Music from "Titanic"

By Matteo Neri

There are few scores, if any, that are more integral to the overall success of a movie than of James Horner's music to "Titanic", a 1997 film directed by James Cameron. The grandeur of the production and the length makes it crucial for all aspects of the film to be utilized to their full potential. Movies can become overwhelming if there is too much material, but music is a perfect way to add a sense of cohesion in such a massive production. The movie is 3 hours and 14 minutes long, making it one of the longest blockbuster spectacles of all time. If the score was not effective, the movie would not have been either.

James Cameron worked with James Horner previously on "Aliens." They did not get along very well during that production, as James Cameron gave him a mere 2 weeks to complete the entire score. For Titanic, Cameron was originally thinking about using Enya, but her inexperience in film scoring and the fact that it took her a very long time to make her previous album at the time made the production team nervous. As much as Cameron and Horner had issues, Cameron loved Horner's music, so they decided to settle their differences and work together on this production.

James Horner was an experienced composer by 1997. Besides "Aliens," for which he was nominated for an Oscar, he also scored successful movies such as "Braveheart" and "Apollo 13", both of which were also nominated for Oscars. Though reluctant to work for Cameron again, it was most likely the best decision of his life, at least when it comes to his success as a composer. He won two Oscars, a Golden Globe, a Grammy,

and also broke the record for amount of soundtracks sold, selling over 30 million worldwide. It also led to him working with James Cameron again for "Avatar" in 2009, another humongous blockbuster success.

The Film

Titanic is a massive film on the surface, with beautiful effects and a very heart-wrenching story; but beneath everything lies a very blatant simplicity. It is a love story, as stereotypical as it gets: a rich girl falls in love with a poor guy, much at the dismay of the girl's family. This is the main aspect of the movie, and the historical events of the sinking are the backdrop.

The story of "Titanic" is told in 1996 by Rose Dawson Calvert, a survivor of Titanic who is 100 years old at the time. On television, she hears that a treasure hunter, Brock Lovett, found a drawing in the wreckage that was sitting in a safe for 84 years. She realizes that this drawing is of her, so she calls Mr. Lovett. He sends her by helicopter to his research ship, Keldysh, so she can tell the story to him and his crew. The team is on a tireless hunt to find the so-called "Heart of the Ocean", a very rare diamond that sank with the ship. In this drawing, Rose was wearing the diamond, and the research team wanted to have as much information as possible. She tells the story to a very interested crew.

In 1912, Rose's full name was Rose DeWitt Bukater, the daughter of a widow, Ruth, who was in severe debt. In order to overcome this, she made her daughter marry Cal Hockley, the son of an immensely wealthy Pittsburg steel tycoon. They were to be

married in 1 month as they board Titanic. Rose was not enthusiastic about the arrangement, and was very distraught about the whole matter, so much so that she attempted to jump off of the ship. As she did this, a stunning young man, Jack, a third class passenger who won his ticket with a lucky hand at poker, talked her out of doing it. As he reaches over to help her get across the railing, she slips and dangles only from his arm, but luckily he is able to lift and bring her to safety. Rose was screaming quite violently the whole time, so an alarmed crew came to see what was happening. They see Jack with his shoes off in a position that suggested that he was assaulting Rose. They detain him, and Cal comes to scold Jack. Rose, concerned about telling Cal and everyone else that she was contemplating suicide, comes up with a story that she was trying to look down at the propellers and slipped, only to be saved by Jack. They all realize that Jack is a hero (though Cal and his valet, Spicer Lovejoy, shows quite a level of skepticism), and invite him to a first class dinner.

The next day, Rose goes to thank Jack on deck, where they start to talk quite a bit. She is very intrigued to find out that Jack is a very good artist, and they go on a walk until evening. At this point, one can begin to see a deep connection between them. After dinner, the two of them go to a third class dance party. Cal, suspicious of where Rose went, summons Spicer to find her. He spots them, and informs Cal. Up on Rose and Cal's private deck the next day, Cal violently scolds Rose never to do that again. That same day, Ruth tells Rose the same thing.

Rose briefly accepts this, and tries to get away from Jack as he tries to find her; but Rose comes around quite quickly, realizing that the gallant life style of the gentry is not what will make her happy. She finds him on the bow and they kiss.

