

# ASPECTS OF EMOTION AND CONSTRUCTION IN THE MUSIC OF NIGHTWISH

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## Abstract

The compositions of NIGHTWISH are one of the most exciting examples of symphonic heavy metal. Tuomas Holopainen composes songs full of emotion and poetry and uses many strategies in order to accompany them musically. The songs of NIGHTWISH are a successful fusion of lyrical emotion and musical construction. How is NIGHTWISH's popularity explained? What musical features characterize this band? Can the music of this group be analyzed from a music scientific point of view? The aim of this article is, on the one hand, to give sound answers to these questions and, on the other hand, to describe from a music analytical point of view the sound of this band in terms of how emotionality influences the musical construction.

**Keywords:** symphonic heavy metal, emotion and construction, music analysis

NIGHTWISH is one of the most well-known heavy metal bands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Tuomas Holopainen, founder, keyboard player and composer of most of the band's songs, created around the turn of the century a new heavy metal sound, which led the way for countless new heavy metal bands of the new generation. No later than the completion of their third album (*Wishmaster*, 2000), NIGHTWISH reached a global and still enduring popularity.

No one could suspect that the vision of a young Finnish musician, which was conceived around a camp fire by the Finnish lake *Pyhäjärvi*, would so significantly change the heavy metal sound of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. All began in 1996 in the Finnish town of Kitee, where three young talented musicians met to found a band, which would play emotional music with keyboards, acoustic guitars and a female singer (Ollila, 2007, p. 29).

Tuomas's intention was neither to create a heavy metal sound nor to pursue a career which includes several months of international tours. Rather, his first demo tape was a spontaneous result of three young musicians who wanted to follow their inner voice (Ollila, 2007, p. 46).

The three founding members of NIGHTWISH all have a background which was very untypical for a heavy metal or hard rock musician. Tuomas Holopainen, founder, keyboarder and composer of most of the band's songs enjoyed a completely normal childhood and was raised by educated parents completely normally.

As a child, Emppu Vuorinen, the band's guitarist, did not intend to become a rock star. His free time activities were in the field of sports (Judo) and he was a member of the local boy scouts team. (Ollila, 2007, p. 29)

Likewise untypical is the also the early biography of Tarja Turunen. Tarja's aim was primarily to become a classical opera singer and not to conquer the most famous rock festivals of the world. (Ollila, 2007, p. 30)

How is NIGHTWISH's popularity explained? What musical features characterize this band? Can the music of this group be analyzed from a music scientific point of view? The aim of this article is, on the one hand, to give sound answers to these questions and, on the other hand, to describe from a music analytical point of view the sound of this band in terms of how emotionality influences the musical construction.

An important aspect of the NIGHTWISH phenomenon is the very emotional lyrics. The band's founder manages to interpret his complex texts with a wealth of musical means. Tarja describes the ability of Tuomas to express his feelings and emotions musically:

"The melodic power of music – and the fact that music can be beautiful even at its heaviest – has always meant an awful lot to Tuomas. He's able to show all his emotions and feelings in his music. I think Tuomas is very brave, because not so many people can do the same. He may not look like a macho man, but when it comes to music, it's all or nothing for him". (Ollila, 2007, p. 112)

In order to understand the compositional language of NIGHTWISH, it is important to briefly look at the course heavy metal music in the 70s. The somber sound and the occult themes of the songs by BLACK SABBATH (Phillips, 2009, p. 35) combined with the new guitar playing techniques the raspy singing and the sophistication of instrumentation of DEEP PURPLE (Phillips, 2009, p. 63-65) were, among others, the most important features for the New Wave of British Heavy Metal (from 1979).

This new exciting, virtuosic and louder sound was now the starting point for diverse heavy metal styles like Thrash Metal, Black Metal, Death Metal and Power Metal. While it was relatively easy during the 70s and 80s to have an overview of the different bands and styles, from 1990 and on, the situation was completely different. Almost every famous band played a self-created style and every famous guitarist had his own special sound. NIGHTWISH placed themselves in the same frame of mind and managed, no later than 2004 with their fifth album (*Once*, 2004) not only an international breakthrough, but also to develop their own sound.

