishing shot that does feature members of the Griffin family, because the music still possesses the familiar melodic contour and rhythm that the viewer recognises to be associated with those characters.

As important as the music accompanying an establishing shot is, Murphy and Jones are very selective about when to include it, and when music is absent from an establishing shot, it is also very important in providing context to an establishing shot. Some of these examples of establishing shots are continuations of previous scenes. In 'Family Guy Lite', the Griffin residence establishing shot from 6:11 – 6:13 is the second establishing shot of the house in the episode. The first was from 2:24 – 2:26, and had music, because the scene introduced the audience to Lois' creative writing club. This following shot is a continuation of the previous events; this time, the club's meeting has concluded, and Brian is alone in the living room. Noticing the absence of the owners, he decides to gleefully eat the remaining food left on the table. Because there is nothing about the scene that alters the previous atmosphere of it in a significant way, and it is a continuation of the previous scene, there is no need for any music. In 'Peternormal Activity', there is an establishing shot for the scene at a café with Stewie and

Brian (9:31 – 10:14). There is music in this establishing shot because it is the first time, we have seen the two characters since they were together with the family that morning. Musical context is needed to set the scene because the location as and atmosphere have changed in the 7 minutes since we last saw them. After this scene, the next time we cut to Stewie and Brian's story is an establishing shot of the Quahog Sauna (11:08 – 11:11). This scene at the Quahog Sauna is a continuation of the previous scene in the respect that Brian and Stewie are going about their day together. There is no change in atmosphere compared to the previous scene, which we saw only a minute and a half prior and thus no music is needed.

A good example of appropriately using music in a scene that does continue previous events, is the establishing shot from 'Brian Griffin's House of Payne' (7:59 – 8:03) that I have already touched on. Although it is a continuation from previous events, because the emotions of the characters have gone from concern, to panic and outright dread, it is appropriate to have music that can indicate this change in atmosphere.

Overall, I have shown that Walter Murphy and Ron Jones both use music in establishing shots in order to provide context beyond what the viewer sees. These establishing shots can come in short or long forms, and Murphy and Jones both look to create a sense of spatial identity<sup>13</sup> with their music. There is the exterior shot, and the music that accompanies it helps to build a picture of what is going on within the location during a given scene. When there is no music in an establishing shot, its omission is often done to imply that the scene shown earlier is a continuation from the most recent scene in that location, and the scene has not changed in its atmosphere, and thus, does not require any musical context beforehand.

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<sup>13</sup> Schwan, Stephan, "Watching Film for the First Time: How Adult Viewers Interpret Perceptual Discontinuities in Film," *Psychological Science* 21, no. 7 (2010): 973

## Walter Murphy's Use of Leitmotifs

There are several recurring activities found in a significant number of episodes where characters are in similar situations or doing a similar action, in which Murphy uses leitmotifs to represent these. A leitmotif is a piece of thematic material that is associated with a particular action or person. The word is taken from its original German ‘leitmotiv’ which translates as ‘leading’ or ‘guiding motif’<sup>14</sup>. These forms of recurring motifs are most often found in pieces of programmatic music. Historically, it is commonly used in opera, as a way of representing important characters in the story. These can be found within the operas of Claudio Monteverdi but has become very closely associated with the operas of Richard Wagner. With the advent of film, the leitmotif has been a core element of many film scores, one of the most famous examples being in John Williams’ music for the Star Wars films.

In this paper, I will discuss two of these leitmotifs:

- The 'Time machine leitmotif'
- The 'Rushing leitmotif'

The Time machine leitmotif begins when Stewie activated his time machine and concludes when he has travelled to wherever he ends up (intentional or unintentional). It is quite a chromatic melody and the beginning feels quasi-D minor but does not have a clear tonal centre, however, the conclusion with the C in bars 2-3 is typically accompanied by some kind of orchestrated F major chord.



