

New Snaggle Tunes – Inspirations

Most of the new material takes a lot of inspiration from Isaac Asimov's 'Foundation' universe (epic sci-fi book series encapsulated by three main series – the Robot Series, the Galactic Empire series, and the Foundation series – all written by one of the most renowned science fiction writers in history). I'd recently finished my first read through of the series and found that it hit me quite hard and came out in my writing.

For anyone not familiar with the series, it tells an epic 'future history' of humanity, spanning many thousands of years, starting with humanity developing the first robots, the gradual colonization of the galaxy, the rise of the great galactic empire, the empire's fall, and then humanity's continued struggle to rebuild civilization. A true epic, highly recommend it.

The Mule

You know what they say about the best laid plans... this tune tells the story of the rise of 'the Mule'. At the time this character is introduced, the meticulous plans for humanity's gradual rebuilding of civilization have been underway for several hundred years and this character completely messes them up. At first he's a figure of much speculation and interest (having just conquered a relatively unimportant planet) though little consequence. Gradually as entire fleets start inexplicably defecting and rumours of the Mule as a great hulking brute with unnatural powers begin circulating, it becomes clear – although far too late – that the Mule is an existential threat to everything humanity has been building towards and that the truth of his nature is even more insidious and unpredictable than the rumours suggest.

Sam I'm Am

So this one's written for my daughter Ollie. Ollie is very strong willed and can be very stubborn. Sometimes it's infuriating, but is often endlessly endearing (especially when it comes with a dash of her trademark 'polite sass'). Trying to convince her to do something she needs to when she's in a mood not to can be an interesting challenge requiring one to throw all kinds of things at her to find the thing she'll respond to in the moment that will change her mind. But then once her mind is changed it's often full throttle... "No I don't WANT to go to the potty!!!!" turns into "LET'S GO TO THE POTTY!!!!!!!!". One of Ollie's favourite stories depicts a true triumph of creative persuasion over stubbornness: Dr Seuss' "Green Eggs and Ham", so this tune takes its name from what Ollie assures me is the *actual* pronunciation of the main character's name.

Musically this tune takes the perspective of the beleaguered parent trying to figure out which strategy will convince the toddler to 'do the thing' without sparking a meltdown, and after some vigorous debate ("No!" "aaaaahhhhhh!" "Dada, you want to keep playing? Yeah? Yeah? Yeah?") there's SUCCESS and the toddler embarks with reckless abandon on whatever the new thing is!

Metamorphosis (working title)

This tune is meant to depict the process of metamorphosis. Reading an epic like Asimov's Foundation universe, one that spans the time frame of many millenia, it highlights the truism – the only constant is change. For the most part you can't get too attached to particular characters or places because none of

them are sticking around, the story is too vast for that. And yet there are through-lines, it's not just a series of random events, there is a history, a story. One that changes and goes through countless transformations, but builds and changes on what came before creating a rich tapestry filled with variation. One of the fun things about works like this is it allows you to see it all from a birds eye view, or at least much more than any of us get to see of the tapestry of our reality as it weaves day by day. It makes you appreciate that everything has it's time and when your time is up you might not come back, but you are a small part of history and of everything that come next.

Arkady (working title)

The working title for this tune is now 'Arkady' (going to aim to come up with something a bit more). This tune is inspired by the Asmovian character 'Arkady Darell' – a plucky, energetic, highly independent child-genius.

Arkady's eavesdrops on a top secret meeting her father holds clandestinely at the family house discussing the imminent threat of a shadowy organization able to brainwash people without their knowledge. Arkady decides to stow away aboard a ship in order to thwart this organization herself having equal measures of deep ability, intellect, and naivete. This tune is filled with energy and grit of the high stakes and dangerous nature of the mission that Arkady has recklessly dove into, mixed with the childlike innocence baked into her character.

Twilight of Civilization

This tune is inspired by the fall of the great galactic empire. The concept of the Galactic Empire in decline I found very intriguing, especially the incredibly slow pace at which it happened making it almost undetectable to any but the few characters paying very close attention. Parallels between the decline of the Galactic Empire and our own society today are hard not to draw, and while the present moment is certainly not the same thing (technological innovation hasn't ceased for one), it's also hard not to see signs of decline which one can only hope will prove to be but a dip in history rather than signs of a coming precipitous fall.

