

Rudraksh Bhateja

**ANALYZING MUSIC PRODUCTION &**  
**PERFORMANCE**

**‘A Nightmare to Remember’ by Dream Theater**

The meanings in progressive metal

Submitted in partial fulfilment of  
the requirements of Leeds Beckett University  
for the MA Music for The Moving Image

## Table of Contents

<b>LIST OF FIGURES.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1 INTRODUCTION: .....</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1 Section 1.....	4
<b>2 LYRICS/PRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1 Section 2.....	6
2.2 Section 3.....	8
<b>3 HISTORY/MUSIC THEORY/CONTEXT.....</b>	<b>9</b>
3.1 Chromatic scale .....	11
3.2 Dorian mode.....	11
3.3 Phrygian mode .....	11
<b>4 BIBLIOGRAPHY: .....</b>	<b>13</b>

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Showing Chromatic Scale.....	11
Figure 2: Showing Dorian Mode .....	11
Figure 3: Showing Phrygian Mode.....	11

# 1 Introduction:

The song is not just about the music and the artist, it appears more as a short movie or a story that expresses musically. It's not necessary for a song to contain a story, it can be a poetry, any fictional or non-fictional imagination of the artist. Many songs became popular because of strong and involving lyrics as many songwriters write songs which depict their real-life incidents that tend to enhance the urge of an audience to connect with the song more effectively. Song name '**A NIGHTMARE TO REMEMBER**' by a band called '**DREAM THEATER**' which revolves around the same content of real-life incident that shifts towards a portrait as a song. However, it will take you on the journey of an interesting story. It was based on a real-life event experienced by John Petrucci, the songwriter and the guitar player of the band, who emotes the experience about his childhood car accident with his father. Upon thorough research and lyric reading, it will be easy to conclude the situation taking place within the song. As a band, DREAM THEATER is considered to be a heavy progressive band with numerous technicality and theoretical aspects, while many of their albums and songs are about story telling. Unlike all other heavy progressive bands, Dream Theater has a similar instrumentation which includes Guitar (John Petrucci), Bass Guitar (John Myung), Keyboards (Jordan Rudess), Drums (Mike Mangini) and Vocalist (James LaBrie). The song is 4:10 minutes long and divided into various sections.

## 1.1 Section 1

It begins with the heavy thunder effect (*A thunder sheet, which was a large, thin sheet of copper suspended from a frame by wires, sounded genuinely like thunder when moved in early 90's*) (McDonald, 2004) which builds a plot in the audience's mind to generate a scenario of the song. Lately, with the advancement of many software systems and sound effects, for instance, OMNISPHERE, everything related to sound effects is completed by the keyboard player. In the 15th bar, the slow and dark piano begins, which is followed by a heavy open guitar riff that changes the mood of the

song, with gothic chords and heavy drum and bass. The dark ambient gothic choir can be easily perceived behind the opening riff, as per research, these choir effect was introduced in music by a famous German composer Carl Orff in 1930 through the very famous symphonic poem known as 'O Fortuna' by Carl Orff's Carmina Burana. (*Powers, 1999*). After the heavy music intro song, there is a mini pause except for the main guitar riff which creates a variety in arrangement and gesture to move to the second arrangement.

## 2 Lyrics/Production

The vocals enter (02:16) with such intense and disturbed aura, which clears the fact that the song is from a child's perspective. Moving towards the lyrics, it is very precisely written and the description of the scenario includes the weather situation (02:31). It is a story told by a child after the accident takes place and it is something which he cannot forget, hence, these last line of the first pre-verse describes his inner feelings completely (02:37). There is a small instrumental section (02:43) with cry baby guitar interlude, which goes well with the song to change from pre-verse to verse. The interesting fact about the song structure is there are no specific chorus but contains some lines which will be recurring as the song changes sections. The verse describes the happy moments of marriage and the healthy relationship between his parents (3:15 – 3:47).

### 2.1 Section 2

(3:49) Begins with a second heavy melodic riff on guitar, double bass drum section, and organ keyboard. The production was an essential part of this song specifically, as this instrumental section sound effect plays a vital source of communication with the audience. Without any lyrical conversation, it creates awareness with the audience regarding the song situation which is usually impossible to attain without any sound. It is a creative way to communicate and let the listeners observe the reality. It is a great way to engaging with the audience with your music. Screeching tires with the sound effect of a car crash (3:55) characterize the situation very clearly, as the song swiftly transfers to other sections, many sound effects are noticeable. As the story moves, the vocal persona changes as per the section, it's similar to be in character of the story and revive one's personality. This is not the case with every song and it is not easy to adapt to the right persona in the given situation. (Tagg,2004). Vocal persona presents any individual or a group to express emotions and behavioral positions. In this particular song, the vocalist playing the role of a child who met with a severe accident in his childhood with his parents, which constantly haunts him when he ponders about it. Words in the lyrics can change the whole meaning of the song despite the music playing in the background. Sometimes it is very confusing for the audience to relate to the song theme.

