Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl (2003) and The Sea Hawk (1940) are both swashbuckling pirate adventures with plenty of energetic sword-fighting and ship battles, not to mention the handsome boys, meltingly lovely girls, and an ultimately assured victory for the good guys, no matter the obstacles along the way. And both have lush, carpeting scores that terrifically enrich the viewing experience.

The Sea Hawk opens in usual Korngold style with an energetic brass fanfare, its magnificence strengthened by parallel triads. While it only lasts 1:16, it functions very classically with an ABA structure that incorporates many of the themes that will be later heard, a la operatic tradition. As Royal Brown comments,

The title sequence for The Sea Hawk... acts as a kind of overture forming an entity unto itself; yet at the end it does not return to the home (tonic) key (B-flat major in this case) but rather modulates -- changes tonal center -- to the key (F minor) of the ensuing cue, pausing in the high strings on the tonic note (F) of that key in lieu of providing the overture with a sense of harmonic closure... [this] exploits the anticipation of closure built into the tonal harmonic system by frustrating that anticipation in order to carry the viewer/listener into the ongoing movement forward of the narrative flow (Brown, p. 4).
Pirates, by contrast, does not really have title sequence. The movie's logo comes up against a black screen and fades into a gray flashback scene at sea, with “ominous” mood music playing in low stringed instruments. (This “ominous” background – mostly not included on the CD -- is a feature of an incredibly large portion of the film; it continuously evokes an effective atmosphere of suspense and gloom, as well as providing continuity between shots.)

This disparity in opening may well be reflective of the the different expectations for the films. A recent Newsweek preview of the upcoming Pirates sequel, "Dead Man's Chest," describes the uncertain film environment in which the first movie was released in 2003:

Three years ago, almost everyone predicted that [Pirates]... would be cheesy also-ran in the big summer box-office race. Pirate movies had tanked for years. Johnny Depp had never had a real hit. Worst of all, it was based on a Disney theme-park ride. It just had to sink, right? Yeah. Like Titanic (Newsweek 66).

While Pirates may have been a surprise hit, The Sea Hawk was expected (correctly) to ride the popularity wave of other recent Korngold score hits such as Captain Blood (1935), The Adventures of Robin Hood (1938) and The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex (1939), all starring the dashing Errol Flynn and directed by Michael Curtiz. Viewers were almost expected to make the connections, and Korngold was happy to help; as one of the commentators in the special features of the recent Sea Hawk DVD noted, the composer "took themes he'd written for Bette Davis [who played Elizabeth in Private Lives] and
turned them around in the middle, so there's a sense of continuity." Nevertheless, his score for *The Sea Hawk* certainly has no stale or reused feeling, and is often regarded as one of his best works. Nearly 100 minutes of the 128-minute film is scored – that's almost over 80%!

Korngold's confidence is readily apparent throughout the film. "The optimistic heroism of... The Sea Hawk is musically generated in part by dominance of the major mode in its various cues, making the appearance of the minor mode in such music as the galley theme and the dirge modification of the romantic theme all the more dramatic" (Brown p. 6) And optimistic heroism is right! There was good reason for Korngold's heavy use of triumphant horns and uplifting themes: Philip II and Elizabeth were clear parallels to Hitler and Churchill for the audience of the day. The issue of characters' divided loyalties (such as that of half-English, half-Spanish Dona Maria) was also a theme in *Pirates*, where hero Will takes the whole movie to finally come to terms with his pirate "heritage" but almost always is accompanied by noble, positive music, even when engaging in what he initially considers misdeeds.