The following musical characteristics are visible if we consider the entire compositional creation of NIGHTWISH, from *Angels Fall First* (1997) to *Imaginaerum* (2011) from a music analytical point of view and from a general perspective:

There is often a change between the female (until 2005: Tarja Turunen, 2005-2012: Anette

Olzon, since 2012 Floor Jansen) and the male (until 2000: mainly Tapio Vilksa, since 2002: Marco Hietala) vocal parts. The combination of the operatic female singing of Tarja Turunen with the raw death metal-kind of Tapio Vilksa's voice was seldom in the heavy metal scene. During the last 14 years there were different combinations between men and women as singers of NIGHTWISH (Tapio Vilksa with Tarja Turunen / Tarja Turunen with Marco Hietala / Marco Hietala with Anette Olzon). The musical parameters of the interaction between the two voices, however, always remained constant. The Swedish band THERION was already known for its use of female operatic singers in combination with heavier sounding male voices. THERION's use of this, however, is completely different from NIGHTWISH's.

The keyboard parts were very differently composed by Tuomas than those in most bands during the 80s (for example: IRON MAIDEN in *7<sup>th</sup> Son of a 7<sup>th</sup> Son* or HELLOWEEN in *Keeper of the Seven Keys*). The keyboard's function changes quite often (for example: in the background with long-lasting chords, doubling the guitar part, leading melody voice while all other instruments play the accompaniment) during a song. Tuomas also uses the instrument's ability to produce many different sounds in order to enrich the entirety of the tone colors of the songs. Since 2002 a live orchestra (specifically since 2007 the *London Philharmonic Orchestra*) plays many of the keyboard's parts, with the aim to make the overall sound richer in overtones and more powerful.

Similarly with the keyboard parts, the instrumentation changes as often as possible during a song. It often happens that it changes so fast (for example *Wish I had an Angel, Amaranth*) that the listener gains the impression of a constantly changing sound.

Tuomas tries during the repetition of characteristic motifs (*Nemo*: opening melody, *Bless the Child*: strong rhythmic string melody in the introduction) to avoid identically sounding combinations.

**Dead Boy's Poem (Wishmaster, 2000)**

The musical score for "Dead Boy's Poem" is presented in five sections, each with a specific time range and instrumentation:

- A: 00:22-00:28**: Features Tarja singing "Born from silence" and "perfect". Instrumentation includes Keyboard, Guitar (solo), and Drums.
- B1: 00:29-00:31**: Continues the vocal line with "silence" and "perfect". Instrumentation includes Keyboard, Guitar (solo), and Drums.
- C1: 01:19-01:22**: Continues the vocal line with "never sigh" and "wrote for the". Instrumentation includes Keyboard, Guitar (solo), and Drums.
- C2: 02:24-02:27**: Continues the vocal line with "eclipse" and "world, it's al ready com(posed)". Instrumentation includes Keyboard, Guitar (solo), and Drums.
- D: 03:14-03:21**: Continues the vocal line with "eclipse" and "world, it's al ready com(posed)". Instrumentation includes Keyboard, Guitar (solo), and Drums.
- E1: 04:12-04:16**: Continues the vocal line with "eclipse" and "world, it's al ready com(posed)". Instrumentation includes Keyboard, Guitar (solo), and Drums.
- E2: 04:49-04:58**: Continues the vocal line with "a lone ly soul". Instrumentation includes Keyboard, Guitar (solo), and Drums.

Figure 1. *Dead Boy's Poem* (Wishmaster, 2000). Development of instrumentation

The musical features just mentioned are part of NIGHTWISH's music and can be found in almost any song. In this study, six songs will be presented. Each of these songs has highly emotional lyrics and is also musically strictly thought-out. The aim of this study is then, to demonstrate the behavior of emotionality and structure of these songs.

*Dead Boy's Poem* (Wishmaster, 2000) is for Tuomas, a "deeply personal song" (Ollila, 2007, p. 111). The text has strong autobiographical references and talk about his emotions about his parents and the world in general, which he can express only through music.