Musically this is meant to be brooding, mournful, and unstable, with small seeds of hope buried deep - not enough to save the current society, but maybe enough to lessen the impact of its fall and allow for another. Harry Seldon – a pivotal character in the series – planned and set into motion the eventual redevelopment of human civilization, but never lived to see if it actually worked. All he had was a hope for a future a thousand years into the future, only living to see the steady fall of the galactic empire.

The Zeroth Law

Some of you may be familiar with the 'Three Laws of Robotics'. This is an Asmovian invention and these are the three laws that robots are meant to be governed by:

- 1) A robot must not injure a human or allow a human to come to harm
- 2) A robot must obey human orders, unless those orders conflict with the First Law
- 3) A robot must protect itself, unless that protection conflicts with the First or Second Law

At the end of the 'Robot Series' one of the characters discovers a 'Zeroth law': A robot must not cause harm or through inaction allow harm to come to humanity. This law sets the robot R. Daneel Olivaw

on his many-millenia spanning journey to safe guarding the entirety of humanity.

The discovery of the 'Zeroth' law means that he must take action to guide the fate of human future history - allowing humanity to come to harm through inaction would cause him to cease to operate - and yet he must continually be delicate and exacting with his machinations so that the unintended consequences of his actions don't cease his operation either. The Zeroth law fashions Daneel into the perfect archetype of a saviour - one who cannot afford to rush to naïve and ineffectual/damaging action against a problem, but neither can he sit back and do nothing when action is required. This isn't the result of anything as facile as 'divinely inspired benevolence', and while his character is written as a robot capable of something resembling love and affection, his motivations and imperatives require nothing more than his own pure self-interest and preservation to live up to this archetype.

I find this character really interesting and the way he's been crafted I think suggests an important question: how can we best set up our society so that even people with purely self interested motives are still incentivized to behave in a way that contributes to our overall betterment?

The musical inspiration behind this tune started with Joshua Redman's 'Jazz Crimes', but morphed into something with some pretty big Brownman influences (Irrational Funktion). It depicts Daneel and his machinations as he guides the fate of humanity, weaving and dodging with the blows of unpredictability, always walking the razor's edge - one wrong move could mean the downfall of humanity and the end of him.

Second Foundation

The 'Second Foundation' is one of two societies seeded by the plan to save human civilization. There is virtually nothing known about it aside from the fact that it is 'out there somewhere'. Initially it's just a vague concept, a beacon of hope, a far flung society which signifies that the first Foundation isn't alone in its mission of reconstruction. This same kind of attitude is prevalent in the prequels where the creation of the Second Foundation is viewed as integral to the future of humanity... and when they finally come out of the woodwork to deal with a major crisis, it's very much a 'the saviors are here' kind of feeling. And yet... past that point the more we learn, the more I find the Second Foundation to be incredibly creepy, totalitarian, and much more insidious than one first supposes... as their vision of 'carrying out the plan' installs them as a permanent ruling class over humanity capable of directly shaping the thoughts and emotions of the underclass. So I've tried to inject equal measures of hope/optimism and creepy overlord into this one.

Elijah and Gladia

This tune is something of a love song - inspired by the relationship between Elijah and Gladia across the Robot series. These two characters meet (I think) a sum total of three times over the course of the series - living on different planets and interstellar travel being a much more difficult thing in these early days. It is a relationship between two people from completely different worlds, completely different ways of life that starts quite rocky and grows to something filled with such tenderness, but which was also inextricably swept up in the turbulent interplanetary politics that went on to shape the fate of the galaxy. I find there are more than a few parallels to draw between these two and 'Han and Leigh' from Star Wars, so there are a few inspirations melodically and harmonically taken from John Williams and their theme though stylistically this goes in quite a different direction.

Gaia's Call

In the later foundation novels Asimov introduces 'Gaia' – an entire planet of people who all exist as part of an overall world consciousness. I'm naturally suspicious of most forms of 'collectivism' - deep seated issues with communism, the idea of the Borg terrify me... for some reason the idea of Gaia is one that I can really get behind. All of Gaia's people seem to retain all of their individuality while also simultaneously being the world consciousness 'Gaia'. Gaia seems to be something emergent of everyone's individual identities that adds to it and binds it instead of replacing it with something different. There's something about this that I find really intriguing – despite my natural suspicion for collectivism. This tune is meant to depict an optimism, a harmony, a joyousness coming from a deep sense of togetherness and community as well as how that unified strand of togetherness still comes in many different flavours.