In episodes that are scored by Murphy with plots involving Stewie's time machine, this leitmotif appears very often. The only episodes where this is not the case are episodes scored by Ron Jones. Depending on the length of the scene, Murphy adds to and expands on the motif to what suits the visuals. In the episode, 'The Big Bang Theory'<sup>15</sup>, after Stewie embarrasses Brian several times by going back in time and changing the past, Brian realises and the two fight over where the time machine ends up. This is an example of a longer

<sup>14</sup> Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, "leitmotif," Encyclopedia Britannica, September 14, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/art/leitmotif>

<sup>15</sup> Polcino, Dominic, dir. 'The Big Bang Theory,' *Family Guy*, Season 9, Episode 18, Disney, 2011

sequence involving the motif, since the time machine is running for a longer period. The scene runs from 3:57 – 4:19, in which Murphy develops an ever-building crescendo as various parts of the time machine break during the fight. The concluding phrase seen underneath from 4:12 – 4:19 is played as the time machine begins to operate, and similar to the leitmotif, is chromatic in nature. Murphy uses this extended version in order to create a longer crescendo, allowing him to progressively add orchestral instruments during the build-up. The instrumentation of this phrase adds to the tension and anticipation of where the two will end up. He brings in tubular bells during this phrase, which cuts through the rest of the orchestral swell. Their timbre, resembling church bells creates an intensity for the music to reach its peak. It also highlights the uncertainty of this scene as previously mentioned, due to the instrument's inharmonic overtones, which are dissonant to the played note.



During this scene, the machine malfunctions and sends them outside the space-time continuum, preventing them from being able to return home with the return pad. This extended version is repeated again at 7:04 – 7:26 when Stewie overloads the return pad, sending them back to the future and back home, and later finds out that that single action turns out to be the big bang, and the formation of the universe. By using the exact same version, it highlights to the viewer that they are returning back to where they came from, and by using the same instrumentation for the crescendo with this concluding phrase, Murphy emphasises the tension and anticipation of whether or not Stewie's idea worked.

This is also an excellent example of Walter Murphy's use of progressive tonality, in that the music begins in quasi-D minor with the F major at the conclusion of the leitmotif, but Murphy's expansion of the idea through the length of the scene allows him to develop it and progress through various keys until ending with the concluding chromatic phrase in an emphatic E major.

Further in the episode, 'The Big Bang Theory' at 18:39 – 18:45 when Brian returns to the present and leaving Stewie in the Renaissance to complete Leonardo da Vinci's work, the Time machine leitmotif is not played. This is because the atmosphere is very emotional and

needs to have music that is appropriate for this scene. There are cases when the leitmotif is played when the return pad is used, such as in the episode ‘Valentine’s Day in Quahog<sup>16</sup>’ at 7:12 – 7:17, after Stewie goes to the 60s and accidentally kisses a baby Lois, a fragment of the leitmotif (bars 2-3) plays when he uses his return pad to go back to the present. Another example of a fragmentation of the leitmotif is in the episode ‘Chap Stewie<sup>17</sup>.’ At 4:30 – 4:40, Stewie reveals to Brian that he has rebuilt his time machine, as the camera turns when Stewie unveils it, Murphy adds more drama and emphasis to this brief action by playing just a small fragment of the leitmotif:



Alongside my examples, there are many other episodes where the Time machine leitmotif also appears, and these are several of them:

- S7E13: ‘Road to Germany’
- S11E4: ‘Yug Ylimaf’
- S13E8: ‘Stewie, Chris, & Brian’s Excellent Adventure’
- S18E3: ‘Absolutely Babulous’

The Rushing leitmotif is the name I have given to the theme that sometimes appears when a character is visibly rushing, and they are running out of time.

The episode ‘Stewie is Enceinte’ contains an excellent example of the Rushing leitmotif. It appears when Brian is rushing Stewie to the hospital after his water breaks and he will soon

<sup>16</sup> Bowen, Bon, dir. ‘Valentine’s Day in Quahog,’ *Family Guy*, Season 11, Episode 13, Disney, 2013

<sup>17</sup> Vaux, Joe, dir. ‘Chap Stewie,’ *Family Guy*, Season 12, Episode 21, Disney, 2014



give birth. The theme immediately appears when the scene cuts to Brian weaving through traffic and driving at high speed in order to get to the hospital in time for Stewie to give birth. Much like the Time machine leitmotif, the Rushing leitmotif it is not in a key, but the top melody, which is very chromatic is harmonised with clear triadic chords. In bar 3, you can see D#m/Bb, which provides a very dominant quality since the dominant of D#m is A#: Bb's enharmonic equivalent. This is followed by the same case in bar 4 but this time in F#m/C. The bassline in its simplest form is an arpeggiated Eb-diminished 7<sup>th</sup>, with each individual note from this chord of E, G, Bb, and C# taking up 1 bar each.