Afterwards, the two of them go to her stateroom, since Rose wanted Jack to draw her. She saw that he drew many nude girls in his sketchbook, and was very intrigued by his work. He draws her nude wearing only the "Heart of the Ocean". As soon as he finishes, Spicer enters trying to find them, and chases them until Jack and Rose get to the boiler room entrance, where they shut the door on him. They run through the boiler room into a storage area, where they get in a car to have sex. After this, a few crewmembers enter the storage area to search for them, but Jack and Rose had already gone up on deck at this point.

The next scene goes up to the lookout nest. This is when the lookout spots the iceberg and call the crew. William Murdoch, the officer in charge, orders "Hard to starboard!" This did not turn the ship enough, and it hits the iceberg. The captain and the architect, Thomas Andrews, arrive soon after. Mr. Andrews tells the crew that the ship will sink in an hour or two, so the abandon ship measures are implemented immediately. Since Jack and Rose are on deck, they overhear the crew discussing the seriousness of the matter, so they decide it is best to tell Ruth and Cal.

Before the chase that occurs after Jack draws Rose, she put the drawing, diamond, and a mocking note to Cal in the safe. When Cal sees the note, he devises a plan with Spicer to put the diamond in Jack's pocket. As Jack and Rose go to tell them of the danger that is ensuing, they execute their plan, and have the master at arms search him. He finds the diamond, and Jack is arrested. Rose goes with Cal and Ruth to the dock, but before she gets on the lifeboat, she runs away to search for Jack. She asks Mr. Andrews where they put him, and he gives her the directions. When she arrives, there is no key, so she finds an ax and luckily is able to break the handcuffs. At this point, the area where

they are at is flooding, so they have to go through quite a hurdle to get back up to the deck. They get up successfully, and go to find a lifeboat. Jack urges her to get on, but she didn't want to go without him. Cal arrives at this point too, and puts his jacket on Rose. He tells her that there is an arrangement for him and Jack to get on another boat (though this arrangement was only for himself). This was enough to convince Rose to get on the boat, but as it is lowered, she changes her mind and jumps off onto the ship. She meets up with Jack at the grand staircase, and they are together until the ship sinks. When they are in the water, they find a large piece of wood that Rose is able to get on. Jack tries to get on as well, but it doesn't stay afloat, so he ends up dying of hypothermia. Rose survives long enough for her to get on the lifeboat that comes back to get any survivors, and makes it to New York safely.

The rest of the film occurs in 1996, as she wraps up the story to the crew of Keldysh. It turns out that the jacket Cal put on her had the diamond in it, so she had it the whole time. On Keldysh, she drops it into the ocean, never to be seen again.

The Music

When writing music for such a massive production, special care must be taken, as the sheer length of the film makes it possible to have a large amount of musical material. This can be problematic, for if someone writes new themes for every scene, the music can become less effective, as the return of themes is the best way to generate an emotional response from the audience. James Horner uses a surprisingly small amount of musical material in "Titanic", but still manages to write a vast amount of material.

The music in "Titanic" is all quite similar; however, it is categorized in a very thoughtful manner. There are many sides to this film, and very specific emotional responses that the filmmakers wanted to exhibit. The first category is the love material, which is the most important, as James Cameron stated that "Titanic is first and foremost a love story". The second category is the epic music when the massiveness of the ship is exhibited, not only for Titanic, but also for Keldysh, the ship that the Titanic treasure hunters are on in 1996. The third category is the material of old Rose remembering and recounting the story. This is mainly very light and subtle material, often just solo piano. This category also includes anything in the modern day parts of the movie that have a deep correlation with the past, for example, when the drawing of Rose is discovered. The fourth, and arguably the most interesting category is the Irish style of music that is portrayed mainly when third class passengers are on the screen. And of course, the sinking has it's own category, which also coincides with any turmoil that happens in the film outside of the sinking. There is also quite a bit of source music that occurs, particularly on deck while the ship is sinking, when the string quartet plays. Most famously, they play "Nearer, My God, to Thee" in the final minutes of the sinking. The quartet also plays in the first class lounges. From this point on, the categories will be referred to as love, epic, remembrance, Irish, turmoil, and source music.

As the love themes are the most important to the structure of the score, it is most appropriate to discuss this first. The main title of the movie is the main love theme, so right away, one can tell that this is the most important aspect of the movie.



The scalular motion in the beginning is used throughout the movie, not only in the love category, but also in the epic, remembrance, and turmoil categories.

Right after the main title sequence, which includes old footage of the Titanic leaving Southampton, as well the surface of the ocean with the title of the movie in the forefront, the scene goes to the treasure hunters in a submarine looking for the "heart of the ocean". As the footage goes to the wreckage of the Titanic, a fair amount of foreshadowing occurs in the score. Firstly, material from the turmoil category is played, though very subtly.