This song functions both lyrically and musically as a through composed *crescendo*. The text is complex and is both sung by Tarja and recited by a young boy with the Nama Sam Hardwick (Ollila, 2007, p. 111-112) Tarja opens *Dead Boy's Poem* with an *a capella* melody (A1: Fig. 1). From the silence (Born from silence) emerge many feelings and emotions (*So much to live for, so much to die for, If only my heart had a home*), which are partly connected with Tuomas's music life as a member of NIGHTWISH (*A perfect concert my best friend, Every thought the music I write, Wrote for the eclipse, wrote for the virgin*). The mood of the poem is rather little positive (*My love letter to nobody*) and in time becomes even more negative (*Failed in becoming a god, Never sigh for better world*). The poem reaches its climax towards the end (*A lonely soul... An ocean soul*). These last lines are sung many times by Tarja and express the emotional state of the song's author. At the same time, the recitation of the lines by Sam Hardwick adds a layer to the text which is full of poetry and emotions.

Fig. 1 describes the development of instrumentation from Tarja's *a capella* singing (A) to the climax of the entire composition (E2). Time references are additionally added to each part of the score in order to make the clarity of Fig. 1 higher. Template is the studio version of the song (NIGHTWISH: Wishmaster, Drakkar, Witten 2000).

The increase of the author's emotions is musically supported by a through composed crescendo. At first, Tarja sings a capella (A). The quiet singing in the lower register is sup-

ported by an acoustic guitar and the keyboard which play subtle long-lasting chords (B1), while later (B2) it is also supported by subtle playing drums. The sound of the distorted guitar (C1 and later (C2) with melody-playing keyboards) adds extra tension to the music. The guitar then takes on the action with a lyrical solo (D). The climax of the composition is reached at the moment where Tarja sings the most emotional lyrics (*A lonely soul... An ocean soul*). There Tuomas takes over the main voice (??) of the music (E1 and E2). While up to this point, he only accompanied the band with long-lasting tones and stayed mainly in the background, now the entire sound of the composition is dominated by his instrument. He is the lonely soul of the poem and the transition of his instrument (keyboard) from the background to the foreground supports his feelings.

Tuomas considers the song *Ever Dream* (Century Child, 2002) as "a personal confession and pouring out of feelings". (Ollila, 2007, p. 171) This explosion of emotion is musically expressed in a similar manner as in *Dead Boy's Poem*. In only three minutes, the instrumentation changes more than twice. All ten instrumentation dispositions differ, additionally, in tone color. Fig. 2 demonstrates the high art of instrumentation by Tuomas Holopainen. (Studio Version: Century Child, Drakkar, Witten 2002) This song has:

- Piano with vocals (A)
- Piano with vocals and strings (B)
- Band (with acoustic guitars) with strings without vocals (C)
- As in C but also with vocals (D)
- Bands (with distorted guitars) with strings and vocals (E)
- As in E but with extra keyboard voices (F)
- Band with solo guitar (overdubbing, G)
- Keyboard (not piano) with vocals (H)
- Band (with double base drums) with female (Tarja) and male (Marco) vocals (I)

### *Ever Dream / Century Child (2002)*

**A: 00:00-00:04**      **B: 00:13-00:16**      **C: 00:30-00:33**      **D: 01:00-01:03 / 02:03-02:06**

Tarja: E ver felt a way... with      E ver felt a way... with      -      -      Would you do it for me

Marco: -      -      -      -      -      -

Piano: -      -      -      -      -      -

(Strings): -      -      -      -      -      -

Keyboard (New Age): -      -      -      -      -      -

Guitar: -      -      -      -      -      -      let ring

B. Guitar: -      -      -      -      -      -

Drums: -      -      -      -      -      -

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**E: 01:26-01:30 / 02:17-02:20**      **F: 02:42-02:47**      **G: 03:06-03:09**

Tarja: e ver felt a way with      beau ty ca scated on me      -      -

Marco: -      -      -      -      -      -

Piano: -      -      -      -      -      -

(Strings): -      -      -      -      -      -

Keyboard (New Age): -      -      -      -      -      -

Guitar: -      -      -      -      -      -

B. Guitar: -      -      -      -      -      -

Drums: -      -      -      -      -      -

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**H: 03:22-03:25**      **I: 03:48-03:51**