## Action Scenes

An excellent example of how Murphy develops and transforms a motif from the titles into its own standalone theme in an action scene is found in the episode ‘A House Full of Peters’<sup>18</sup> (S15E20). In this episode, Peter receives what turns out to be a prank call by Lois, in which she pretends to be one of his unknown children. He had previously been a sperm donor, so he decides to check if this was true. At 6:59 – 7:20, there is an action scene where Peter drives to the sperm bank, with Lois following closely behind.

The music opens in the key of G minor, as the cello and piano play a transformation of motif E. The motif has been turned into its own unique theme, and rather than being played with swinging quavers like the original, it is played straight, and Murphy does this to underline the serious tone of the scene.



Unlike the original, Murphy avoids using the leading note of G harmonic minor (F#) in this transformation. This is unlike the previous example from ‘Paternormal Activity’ of the asylum establishing shot. He is not looking to confirm the key and instead opts for F♭. F♭ appears in the G natural minor scale, but also features in the Mixolydian mode, which gives this theme’s key a more dominant quality, rather than being a clear tonic.

### G Natural Minor



<sup>18</sup> Lee, Joseph, dir. ‘A House Full of Peters’, *Family Guy*, Season 15, Episode 20, Disney, 2017

## G Mixolydian Mode



As I have shown in other examples, Murphy and Jones both like to use the Mixolydian mode, as is common for many film composers, because it creates the ambiguity and dominant quality to be able to progress through various tonal centres effectively. Murphy also avoids clearly confirming G minor by having the violins and violas incorporate a C (suspended 4<sup>th</sup>) in their ostinato rather than using the minor 3<sup>rd</sup> (Bb) which would be too dark. Murphy is going for a tonal colour that suggests uncertainty as opposed to negativity.

Murphy also uses the Rule of Thirds in this cue; after opening in G minor, he shifts to Bb minor. In the final bar (bar 8) in Bb minor, a swift crescendo in the strings and flute leads to a subito passage featuring quartal and quintal harmony. As the strings play tremolos of A, E, and B, notes all separated by a perfect 5<sup>th</sup>, the flute plays a melody that descends in perfect 4ths before finishing on B $\flat$ , far removed from the Bb minor of the previous 4 bars.



The use of quartal and quintal harmony in this passage provides a sense of atonality in that it avoids any clear harmony, which provides an enigmatic feeling that is entirely appropriate to this scene.

This shorter passage is further developed in a future episode already featured in this paper: 'Family Guy Lite' (S17E14). The story in this episode, involving Brian and Stewie revolves

around Lois writing a story in which Brian believed she was revealing her secrets of her ideal attributes in a lover. Upon discovering that parts of the grocery store had served as inspiration for the story, and that the character of Horatio was real, Brian believes that Lois is cheating on Peter. The action scene this time, involved Brian and Stewie following Lois. The first version of this theme saw a progression of G minor – Bb minor, and Murphy expands this progression further. After repeating the G minor section a second time (bars 11-15) after the quartal and quintal harmonic interlude, he extends it by 1 bar, turning a stable and comfortable 4-bar phrase into an unusual 5-bar phrase. Then, there is a brief pause after Stewie spills his cola. After this, the music returns, the theme repeats again with a 4-bar phrase, but this time in A minor (bars 17-20).



This whole tone shift is a contrast to previous material, and is ascending from the previous key, beginning the build up towards the finale. He then shifts a third above to C this time, resuming the Rule of Thirds. After moving through three tonal centres (Gm, Bbm, Am) where we heard the entire theme, Murphy fragments it this time, making it ambiguous to whether we are in a minor key. Although the theme itself is an elongated version of motif E, and it is just the first three notes, it is also the A1 fragment.