***“The sky was clear and frigid, the air was thick and still***

***Now I'm not one to soon forget and I bet I never will”***

This the fourth line from the intro of the song in very fractious voice, where the child is talking about the weather conditions thus it is a bit confusing to find it relatable

to the song. But the second line supports the argument and explains that something terrible is going to occur very soon which he cannot forget. That means the weather is going to change its color.

***“Flawless new beginning eclipsed by tragedy”***

As mentioned earlier now there is an eclipse in climatic condition.

***“Without warning***

***Out of nowhere***

***Like a bullet***

***From the night***

***Crushing glass***

***Rubber and steel***

***Scorching fire***

***Glowing lights***

***Screams of terror***

***Pain of fear***

***Sounds of sirens***

***Smoke in my eyes***

***Sudden stillness***

***wrapped in silence***

***No more screaming***

***No more cries”***

These lines are co-related to one line which I mentioned earlier where, in retrospect, the child was talking about how situations are going to change (in a sarcastic tone towards negative side).

***“Stunned and bewildered***

***Cold and afraid***

***Torn up and broken***

***Frightened and dazed”***

These lines describe the inner-felling of a child after the accident, where he was devastated and in shock as all these things happened within a fraction of a second for him to react to the situation. And, these lines are used as a bridge to change within the sections.

## **2.2 Section 3**

(4:57) Starts with a clean acoustic guitar plucking, with intense drum section and siren sounds (can be police or an ambulance as per the scenario). This states that this section is not going to be heavy and the story is going to drastically change. If noticed in the instrumental section, there is a flat line effect of ECG or EKG stands for Electrocardiography sound (5:32) which clears the earlier confusion of police sirens or an ambulance siren. This sound can be used to make sure that now the child has been admitted to hospital.

***“Lying on the table in this unfamiliar place***

***I'm greeted by a stranger, a man without a face***

***He said, "Son do you remember? Do you even know your name?"***

***Then he shined a light into my eyes and said***

***"Take this for the pain"***

These lines clearly state the situation of a child after the accident. “Unfamiliar place” is used for the hospital, “A man without a face” is used for a doctor as doctors always prefer to use face surgical masks to protect themselves from any bacteria which also clears a fact that the child was injured.

The section carries on with the bridge in the middle and the conversation between the child and the doctor. Before the ending, there’s a heavy instrumental section (8:33 – 11:02) which includes the guitar and keyboard solo. The song then takes a dramatic turn with heavy bridge and powerful vocal and a series of different time signatures keep moving with the song. There’s repetition of the first guitar riff but with different dynamics, the song ends with double kick drums and organ keyboard solo section.



### 3 History/Music Theory/Context

As band leads to the “modern gothic” genre, there is some expected methodology behind their work. Composing lengthy- multipart songs with the time frame of 15-20 minutes requires a lot of theory involved in the music. The band(DT) is highly influenced with some known names such as the progressive rock genre like Rush, Led Zeppelin, Queensryche etc. (Ref 7/8) The band is dynamically strong with robust hold on various time signatures, “La villa strangiato” by Rush which was released in 1978 which still has a massive influence on various Dream Theater songs. These two bands share an incredible amount of technicality and musicality being popular bands of different eras.

In the beginning years of 1960s rock music, young generation was attracted towards hippie and drugs culture. Bands like Moody Blues and Pink Floyd started the format of progressively long songs, by keeping the pop-format and the verse-chorus structure. Here is a similarity between the two songs of the same genre but different time period.

- **La Villa Strangiato - 1978 (Rush)**



- **A Nightmare to Remember - 2009 (Dream Theater)**



The table below shows the popular progressive metal/rock bands and their active years to get an idea about the history of progressive metal genre.

<b>Artist</b>	<b>Genre</b>	<b>Years Active</b>	<b>Origin</b>
<b>King Crimson</b>	Progressive Rock/Jazz Fusion	1968 - <i>present</i>	England
<b>The Nice</b>	Progressive/Psychedelic Rock	1967 - 2002	England
<b>Rush</b>	Progressive Rock/Metal	1968 - 2015	Canada
<b>Pink Floyd</b>	Progressive Rock	1965 - 2014	England
<b>Yes</b>	Progressive Rock	1968 - <i>present</i>	England
<b>Dream Theater</b>	Progressive Metal	1985 - <i>present</i>	United States
<b>Symphony X</b>	Progressive Metal	1994 - <i>present</i>	United States
<b>Tool</b>	Progressive Metal/Alternative Rock	1990 - <i>present</i>	United States

Minor key has a strong relationship with genres like Progressive Rock, Progressive Metal, Gothic Metal and Psychedelic Rock/Metal etc. Half-diminished, #5, Augmented, minor 7 also gives power to the music and support the heaviness of the music. (Ref-10) Guitar tunings like drop D, drop C or C tuning is another way to make your sound heavy and dark, many popular bands use such techniques to sound heavier.