Tarja: E ver felt a way with out      E ver felt a way... with      E ver felt a way... with

Marco: -      -      -      -      -      -

Piano: -      -      -      -      -      -

(Strings): -      -      -      -      -      -

Keyboard (New Age): -      -      -      -      -      -

Guitar: -      -      -      -      -      -

B. Guitar: -      -      -      -      -      -

Drums: -      -      -      -      -      -

(no Sa)

sw

Figure 2. *Ever Dream* (Century Child, 2002), all instrumentation dispositions

The introduction of a second voice and the pulsating rhythm are used by Tuomas intentionally at the end of the composition, in order to give the music extra energy and excitement. The strong tone-color contrast between the operatic voice of Tarja Turunen and the raw death-metal kind of voice by Marco Hietala is intentionally used in many songs by Tuomas, in order to musically express the emotional character of the lyrics. An example for this is *Slaying the Dreamer* (Century Child, 2002).

Tensions existed for a long time between the band members and Tarja, before their final separation in 2005. A friend of Tarja's accused Tuomas of being, among others, a ruthless person. Tuomas Holopainen must indeed be a very sensitive person, since these false accusations brought him to such an emotional state, that he stayed up all that night writing the lyrics to *Slaying the Dreamer*. It was the most aggressive text written by Tuomas at that time. These lyrics also provided the ground for the most aggressive song composed by Tuomas at that time. (Ollila, 2007, p. 172)

While in *Dead Boy's Poem* the emotions that appear are negative and at the same time introverted, in *Slaying the Dreamer*, aggressiveness, anger and outrage are the ones that prevail. In the chorus, Tuomas describes the verbal abuse by Tarja's friend (*Put a stake through my heart and drag me into sunlight, so awake for your greed as you're slaying the dreamer*) and the subsequent effects on his mental state (*God it hurts, give a name to the pain, Our primrose path to hell is growing weed*). This part of the composition is brought forth by alternating between Tarja and instrumental interludes. Towards the end of the song, though, we have an explosion of emotions (*You bastards tainted my soul, raped my words, played me a fool, Gather your precious glitter and leave me be, The great ones are all dead and I'm tired, too, I truly hate you all*). This explosion of negative feelings is sung by Marco.

Fig. 3 shows the compositional strategy used by Tuomas in order to musically express his emotions. He divides the sound of the composition in four tone-color categories:

Bright / Middle-bright / Middle-dark / Dark.

For each of these four categories, he uses instruments which remain constant during the song. Fig. 3 shows an overview of the diverse tone-colors and the instruments, which build these tone-colors. It shows that:

- When Tarja sings, instruments with brighter tone-colors appear in the background (for example bells).
- When Marco sings, the band plays with more distortion in the lower register of their instruments.
- There is a constant change of the four tone-colors.

Voice	Tone-color	Dominant Instruments
Female	Bright	Keyboards with Orchestra (Tutti) (00:57-01:09,01:39-01:48,02:15-02:33)
Instrumental	Middle-bright	Guitar with distortion and Bells (00:28-00:56,01:22-01:38,02:02-02:14)
Male	Middle-dark	Guitar with distortion (lower register) (00:00-00:28,01:10-01:21,01:49-02:01,02:34-03:01.)
Male	Dark	Guitar with distortion (lower register) (more aggressive) (03:02-04:32)

Figure 3. *Slaying the Dreamer* (Century Child, 2002)

The song *Eva* (Dark Passion Play, 2007) could hardly be any more different in both lyrical and musical content than *Slaying the Dreamer*. It is a sensitive girl who is bullied at school by other student. The song's singer, Anette Olzon, was instrumental in the creation of *Eva*, since she was herself in a similar situation during the school years. (Metal Hammer, Oktober 2007, p. 30-37)

There are significant musical differences between *Eva* and *Slaying the Dreamer*. In *Eva*, the orchestra instruments are dominant, while the band plays a minor role and the male vocals are missing completely. But only the musical factors just mentioned, are not enough in order to distinguish the tone-colors that appear in *Eva* from the rest of the songs in this album. The choice of the key G-sharp minor is owed to the strong lyrical character in *Eva*. In the entire compositional work by NIGHTWISH,

this is the only song composed in such a key or any neighboring keys.