21 16:58

Lois and Horatio exit the car

Marimba Flute

Cm

mp

A1 fragment:



seems to day

Beginning of motif E:



Lu-cky there's

Despite the fact that the transformations of motif E in this cue are in minor keys, because he features the dominant 7<sup>th</sup> more prominently than the minor 3<sup>rd</sup> aside from when we hear the theme (when the minor 3<sup>rd</sup> only appears once each time), the music does not feel like it is strongly in a minor key, it highlights the uncertainty that Brian and Stewie feel in the scene as they try to figure out what is going on. Murphy creates this uncertainty to an even greater extent as he elongates this passage in C (bars 21-23); unlike the previous elongation where he turned the 4-bar phrase into a 5-bar phrase, he changes the time signature to 3/2, effectively adding half a bar, which makes the entrance of the conclusion almost shocking.

At the conclusion of the cue (bars 24-26), Murphy does not finish with any kind of cadence. Throughout the entire scene, he avoids any kind of cadence; despite the clear chords, he maintains the clear dominant 7<sup>th</sup> in the theme that is in the Mixolydian mode. This makes the harmony less stable which suits rapid chord progression. He concludes the cue with a punchy C<sup>#7</sup>sus4 chord, leaving out the minor 3<sup>rd</sup> which avoids concluding the music in a triadic harmony. It also links back to the passage in bars 9-10 that feature the quartal and quintal harmony.

24 17:05 Cutback to Brian and Stewie rapidly driving to the stable 17:10 Marimba

Horns + Trombones

*mf*

C#m

*mf*

"Lois, don't do it!"

These latter two scenes demonstrate Murphy's use of longer thematic material as a leitmotif beyond a single episode. Both scenes involve characters following someone, one with Lois following, and then in contrast with her being followed, and despite a gap of two seasons, Murphy uses the original music from 'A House Full of Peters' and develops it further in 'Family Guy Lite' because it musically represents an action scene where someone is being followed.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have examined several ways in which composers Walter Murphy and Ron Jones use music within an episode of *Family Guy*. I have endeavoured to show how their music provides context for short and long form establishing shots beyond the visual and how it helps to identify aspects of the scene: the location, atmosphere, action, and the characters present. Both composers have their own individual approaches to scoring an episode. Walter Murphy employs familiar motifs, transforming them by playing with harmony, rhythm, and instrumentation to create a novel soundscape, yet thematic material is still recognizable. In contrast, Ron Jones uses small elements of motifs found in the theme but incorporates them in such a way that the resulting music sounds original and standalone. Finally, I examined how Murphy incorporates leitmotifs into various episodes; and, how he scores a couple of action scenes by incorporating one motif from the main theme and turning it into its own significant standalone theme. Both Murphy and Jones have in their own way, contributed to *Family Guy*'s long-lasting success, providing great music to an amazing show.

I would like to extend my thanks to Seth MacFarlane, Walter Murphy, Ron Jones, and everyone else who has worked on *Family Guy* over the years it has been running.

## Appendix One

### Family Guy Main Title Transcription

# Family Guy Main Title

Melody with instrumental line

Seth MacFarlane and Walter Murphy

*Trans. Alex Jefferies*

Swing ♩=120

Lois

It seems to day that all you see is vi-o-lence in mo-vies and

4 sex on T V But where are those good old fash-ioned val-ues on which we used to re-ly

8 Lu-cky there's a Fam-i-ly Guy Lu-cky there's a man who

12 Po-si-ti-vely can do all the things that make us Laugh and cry!

15 He's our Fam-ily Guy!

*mf* *f*



## Family Guy Main Title Transcription (Annotated)

**Family Guy Main Title**  
Melody with instrumental line

Seth MacFarlane and Walter Murphy  
Trans. Alex Jefferies

Swing ♩=120

**Motif A** **Motif B**

Lois  
It seems to day that all you see is vi-o-lence in mo-vies and

**A1** **Motif C** **B1** **Motif D**

4 Peter  
sex on T V But where are those good old fash-ioned val-ues on which we used to re-ly

**B2** **Motif E** **B1**


8 Lu-cky there's a Fam-i-ly Guy **A1** Lu-cky there's a man who

**B1** **Motif F**

12 Po-si-ti-vely can do all the things that make us Laugh and cry!

**Motif G** **Motif H**

15 All  
He's our Fam-ily Guy!  
*mf* ————— *f*

 = orchestra

## Appendix Two

### Short Form Establishing Shots

#### Family Guy Lite (S17E14)

Brewery Establishing Shot (0:30-0:34)

**Swing**  $\text{♩} = 80$   
Winds and percussion

Walter Murphy  
Trans. Alex Jefferies

Brass

Double bass.