Secondly, source music from the string quartet plays for a while, with a very distant type of effect, starting with "Nearer, My God, to Thee."

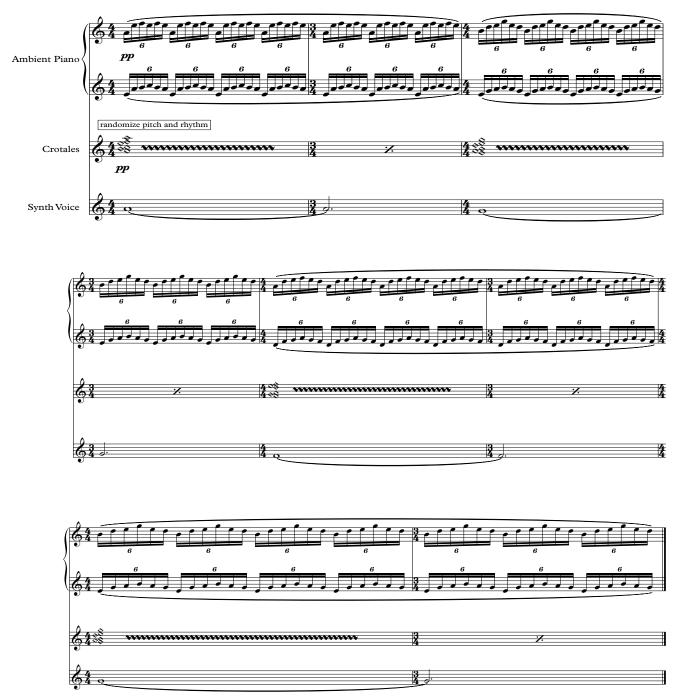
After the treasure hunters find the safe where they think the diamond is, there is a quick cut to the ship they are on. This is the first time the epic theme is used.

Figure C

Almost any time there is a shot where an entire ship is visible, this theme is used.

At this point, the music starts moving toward the third category, which is that of old Rose reminiscing about her experiences, as well as when relics of the ship that the scavengers found are displayed (the remembrance category). The theme that is played while Rose's drawing is uncovered is as follows:

Figure D



Horner decided to use synth voices instead of real voices in order to avoid a "church-like" effect. This is something he tried to avoid throughout the film, as he always resorts to the syths. It is very effective as it makes the voices sound very clear and void of the emotion that is created when real voices are used. This is not to say that there is not an emotional response that is created, but it is much shallower of an effect, more like an instrument than a voice.

At this point in the film, the piano starts to come to the forefront. This creates a beautiful nostalgic effect that appropriately accompanies Rose reminiscing over her experiences as she begins to tell the story to the crew. It also creates a vast contrast to when the scene changes to Southampton in 1912, as the Titanic is boarding. The epic music takes over again at that point. The piano starts to play solo material when Rose is going through the trinkets that the scavengers found, realizing that many of the items are



As simple as this seems to be, there are some incredible subtleties that occur. The first two bars are very bright in mood, as it is when Rose sees a mirror that was hers. She then picks it up, which is when the next 3 bars play. This is still bright, but has a very brief moment of mild dissonance at the start of bar 5. This is when she realizes that there is a crack in the mirror. It is a very mild "dissonance" in the feeling of the plot, and the music follows that with upmost precision. At measure 7, Rose sees more trinkets, and the mood gets much darker, driving up the feeling of nostalgia. At measure 10 to the end, it resolves to B Major, which creates a feeling of resolution as the scene ends. This is only about one minute of the movie, but the subtleties of emotions here are very precise and well thought out.

In the next scene, a very effective use of source music occurs. As Rose looks around the lab, there are many screens with video of the wrecked Titanic. One of the screens displays the doors that go to the Grand Staircase. Rose starts to reminisce about going through these doors, and as she does this, a very ambient and unclear sound of a string quartet starts to play. The scene then momentarily goes to 1912 and the string quartet very quickly becomes fully audible. After about 2 seconds, the film goes back to 1996. The ambient effect of the string quartet is an auditory representation of water, and the clarity represents being on the ship.