In fact, Tuomas goes a step further and composes every part of *Eva* in a different key, something which guarantees tone-color variety.

Formal section	Intro, Verse 1-2	Chorus A1	Verse 3-4	Solo	Chorus A2
Tonality	G#-m	B	E	B-m	C-m

Figure 4. *Eva* (Dark Passion Play, 2007), harmonic disposition

**Eva (Dark Passion Play, 2007)**

Figure 5a. Introduction and Verse 1-2 (00:00-00:56, 02:12-02:50)

Figure 5b. Refrain A1 (00:00-00:56, 02:12-02:50)

Figure 5c. Verse 3-4 (01:35-01:36-02:11)

Figure 5d. Solo (02:51-03:27)

Figure 5e. Refrain A2 (03:28-04:26)

Fig. 4 provides an overview of all formal sections of *Eva* and the tonalities in which each section is composed.

Fig. 5 lists, in form of a *Particel* with vocals, the first to bars of every part of the score in *Eva*. (Dark Passion Play, Nuklear Blast, Donzdorf 2007)

Although the schema melody plus accompaniment remains constant, the harmonic progression is constantly changing.

The termination of the band's cooperation with Tarja Turunen after the final concert of the Once tour (2004 – 2005) marks a turning point in the history of NIGHTWISH. It was both for Tarja and Tuomas and the rest of the band's members, a traumatic experience, which was processed by each one of them in a different way. Tuomas expressed his anger about Tarja's husband in the song *Master Passion Greed*. For Tarja, he composed the song *Bye Bye Beautiful*. Both of these songs are the most emotional songs of the next album (without Tarja Turunen, Dark Passion, Play, 2007).

*Master Passion Greed* is a song filled with anger, doubt and aggression against Marcelo Cabuli, Tarja Turunen's husband. Tuomas blames him that he deceived and manipulated Tarja (*Seek her, Seduce her, Tame her, Blame her, Have her, Kill her*). He does indeed pose some serious allegations against Marcelo Cabuli. The song was never performed live.

For such an emotional text, the founder of NIGHTWISH, chose an accordingly unusual musical form. Tuomas composed this song almost entirely on the guitar (Hard Rock, Oktober 2007, p. 22-26) and became the hardest sounding song of the band. (Metal Hammer, August 2007, p. 22) *Master Passion Greed* builds on the tradition of the 80's thrash metal.

Figure 6. SLAYER: introduction of Black Magic, Show No Mercy (1983)

Fig. 6 demonstrates, from a music analytical point of view, how a typical thrash-metal song is built. Different riffs are put together in an extremely high tempo. Diverse colors are introduced in order to make the constant changing of the tone-colors more clear. The following tone-colors are used in *Black Magic*:

Fast repetitions of an open string, damped with the lower part of the hand (palm mute). This results in a muffled sound with very few overtones (section A / green colour).

Power chords, not damped. Due to the enormous distortion, the impression that the guitarist plays no double stops is given. The sound is rich and full (section B / light brown colour).

Monophonic melody, neither plentiful nor damped in terms of timbre (section C / blue colour).

Although there are more than 25 years between SLAYER's *Black Magic* and NIGHTWISH's *Master Passion Greed* (Fig. 7), there are surprisingly many similarities between the two compositions. Tuomas uses the same tone-color on the guitar. He composes many riffs before the singer's entrance and tries to vary the tone-colors of the different riffs as much as possible.

Despite the massive aggression against Marcelo Cabuli, Tuomas shows a certain fairness and waives the female voice of the successor of Tarja Turunen (Anette Olzon). Upon

reaching the climax of *Master Passion Greed* (*Seek her, Seduce her, Tame her, Blame her, Have her, Kill her*), the Chorus is sung by the entire band. This song psychologically exceeds the limits of expression of emotions and feelings and is considered by the members of NIGHTWISH as a kind of dealing with the past.