The musical score for 'Family Guy Lite (S17E14)' is written for a swing style at 80 beats per minute. It features a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a 4/4 time signature. The score is arranged for Winds and percussion, Brass, and Double bass. The melody is primarily carried by the winds and percussion, with the brass providing harmonic support. The double bass line is a simple, steady accompaniment.

#### Peternormal Activity (S14E4)

Griffin residence establishing shot (2:21 - 2:27)

Flutes

Walter Murphy  
Trans. Alex Jefferies

French horns

Bass guitar

The musical score for 'Peternormal Activity (S14E4)' is written for a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a 4/4 time signature. It features a melody primarily carried by the flutes, with French horns providing harmonic support. The bass guitar line is a simple, steady accompaniment.

#### Stewie is Enceinte (S13E13)

Griffin residence establishing shot (8:58 - 9:02)

Flute I

**p** Flute II

Walter Murphy  
Trans. Alex Jefferies

Low brass, possibly saxophone

The musical score for 'Stewie is Enceinte (S13E13)' is written for a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a 6/8 time signature. It features a melody primarily carried by Flute I and Flute II, with low brass (possibly saxophone) providing harmonic support. The score begins with a piano (**p**) dynamic.

## Family Guy Lite (S17E14)

Drunken Clam establishing shot (7:17-7:20)

Walter Murphy  
Trans. Alex Jefferies

Solo Trumpet

The musical score for 'Family Guy Lite (S17E14)' is in 2/4 time with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). It features a solo trumpet line in the upper staff and a piano accompaniment in the lower staff. The trumpet line consists of a series of eighth and quarter notes, while the piano accompaniment provides a harmonic foundation with chords and single notes.

## The Finer Strings (S15E13)

Pewterschmidt mansion establishing shot (8:18 - 8:23)

Walter Murphy  
Trans. Alex Jefferies

A Dm G C F Bb

Solo Oboe  
*p*

Solo Bassoon

Violins 5 7 6 5 b7 6 b7

Cello

The musical score for 'The Finer Strings (S15E13)' is in 4/4 time with a key signature of two flats. It features a solo oboe and solo bassoon in the upper staves, and violins and cello in the lower staves. The oboe and bassoon play a melodic line, while the strings provide a harmonic accompaniment. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p* (piano) and *f* (forte).

## Absolutely Babulous (S18E3)

Pewterschmidt mansion establishing shot (13:35 - 13:39)

Walter Murphy  
Trans. Alex Jefferies

Trumpets

Bass guitar

The musical score for 'Absolutely Babulous (S18E3)' is in 4/4 time with a key signature of two flats. It features a trumpet line in the upper staff and a bass guitar line in the lower staff. The trumpet line is characterized by a series of eighth and quarter notes, while the bass guitar provides a steady, rhythmic accompaniment.

## Family Guy Lite (S17E14)

Griffin residence establishing shot (19:57-20:00)

Walter Murphy  
Trans. Alex Jefferies

Musical score for the Griffin residence establishing shot (19:57-20:00). The score is in 2/2 time and features three staves: Flutes, Trombones, and Bass. The Flutes staff has a treble clef and a key signature of two flats. The Trombones staff has a bass clef and a key signature of two flats. The Bass staff has a bass clef and a key signature of two flats. The Flutes part begins with a half note G4, followed by a half note F#4, then a half note E4, and a half note D4. The Trombones part begins with a half note G3, followed by a half note F#3, then a half note E3, and a half note D3. The Bass part begins with a half note G2, followed by a half note F#2, then a half note E2, and a half note D2. The Flutes part ends with a half note C5, followed by a half note B4, then a half note A4, and a half note G4. The Trombones part ends with a half note C4, followed by a half note B3, then a half note A3, and a half note G3. The Bass part ends with a half note C3, followed by a half note B2, then a half note A2, and a half note G2. A piccolo part enters in the final measure with a half note G5, followed by a half note F#5, then a half note E5, and a half note D5.