As Rose begins telling the story, the piano theme (figure E) comes back, and then the scene starts to fade into Southampton in 1912, as the Titanic is boarding. The music accurately accompanies this, fading from the very light ambient piano theme to a very clear orchestral fanfare (like in figure C). This time, however, it is developed quite a bit, as the scene is longer than before. There is a new theme that comes in right after the

fanfare theme is played, involving two dotted eighth notes and two straight eighth notes. It eases in seamlessly and ends up sounding like a secondary theme. It is played with synth voices again, but this time with a boy choir setting. After the short secondary theme, the boy choir sings the original epic theme again. The feeling of the whole section is quite similar, but the synth voices definitely give a much lighter feeling than at the start of the cue, when the whole orchestra was playing. This is very effective since there is much more action and dialogue on the screen at this point. Interestingly, there is no new musical material for this cue other than straight repetition.

After that, we meet Jack and Fabrizio in the pub. After Jack wins the tickets, they realize that Titanic leaves in "5 minutes". At this point, they need to sprint to board on time. This is the first time that the Irish folk music enters the score. It sets the tone that the Irish music will be associated with third class passengers. As the ship departs, the same epic music is played again, virtually unchanged, just with some minor edits, most likely not even done by the composer.

When the ship stops at Cherbourg to pick up passengers, Molly Brown is introduced. There is no underscore at this point, as the string quartet source music in the background takes over, something that often occurs when in the first class lounges.

As Titanic leaves Ireland and heads into the open Atlantic, there is another large-scale epic cue as Captain Edward Smith orders full speed (cue 14). The scale of the ship is shown more vividly here than in any other point in the movie, so the music needed to portray just as much vividness. Interestingly, even though this music sounds different than the love material, it has an identical harmonic progression. The love material in this film is all based on the progression from the song "My Heart Will Go On" (though the

song was written after the score). The beginning of the song is based on the main title material from figure A. When the voice comes in, there is a secondary theme that is sung.

Figure F

Ev 'ry night in my dreams I see you, I feel you.

Here you see the first four measures of the harmony from the song.



Now, compare it with the main theme from this cue.

Figure H



The key signature from the song was changed for this example, to show the similarity of the harmonies very clearly. There is virtually no difference except for rhythm and instrumentation. In the cue, these are played by the synth voices, making it feel very clear and buoyant, which is a very effective way to start the cue, as the captain

did not yet say to go full speed. As soon as he does, the instrumentation gradually grows, as well as the dynamics, until Titanic's propellers are at full speed, which is when the orchestra hits a climax. Through this section, the rhythms get faster and faster to perpetuate the crescendo. Jack and Fabrizio then run to the bow of the ship and look down to marvel at the speed. The main theme is then repeated three times by the female synth choir, before going back to the epic theme, using the whole orchestra. The cue starts with the synth voices, then goes to orchestra, and then back to synth voices, before going back to orchestra to finish off the cue, creating a very simple way to make contrast while still being able to repeat without becoming tiresome.

The first time that Jack sees Rose is the next cue that occurs (cue 15). This one

actually crosses the border of categories, though is definitely in the love category. The reason it crosses categories is because when the piano comes in, it is very similar to the piano riff that is played when old Rose looks at the trinkets that the treasure hunters found (figure E). However, on top of this riff, there is an oboe that plays the main love material (as in figure F), though in a very rubato and drawn out fashion.

As the scene fades out, it goes to the string quartet source music, as it is at a first class dinner. At this dinner, Rose looks very dismayed and is contemplating suicide. The scene quickly cuts to her running up on deck towards the stern (cue 16). It is definitely in the turmoil category; he uses the low brass quite a bit, as well as low piano, but there is a clarinet solo on top of this that makes it a bit emotional, which is exactly what is happening on the screen. It is very dark, but yet, she is very emotional, so the clarinet solo sweetens the mood a bit. Interestingly, the clarinet is very similar to the main epic theme (figure C), but the first two eight notes go down. Right after this, there is new

material that never was played before, which really highlights the feeling of sorrow in this film (0:35:49).



As Rose approaches the stern, one of the love themes is played again, acting as a type of foreshadowing, as Jack comes right afterwards to talk her out of doing it. This is when they first meet. There is a brief pause as their dialogue starts, and then as Rose gives her hand to Jack to pull her over, there is yet another new theme that is only used for this one moment. It uses the rhythm from the main epic theme.



Even though this theme does derive from the main epic theme, the other components of this music make it feel very unique, and it is very interesting that it is only played once. Since it is when Rose and Jack first hold hands, it ends up being a very special moment in the movie, so again, the music is right there with the action.