### 3.1 Chromatic scale



Figure 1: Showing Chromatic Scale

### 3.2 Dorian mode

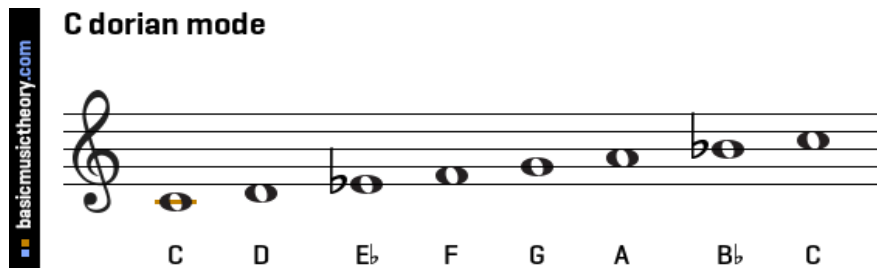


Figure 2: Showing Dorian Mode

### 3.3 Phrygian mode



Figure 3: Showing Phrygian Mode

This is a very known concept in heavy metal reign also known as modes. The chromatic scale can affect the tension in the song and sometimes help to return to the root chord, in case there is any scale change in the song. Chromatic scales help in many other ways and gives a songwriter the freedom to be creative with the melody to add color to the sound. Some very popular guitar riffs and songs are based on chromaticism riffs like Dazed and Confused (Led Zeppelin), Five Magics (Megadeth), Master of Puppets (Metallica). Adding a sharp # in any chord progression or any scale or mode can change the aura of the music, also sharp brings a lot of anxiety and weird tension in the tonality of any mode or scale. On the other hand, Dorian mode is also

considered as a part of minor scale family, flat 3rd and flat 7th also known as minor 3rd and minor 7th give this scale a very jazzy and sad tonality. Dorian mode is mostly used in jazz and blues genre as this scale has that intense sound which helps the songwriter to know the exact feel of the song. Some popular songs based on Dorian mode are 'Another brick in the wall' (Pink Floyd), 'Get Lucky' (Daft Punk) (*Lettner, 2017*).

Phrygian mode is the perfect choice for any metal or progressive metal band, this is the most used mode in the metal genre. The intervals minor 2nd, minor 3rd, minor 6th and minor 7th mode sounds very similar to melodic minor scale with an exception of minor 2nd. This scale sounds very dark and gothic as compared to any other mode in music theory. Every heavy metal band composes lots of songs and instrumentals using this mode. Some known songs in this mode are 'Wherever I May Roam' (Metallica), 'Sober' (Tool), 'If Rain Is What You Want' (Slipknot).

## 4 Bibliography:

BasicMusicTheory (n.d) C phrygian mode [Internet]. Available from: <<https://www.basicmusictheory.com/c-phrygian-mode>> [Accessed 30 April 2018].

BasicMusicTheory (n.d) C dorian mode [Internet]. Available from: <<https://www.basicmusictheory.com/c-dorian-mode>> [Accessed 30 April 2018].

Collins, K. & Kapralos, B. (2014) Journal of Sonic Studies [Internet]. Available from: <<http://journal.sonicstudies.org/vol06/nr01/a04>> [Accessed 30 April 2018].

Lettner, F. (2017) Musical Modes: What they are and how to use them • Fretello Learn Guitar [Internet]. Available from: <<https://www.fretello.com/the-magic-behind-musical-modes/>> [Accessed 30 April 2018].

McDonaldo, M. (2005) The Evolution of Sound Effects [Internet]. Available from: <[http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ma05/macdonald/radiosfx/hist\\_sfx.html](http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ma05/macdonald/radiosfx/hist_sfx.html)> [Accessed 29 April 2018].

Petrucci, J. (2014) John Petrucci of Dream Theater Discusses Rush's '2112' - The Record That Changed My Life [Internet]. Available from: <<https://www.guitarworld.com/features/john-petrucci-dream-theater-discusses-rushs-2112-record-changed-my-life>> [Accessed 30 April 2018].

Powers, A. (1999) Not Medieval but Eternal; In Its Sixth Decade, 'Carmina Burana' Still Echoes. *New York Times*. Available from:

<<https://www.nytimes.com/1999/06/14/arts/not-medieval-but-eternal-in-its-sixth-decade-carmina-burana-still-echoes.html>> [Accessed 30 April 2018].

Rivadavia, E. (2009) Black Clouds and Silver Linings - Dream Theater | Songs, Reviews, Credits [Internet]. Available from: <<https://www.allmusic.com/album/black-clouds-and-silver-linings-mw0000815044>> [Accessed 30 April 2018].

Tagg, P. (2004) Film music, anti-depressants and anguish management [Internet]. Available from: <<https://www.tagg.org/articles/jochen0411.html>> [Accessed 30 April 2018].

Wolf, T. (2005) CHAPTER 6: How Chords and Chord Progressions REALLY Work 6.17 Chords and Chord Progressions: Maximizing Emotional Impact [Internet]. Available from: <[https://www.howmusicreallyworks.com/Pages\\_Chapter\\_6/6\\_17.html](https://www.howmusicreallyworks.com/Pages_Chapter_6/6_17.html)> [Accessed 30 April 2018].