## Brian Griffin's House of Payne (S8E15)

Griffin residence establishing shot (7:59-8:04)

Ron Jones  
Trans. Alex Jefferies

Musical score for the Griffin residence establishing shot (7:59-8:04). The score is in 4/4 time and features three staves: Flutes and xylophone, Bassoon, and Violins. The Flutes and xylophone staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The Bassoon staff has a bass clef and a key signature of one flat. The Violins staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The Flutes and xylophone part begins with a half note G4, followed by a half note F#4, then a half note E4, and a half note D4. The Bassoon part begins with a half note G3, followed by a half note F#3, then a half note E3, and a half note D3. The Violins part begins with a half note G4, followed by a half note F#4, then a half note E4, and a half note D4. The Flutes and xylophone part ends with a half note C5, followed by a half note B4, then a half note A4, and a half note G4. The Bassoon part ends with a half note C4, followed by a half note B3, then a half note A3, and a half note G3. The Violins part ends with a half note C5, followed by a half note B4, then a half note A4, and a half note G4. A double bass part enters in the final measure with a half note G2, followed by a half note F#2, then a half note E2, and a half note D2.

## Appendix Three

### Long Form Establishing Shots

# Peternormal Activity (S14E4)

Asylum establishing shot (4:16-4:46)

Walter Murphy  
Trans. Alex Jefferies

**Mysteriously**  $\text{♩} = 100$

Dm

Solo Oboe

Piano

*mp*

*p*

**Mysteriously**  $\text{♩} = 100$

Vln II

*pp*

Vla

4

Bbm

Solo French Horn

*mp*

3

F#m

Vln I

*mf*

*pp*

2

8 Solo Trumpet

*mp*

3

10 Am Flutes Cm Bb<sup>+</sup>

*mp*

French horn

*fp* *f*

Trombones

*p* *fp* *f*

Vla

Cellos

## Take My Wife (S13E19)

Island establishing shot (3:58-4:15)

Walter Murphy  
Trans. Alex Jefferies

Saxophones

5 Bass guitar Piano

## Appendix Three

### Action Scenes

# A House Full of Peters (S15E20)

Lois follows Peter (6:59 - 7:20)

Walter Murphy  
Trans. Alex Jefferies

**Straight**  $\text{♩} = 60$

Marimba Flute

*p* *p*

Gm

Vln+Vla *p*

Piano

5

Marimba Flute

*p* *p*

Bbm

8

Brief Adagio

*mf* *p*

*pp*

# Family Guy S17E14 "Family Guy Lite"

Brian and Stewie follow Lois (16:12-17:10)

Walter Murphy,  
trans. by Alex Jefferies

16:12

**Straight**  $\text{♩} = 60$

Lois turns in to parking lot

Marimba Flute

*p* *p*

Gm

Vln+Vla

Cello, Piano, Guitar

5 16:20

Lois pulls into parking lot

Hi-hat

Marimba Flute

*p* *p*

Bbm

Horatio gets in

9 16:29 16:34 **A tempo** 16:35

*mf* *p* *p*

Brief slowing, Brian and Stewie interaction

**A tempo**

Lois and Horatio begin driving off

Gm

*p*



2

16:50

13 Marimba Flute

*p* *p*

"I can't believe it Stewie"