The instruments for the SH are mainly that of a classical orchestra, but some variations show up. For example, in the Panama sequences, large amounts of percussion were added -- “tambourine, gourd, timbales, marimba, vibraphone, xylophone, tam-tam, temple bloicks, glockenspiel, foot cymbal, and rumba drum” (Brown, p. 98) – and “shadowy saxophones and bunched pizzicato strings [with]... an occasional dash of Latin-American syncopation” (Brown, p. 98) to give the scenes an exotic feel. Many of the Spain scenes also have a Spanish feel to them, with a habenera rhythm and castanets (Brown, p. 100).
SH does not even restrict itself merely to instruments. After the enslaved English crew revolts and takes over a ship to sail home, the sailors sing a triumphant “Strike for the Shores of Dover!” though “only the flimsiest attempt is made to maintain the diegetic illusion” (Brown 101). By contrast, when the characters in Pirates sing – such as young Elizabeth in the opening scene, or stranded Jack and Elizabeth on the beach, or re-captained Jack at the end – it's really them singing, weak voices and all. In the middle case, no other music is heard, and in the others the instruments are playing other themes. However, there is heavy use of a men's voiceless choir for many of the dramatic, dark scenes, and the large use of drums evoke a primitive, deeply emotional response. Several clever usage of instruments were also used -- for example, in 58:23 drums beat out the theme melody, and an organ is used in 35:58 (and never elsewhere).

The most noticeable feature of Pirates is definitely its themes however – for themes it has a-plenty. They have simple melodies (compare to the Sea Hawk's deeply chromatic chords) and are played sometimes in mere fragments to evoke a particular association. Most prominent is what I've called the “Curse” theme, a minor and wrenching three-note sequence that shows up all over the movie, and is a good signal that something's either wrong or about to become so. Two other interesting themes are the “Love” (T3fast) and “Adventure” (T3slow) themes, which are basically the same; the former is much slower and with fewer repeated notes, but otherwise they're identical. This connection highlights an important point of the film: this is a pirate movie, and the heroes love nothing more than adventure.

Consider, for example, in the first sword-fight – between Jack and Will in the blacksmith shop (21:30). The “adventure theme” is in ¾ time, evoking waltzes – for the
two surely do “dance” their way through an elegantly-choreographed duel. For the only time in the movie, it begins in a dark minor: we are uncertain about this fight, because both characters are protagonists, but we aren't sure about Jack, nor whom we wish to win. Soon, however, it switches into a more energetic major to better accompany the exciting challenges of their sword-fight.

The “Love” theme is also used interestingly. For most of the film, it appears when you'd expect it to – when Will or Elizabeth are talking together, or thinking about each other, or kissing. But at the very end of the film, it's heard in Jack scene, when he caresses his new ship. Women are not the object of Jack's adoration (especially given some earlier scenes between him and previous acquaintances of the fairer sex when Will and he try to rustle up a crew, when the “Love” theme is definitely not heard). Instead, he loves the sea, the ships, the piracy.

A a DVD commentator noted about the Sea Hawk that "you really wonder whether Errol would have been quite so brave as he was without that music." The same can be said for both of the movies as a whole: the music is such a large part of the films, ever-present and emotionally-provoking, making them a true pirate's treasure to watch.
Bibliography


**Pirates – Soundtrack CD Track Listing**
1. Fog Bound
2. The Medallion Calls
3. The Black Pearl
4. Will and Elizabeth
5. Swords Crossed
6. Walk the Plank
7. Barbossa Is Hungry
8. Blood Ritual
9. Moonlight Serenade
10. To the Pirates' Cave!
11. Skull and Crossbones
12. Bootstrap's Bootstraps
13. Underwater March
14. One Last Shot
15. He's a Pirate

**Sea Hawk - Soundtrack CD Track Listing**
1. Main Title
2. The Spanish Galleass/Galley Slaves/The "Albatross"
3. The Captain's Table
4. Dona Maria and Captain Thorpe/Elisabeth's Throne Room
5. Thorpe's Pet Monkey
6. Map Of Panama
7. The Chess Game
8. Coach To Dover
9. Farewell/Panama
10. Jungle March/Battle
11. Return To The "Albatross"
12. Condemned To The Galley/Dona Maria's Song (words: Howard Koch)
13. Queen Elisabeth/Maria's Anguish
14. Escape From The Galley/Fight On Deck/Strike For The Shores of Dover (words: Howard Koch & Jack Scholl)
15. Reunion
16. Thorpe Confronts Wolflingham/The Duel
17. Fanfare/Finale