

**Song Exploder**  
**Brian Tyler - Avengers: Age of Ultron**  
**Episode 39**

Hrishikesh: You're listening to Song Exploder, where musicians take apart their songs and piece by piece tell the story of how they were made. My name is Hrishikesh Hirway.

*("Avengers: Age of Ultron" by BRIAN TYLER)*

Hrishikesh: *Avengers: Age of Ultron* is the second movie featuring the Avengers, a supergroup of comic book heroes. The other character in the title, Ultron, is the villain in this story. If you haven't seen the film, that's all the background you need to know for this episode. Composer Brian Tyler disassembles the cue he wrote to accompany the film's title card. It was recorded at Abbey Road Studios with the London Philharmonic with Brian himself conducting.

*("Avengers: Age of Ultron" by BRIAN TYLER)*

*(Music ends)*

Brian: Hi, I'm Brian Tyler, composer of the film, *Avengers: Age of Ultron*. The piece that we're listening to here is the title card, where it says "Avengers: Age of Ultron" over the screen, and the scene that precedes that. I was actually thinking it would be some big Avengers fanfare for the good guys, you know, for our heroes. But Joss said,

Hrishikesh: That's Joss Whedon, who wrote and directed the film.

Brian: Joss said, "No, no, no, no, no. It's going to say Avengers in big letters, you'll see Ultron in smaller letters, but you're going to be feeling Ultron. This movie is about our team not having control." That was kind of fun to do a villainous title card for a Marvel movie. I think it was a first.

*(Strings)*

Brain: "Let's find a vibe for Ultron," was really the first of the marching orders [laughter], in terms of composition.

*(Strings end)*

Brian: Originally, the Ultron theme, I wrote away from picture. It was something that Joss and I had a lot of discussion about and I wrote many versions. At one point, I called his theme, like the “broken clock,” representing his character, which it has to have some logic to it. Well, he thinks he's doing right by hitting the restart button on humanity. He thinks that's the best thing for humanity, which is ironic. How do we write a theme that sounds almost heroic because he, in his own mind, is justified, but dissonant and tweaky enough to say, “No, he doesn't quite have it right [laughter]. He is a villain, still”? So it was a tricky one. There was a number of things that made it really happen, and come together. One was having a melody that you could easily get in your head, but there's something weird about it, and off about it, in that it starts one note off from the key we're in.

*(Strings)*

*(Strings fade)*

Brian: It's flat by one note, it sounds like it's nearly wrong. And that was something that Joss really loved about it. Also things like, instead of using traditional piano, we used two pianos and one is out of tune on purpose.

*(Pianos)*

Brian: I remember Joss wrote me a text, and said something like, “This needs to be the broken cogs of cognition.” So it repeats again.

*(Pianos)*

Brian: So you kind of get your pattern like, “Oh, I know this pattern.” And then, the very last note is ahead by a beat.

*(Pianos)*

Brian: Not only out of tune, but out of time.

*(Pianos end)*

Brian: Then, there's a subconscious point back, distorted guitars.

*(Distorted guitar)*

*(Distorted guitar fades)*

Brian: I didn't want it to be too much like rock guitar. I wanted it to sound a little more like a machine or a robot. We actually artificially downtuned it an octave. The strings at the beginning, this is where Tony Stark is looking at the Loki Sceptre going, "Hmm. Should I? Shouldn't I? Should I? Shouldn't I?" And then the cellos come in with the violas kind of doing this ostinato [mimics ostinato].

*(Cellos with violas)*

Brian: And it's setting the table, and all of a sudden, the cellos and the basses come in with us [mimics the cellos and basses].

*(Basses join)*

*(Music fades)*

Brian: It's almost like a march, and the idea of the superhero is introduced to you. When you have marches, you usually think of Superman and things like that, but the fact that he has this really forward momentum thing going in the lower strings against these upper strings, kind of makes it feel deliberate.

*(Violins)*

Brian: The violins start running up the scale, just like they're out of control, and they're hitting some wrong notes along the way, quote, "wrong notes."

*(Violins)*

*(Violins fade)*

Brian: That's where the rest of the orchestra plays the melody, the big Ultron theme. Usually, that is where everyone would come together, and that's where, OK, strings are going to support the brass, and the brass is going to be with the woodwinds, and everyone's going to be playing the melody, and it's going to sound really together. And it's actually, at that point, I did exactly the opposite with the strings.

*(Strings)*

*(Strings end)*

Brian: And there's the traditional “dah, dah, dah, dum,” button at the end of the piece to say, he's in control after all [laughter], even though he seems erratic.

*(Brass)*

Brian: The grand juror, the pageantry of Ultron's theme here at full tilt is definitely helped by the fact that we have brass playing in the superhero range.

*(Brass)*

*(Brass ends)*

Brian: Typically, when you have a hero or a superhero, you're going to have the brass taking the melody – there's just kind of nothing more heroic than brass playing a melody. But the fact that the strings are all violating the scale against this brass majestic style gave it a sense of something's wrong. Abbey Road is a very cool room, it's got a lot of volume.

*(Wind sound)*

Brian: When you have that many people playing a piece that's fortissimo like this, it's deafening.

*(Percussion)*

Brian: And then, when it gets to the big part, apparently just sounded like pure distortion. We had really recorded the percussion separately, and I didn't want them to hold back and say, “OK, can you blend in with the orchestra?” No. We wanted them to be loud and obnoxious because that's what makes it aggressive and sound cool. And so, we were able to balance it all at the end, so they got to have their percussion solo moment.

*(Percussion)*

*(Percussion ends)*

Brian: Knowing that I'm going to conduct the orchestra completely affects the way [laughter] I write orchestral music, because I never want to do something that's

impossible where we rely on technology to have to artificially stitch pieces of music together that are impossible to play because, to me, that takes away from the human element of what music is.

*(Woodwind)*

Brian: Having been over at Marvel as much as I have been, it's been kind of a home away from home. I know the origin stories of all these characters via the comics before I, you know, was involved with these movies. You get the idea of where things are going, but it was great, kind of as a fan of the comics through the years to see how they tied these things together.

*(Woodwind)*

*(Woodwind ends)*

Hrishikesh: And now, here's the full piece of music for the *Avengers: Age of Ultron* title card.

*("Avengers: Age of Ultron" by BRIAN TYLER)*

Hrishikesh: You can find out more about Brian Tyler's work at [songexploder.net](http://songexploder.net). In addition to his work on Ultron, Brian also composed the Marvel fanfare, the music that accompanies the Marvel Studios logo. You can watch the video, and listen to that music on the Song Exploder website.

You can find all the past and future episodes of Song Exploder at [songexploder.net](http://songexploder.net) or on iTunes, Stitcher, or wherever you download podcasts. Find the show on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram @SongExploder. Song Exploder is a proud member of Radiotopia, from PRX, a curated network of extraordinary story-driven shows. Learn more at [radiotopia.fm](http://radiotopia.fm). My name is Hrishikesh Hirway, thanks for listening.