Stewie spills his cola



16:50

**A Tempo**

17 Cutback to Lois and Horatio

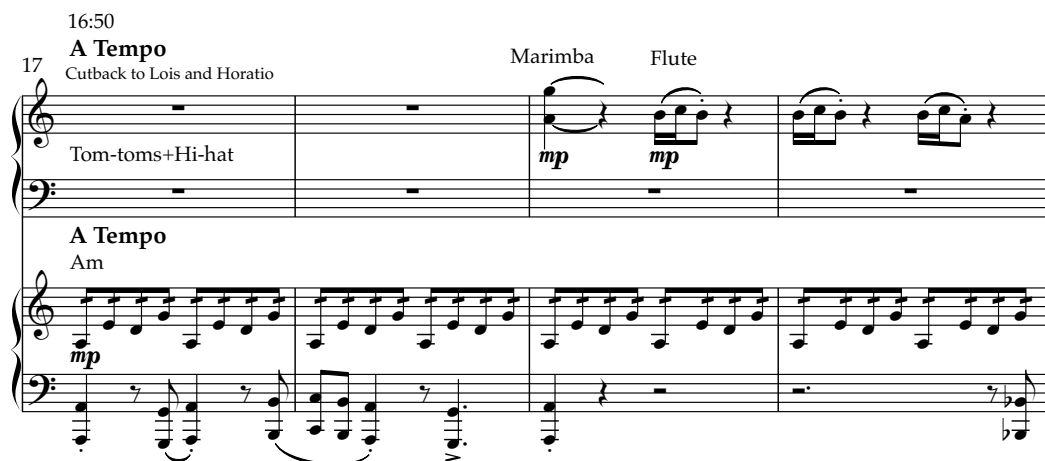
Tom-toms+Hi-hat

Marimba Flute

*mp* *mp*

**A Tempo**

Am



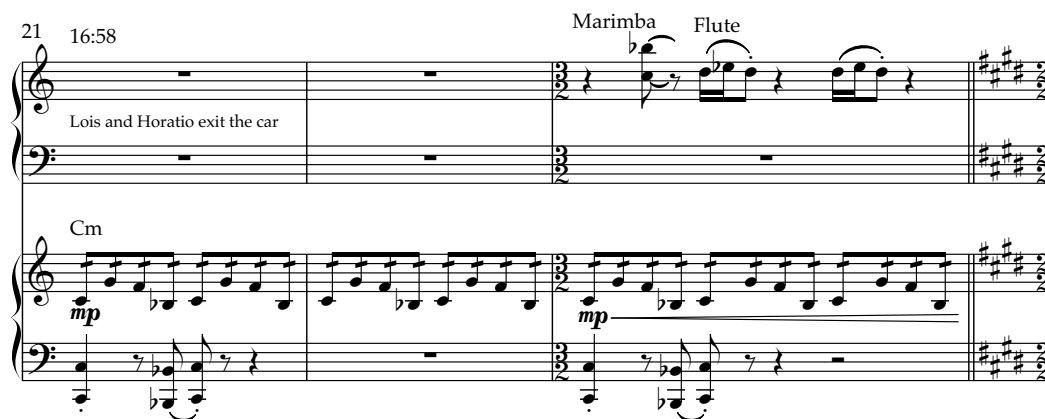
21 16:58

Lois and Horatio exit the car

Marimba Flute

Cm

*mp* *mp*



24 17:05 Cutback to Brian and Stewie rapidly driving to the stable 17:10 Marimba

Horns + Trombones

*mf*

C#m

*mf*

"Lois, don't do it!"

The musical score consists of two staves. The top staff, labeled 'Horns + Trombones', is in 2/2 time and has a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). It contains three measures: the first measure has a whole rest; the second measure has a whole note chord of F#3, C#4, and G#4; the third measure has a whole note chord of F#3, C#4, and G#4, with a fermata over it. The bottom staff, labeled 'Marimba', is also in 2/2 time and has a key signature of three sharps. It contains three measures: the first measure has a whole note chord of F#3, C#4, and G#4; the second measure has a whole note chord of F#3, C#4, and G#4; the third measure has a whole note chord of F#3, C#4, and G#4, with a fermata over it. The lyrics 'Lois, don't do it!' are written under the Marimba staff in the third measure. The dynamic *mf* is marked at the beginning of the first measure of both staves. The chord C#m is indicated above the first measure of the Marimba staff.

## Appendix Four

## Leitmotifs

## Time Machine Leitmotif

Walter Murphy  
Trans. Alex Jefferies



## Rushing Leitmotif

Walter Murphy  
Trans. Alex Jefferies

Trumpets

*mf cresc.*

French horns

*ff* 3

3

Trombones

A musical score for three brass instruments: Trumpets, French horns, and Trombones. The time signature is 2/4. The Trumpets part starts with a *mf cresc.* dynamic and features a melodic line that rises in pitch over the first four measures, ending with a triplet of eighth notes in the fifth measure. The French horns part enters in the third measure with a triplet of eighth notes, marked with *ff*. The Trombones part provides a steady eighth-note accompaniment throughout. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

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