When Rose slips (cue 18), it is basically a continuation of cue 16, though at this point, it is much darker as there is no time for the emotional content that was present before. There are no woodwinds or high instruments, mainly low brass, and an ascending trumpet line as Jack pulls her over the railing.

The next scene is in Rose's room, where Cal gives Rose the "Heart of the Ocean". As he notices her being melancholy, he tries to cheer her up, and asks her to open her heart to him. As the scene ends, the eerie theme from cue 2 comes back (figure b). If

there was no music here, it would be a nice moment, seeming as if Cal and Rose made up. But the low strings playing that ominous theme makes the audience feel as though something is very wrong. As it is a very subtle theme, it is also a very good way to fade into another scene. The next scene does not have any music, so it is very important to not make too bold of a statement in order to transition more smoothly.

The next scene is where Jack and Rose talk on the deck for the first time since the incident. As stated, there is no music here, but as Rose looks through Jack's drawings, the piano theme from when old Rose sees her trinkets (cue 9) comes back yet again. This theme starts to take on a new form when it comes to the categories, as it changes from serving as a nostalgic function to a more romantic function. Since it was just used before as love material (when Jack first sees Rose), the audience starts to associate this more with love the more it is used.

After Jack rescued Rose, Cal invited him to a first class dinner. The next scene is in the dining room with Jack, Rose, and all of the people who sit at her table. As it usually is in first class areas, there is source music here with the string quartet. Right afterwards though, Jack takes Rose to a third class party, where there is a very upbeat Irish folk band. It is technically source music, but it serves a very important function, as it shows an immense contrast to the string quartet playing in the first class dinner.

Cal and Ruth scold Rose about going off with Jack, so there is a brief period in the movie here where she accepts their position. However, Jack finds her walking on deck and sneaks her into a room to talk to her. She tells Jack that she can't be around him anymore, and goes back to Cal. This is extremely short lived, and she goes to see Jack shortly after at the bow of the ship. This is one of the most romantic parts of the movie,

as she is finally admitting to being in love with Jack. At this point, the movie goes into straight up love material. All of the themes that are involved with love are played, starting with the piano playing repeated chords in the chord progression, followed by the main melody (as in figure E). This love material goes on for a while, taking over the next two cues as well, when Jack draws Rose in the nude.

After Jack finishes drawing, Spicer comes to look for them again. There is a dramatic chase that happens at this point, but the mood gets almost humorous as the Irish style music comes back in again. As the Irish music is most heavily associated with third class passengers, it really makes Rose start to fit in with that kind of persona more than a "first class girl".

The chase finishes with Jack and Rose escaping into the boiler room. They run through the boiler room and get to a storage room, where they get in a car and have their famous sex scene. Here it is all love material again. This scene is the final scene before the music goes primarily to the turmoil category.

The turmoil category begins to go to the forefront when the lookout men see the iceberg. Right before the sighting, Jack and Rose kiss under the lookout nest, as they had just escaped the crew searching for them (since the crew in the boiler room saw them running through). They are laughing at the search team and kissing with the love material playing. The lookout men look down to glimpse at them, but when they look up, they spot the iceberg. At this point, there is a small motif in the low brass that is played to end the love material (figure K).

From here on out, the general mood of the music changes for the rest of the film.

The music becomes far more complex and less thematic. What's interesting, though, is



that all of the themes from the first half of the movie are still continuously present, but in very small chunks that are modulated and continuously developed. Throughout the rest of the movie, there is actually no new thematic material. Almost all of the contents are derived at least in some way from the love or epic material. The new material that is created is by altering the original motives. A good example of this is at 2:30:29, during the sinking sequence. It occurs during Titanic's final few minutes, as it rapidly tilts over.

The scene is pure chaos, with Jack and Rose trying to run to the end of the ship (figure L). The first two measures show the scalular motion that is heard throughout the film, including the love material and the epic material (from figure c). When the synth voices come in at measure 6, it shows even more similarity to the epic material, which has the scalular motion, followed by a leap, then a scalular downward motion. Measure 6 of this behaves exactly the same way as the original epic theme, but it is virtually unnoticeable. It does, however, create a subconscious emotional response, since the themes coming back create a familiarity that makes the more complex music far easier to take in. This does not only occur with the main melodic material, as much of the ostinati act similarly as well. The string ostinato in measure 5, for example, is mainly using scalular and stepwise motion, much like the material from the first half of the movie. The instrumentation creates this familiarity as well, as Horner sticks to using the same synth voices and strings. The one difference is that the brass is quite a bit more present, which is an obvious choice considering the seriousness of what is going on in the narrative.