There is another song in this album with the same background as *Master Passion Greed*. *Bye Bye Beautiful* themes the behavior of Tarja not only during the painful break up from the band, but also long before this happened. The tone-color contrast between the male and female voices (musical level) is intelligibly combined with the reproachful text by Tuomas. It was a challenge to keep the fairness (Anette had to stay out of this story) and still not give up on the tone-color of the female voice.

Tuomas manages this balancing act through intelligent introduction of different textual levels. At the beginning of *Bye Bye Beautiful* Anette sings poetic, yet extremely abstract lyrics (Finally the hills are without eyes, they are tired of painting. A dead man's face red with their own blood. They used to love having so much to lose. Blink your eyes just once and see everything in ruins). (00:31-00:57 and 01:48-02:15)

The meaning of these lyrics remains unclear, something which was probably intentional by Tuomas.



**Master Passion Greed (Dark Passion Play, 2007), Guitar**

The image displays a guitar score for the song 'Master Passion Greed' by Dark Passion Play. The score is written in 4/4 time and features several distinct riffs and sections. The notation includes treble clefs, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and various musical notations such as eighth notes, sixteenth notes, and power chords. The score is divided into sections: Riff 1 (measures 1-4), Riff 2 (measures 5-8), Riff 3a (measures 9-13), Riff 4 (measures 14-16), Riff 3b (measures 17-19), Riff 3c (measures 20-23), Verse 1 (measures 24-25), Riff 5a (measures 26-27), and Riff 5b (measures 28-31). The score includes performance instructions such as 'play 4 times', 'play 2 times', 'play 6 times', and 'play 3 times'. Pedal points are indicated by 'P.M...' with dotted lines. The score is color-coded: Riffs 1, 2, 4, and 5a are highlighted in green; Riffs 3a, 3b, 3c, and 5b are highlighted in brown; and the Verse 1 section is highlighted in blue. Measure numbers 5, 9, 14, 17, 21, and 24 are marked at the beginning of their respective lines.

Figure 7. *Master Passion Greed* (Dark Passion Play, 2007), Introduction and Verse 1 (guitar)

This includes some strong musical characteristics of pop music. On the official video clip by NIGHTWISH (released on September 27 2007) the music is not played by the band, but from young attractive girls. In many interviews, Tuomas describes the connection of models as band members with the expulsion of Tarja.

Text level A, <u>Anette Olzon</u> (00:31-00:57)	
Finally the hills are without eyes, they are tired of painting. A dead man's face red with their own blood. They used to love having so much to lose. Blink your eyes just once and see everything in ruins	
Text level B, <u>Marco Hietala</u> (1:00-1:31)	
<p style="text-align: center;">Did you ever hear what I told you? Did you ever read what I wrote you? Did you ever listen to what we played? Did you ever let in what the world said? Did we get this far just to feel your hate? Did we play to become only pawns in the game? How blind can you be, don't you see? You chose the long road but we'll be waiting? Bye, bye beautiful. Bye, bye beautiful</p>	

Figure 8. *Bye Bye Beautiful* (Dark Passion Play, 2007), Text levels A and B

The subsequent use of Marco's voice could not be more contrasting. His raw voice supports the concrete and reproachful lyrics (*Did you ever hear what I told you? Did you ever read what I wrote you? Did you ever listen to what we played?*), the music is dominated by the sound of distorted guitars and in the video clip, the young girls are replaced by the band's members. Fig. 8 shows the first verses by Anette and Marco.

The genius of this song is that the symmetry between the layers A and B is broken in the last quarter of composition (Fig. 9:03:18-03:31). Anette whispers the melody of Marco, but sings the abstract lyrics (B). Such hidden symmetry perforations demonstrate exactly how well thought out the music of NIGHTWISH is.

<b>Anette:</b>	<b>Text Music</b>	A A		A A		A <b>B</b>	
<b>Marco:</b>	<b>Text Music</b>		<b>B B</b>		<b>B B</b>		<b>B B</b>

Figure 9. *Bye Bye Beautiful* (Dark Passion Play, 2007), formal disposition

The compositions of NIGHTWISH are one of the most exciting examples of symphonic heavy metal. Tuomas Holopainen composes songs full of emotion and poetry and uses many strategies in order to accompany them musically. The songs of NIGHTWISH are a successful fusion of lyrical emotion and musical construction.

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