Everything after Titanic hits the iceberg is a development or transformation of this original material. During the sinking, besides the underscore, there is a vast amount of string quartet source music being played. This has a historical context, as this actually did happen during the actual sinking. The idea was that if the players were playing as normal, people would panic less. To finish off their set, they played "Nearer, My God, to Thee". During this, there is a montage of the horror of the sinking. In most contexts, the music wouldn't fit, as the scene is in a more action type of setting. But this creates an even more profound effect, as the music displays a deep sorrow, yet an acceptance of going back to

the creator. After this, the music goes back to the turmoil music until the ship



There is a very long section with no music as soon as Titanic sinks. When everyone is in the water, Cameron decided to have it be only the people screaming. It seems as though this is because it shows a sharp contrast to when everyone dies, as everything becomes quite silent. If music was in the background, this effect would not be as pronounced. The music comes in again when the lifeboat comes back to look for survivors (2:45:11). It is still in the turmoil category, but far more serene, as it is showing all of the dead bodies. This is the last time any turmoil material is played. After Rose sees that Jack is dead, the rest of the movie uses love material for the music. The moment she realizes that he isn't responding, the main title is played all the way through again, and then further developed with a low whistle. All of the following cues use this as well, and then the final credits go to the song "My Heart Will Go On", which, as stated, uses all the love themes again. Titanic is first and foremost a love story, and considering how much of the music is love music, it is quite apparent.

Horner is brilliant when it comes to making everything sound new even if it is from previous music. As we have seen, not much is really needed to make a large-scale score. As long as it is categorized well and creates the emotional response necessary for the sequence, it will be effective. Every moment seems to work perfectly with the scene, and every nuance is completely parallel to what the director intended emotionally. Music is supposed to make this sensation even stronger, and that is exactly what James Horner managed to do.

Cue List (hr:min:sec)

1. Main Titles (0:00:25) 2. "Ghost Ship" (0:01:25) 3. "Up To The Surface" (0:08:05) "Uncovering The Drawing" (0:09:45) "Rose Seeing Herself On TV" (0:10:50) 6. "Brock Getting A Call" (0:11:32) 7. "Rose On A Helicopter" (0:12:21) 8. "Rose Sees Her Drawing" (0:14:30) 9. "Sunken Trinkets" (0:16:14) 10. "Rose Begins The Story" (0:19:52) 11. "Southampton" (0:20:04) 12. "Jack and Fabrizio Running" (0:24:37) 13. "Titanic Departs" (0:25:24) 14. "Nothing Ahead Of Us But Ocean" (0:28:15) 15. "First sight of Rose" (0:34:13) 16. "Rose Running" (0:35:17) 17. "Holding Hands" (0:39:56) 18. "Rose Slips" (0:40:20) 19. "It's For Royalty" (0:44:35) 20. "Looking Through Jack's Drawings" (0:49:28) 21. "Third Class Dance Party" (1:02:52) 22. "Rose Changes Her Mind" (1:16:55) 23. "Preparing For The Drawing" (1:21:19) 24. "Jack Draws" (1:23:07) 25. "Spicer Chases Rose and Jack" (1:27:28)

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26. "Take Me to the Stars" (1:29:38)
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- 27. "Cal Sees the Drawing" (1:32:41)
- 28. "Rose and Jack Laughing on Deck" (1:33:01)
- 29. "ICEBERG!" (1:34:00)
- 30. "After the Hit" (1:39:26)
- 31. "Distress Flare" (1:50:30)
- 32. "Rose Searches for Jack" (1:53:23)
- 33. "Rose Punches a Seaman" (1:58:40)
- 34. "Now There's Something You Don't See Every Day" (2:01:53)
- 35. "I Need More Women And Children Please" (2:03:29)
- 36. "We Have An Understanding Then, Mr. Murdoch" (2:08:17)
- 37. "Rose Gets On the Lifeboat" (2:11:25)
- 38. "Cal Chases Rose and Jack" (2:14:00)
- 39. "I Put The Coat On Her!" (2:15:27)
- 40. "Captain Get's Imploded On" [The Sinking] (2:27:25)
- 41. "Searching For Survivors" (2:45:07)
- 42. "Wait For An Absolution That Would Never Come" (2:51:34)
- 43. "Statue of Liberty" (2:53:33)
- 44. "I Never Let it In" (2:55:37)

KEY

Love

Turmoil

Irish

Epic

Remembrance

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