


**Crash Landing On You:
a beautifully written story
accompanied by a score just as
remarkable.**
**Original Television Soundtrack Album
Review**

Written by: Ella Pedrozo



Lee, Jeong-hyo, and Park, Ji-eun.
Crash Landing On You. Studio Dragon
and Culture Depot, tvN Netflix, 2019.

April 2nd, Crush, DAVICHI, Go Eun
Jeong, KIM JAE HWAN, Kim Kyoung
Hee, KIMSEJEONG, Nam Hye Seung,
Park Sang Hee, SOHEE, Song Ga In, So
Soo Bin, Yerin Baek, Yoon Mirae, 10cm,
*Crash Landing On You (Original
Television Soundtrack)*, Stone Music
Entertainment, 2020.

Crash Landing On You, written by Park
Ji-eun and directed by Lee Jeong-hyo, is a
South Korean drama that premiered
throughout 2019--2020. Starring Hyun Bin
and Son Ye-jin as the main leads, and Kim
Jung-hyun and Seo Ji-hye as the second
leads, it's a series that took the world by
storm for many reasons. The phenomenal
performances given by the actors, the
excellent writing, story, and character
development, the research that went into
depicting North Korea as accurately as
they could, and of course, the outstanding
and original television soundtrack.
The soundtrack is unique and memorable
in several different ways, many of which
are so subtly done that they can go
unnoticed when one is engrossed in the
series. This doesn't take away from its
impact--the viewer's understanding of the
narrative can easily be deepened with

these carefully and purposefully placed
themes.

The use of the score in a nondiegetic
fashion is expertly done; one would surely
feel as though an emotional facet were
missing without the underscores. What is
special here is the use of leitmotifs blended
and varied so skillfully (it could even
easily be argued methodically, since the
leitmotifs serve a distinct purpose in each
scene used) with the diegesis.

Perhaps one of the most symbolic
leitmotifs to note is the theme in "The
Song for my Brother," composed by Nam
Hye Seung and Park Sang Hee. The main
theme, first presented solely as a piano
piece (later to be heard as an orchestral
version with added string harmonies) and
thirteen measures long, is present
throughout the series starting in the
seventh episode; in a brilliant and
meaningful artistic choice by the creators
and composers, the significance of the
leitmotif changes throughout the series,
starting as a farewell piece and concluding
as a piece that ties Captain Ri Jeong-hyeok
and Yoon Se-ri together before they even
meet.

The song first appears while Ri
Jeong-hyeok is about to leave Switzerland
due to the death of his brother. It's played
in a diegetic fashion on a dock overlooking
the ocean, where we later find out Yoon
Se-ri was listening from afar (which, as we
are informed, is the grace that saves her
from taking her own life. In this way, it has
already been redeemed to its original
theme of love, although we don't know it
yet).

It's important to note this piece appears on
the heels of "Same Sky, Different World,"
a work which expertly narrates the
heartbreaking loss of Ri Jeong-hyeok's
brother and career through an arrangement

of clarinet in the lower register (then with added harmonies in the upper register), cello, piano, and sweeping strings. The up and down “swells” of instruments, expressed through an expert use of dynamics and harmonies, mimic the breathing of someone who is grieving; the sentiment of loss is aptly captured in this piece.

Ri Jeong-hyeok even expresses the sentiment that he will no longer play the piano, briefly turning “A Song for My Brother,” into a farewell piece of the film. We’re shown to associate the theme from this piece with Ri Jeong-hyeok and his heartbreak at losing his brother, as well as the feeling of desperation: losing his brother and his opportunity to play piano professionally abroad in the same moment. The piece, at this point in time, is irrefutably rooted in his personal loss and suffering, although it was not originally born out of loss, but rather love for his older brother and hope for his career. As the series progresses, we begin to hear it played in different scenes, and it slowly starts to take on a new meaning. A song born out of love, and then twisted by loss and suffering into a completely different meaning, is given redemption through the love of Captain Ri Jeong-hyeok and Yoon Se-ri, and the emotions of that love are expertly expressed through this piece with the dreamlike intro, theme, a variation on the theme, and then switching naturally and easily into a minor key. After switching back to the original key, the piece varies the theme even more, adding octaves to the leitmotif and more movement in the left hand. It then ends similarly to the way it started, which ties in perfectly with the evolution of the piece in the film. The work itself wonderfully

encapsulates and reflects its transformation in the series through its notation.

Another important leitmotif presents itself in the pieces “Picnic,” and “The Wind of the Day,”--songs that play when we are shown the relationship, and the growing and strengthening thereof, of the friendships between the soldiers in the unit company five, and Yoon Se-ri.

“The Wind of the Day,” could be described as a slower, gentler, and more nostalgic version of “Picnic.” The latter is more lighthearted due to the light bells at the start of the work, faster tempo of the theme, switching of instruments playing the melody, and light drums in the back. The former is more somber, using the slow flute, accompanied by harmonies in the strings, to express a sort of wistfulness and forlorn hope for seeing each other again in the future. It is played during their picnic in North Korea, (what they all think will be their last meal together) with the soldiers while Pyo Chi-su, a Sergeant Major in Company Five, reads her a farewell poem he wrote, poetically demonstrating the existence of an impossible yet beautiful friendship between people who were never supposed to meet. The same theme continues through a lone flute, playing a slower variation, in the background of Yoon Se-ri’s farewell song to the soldiers and Captain Ri Jeong-hyeok, tying in together the longing of a deep friendship that would have existed between them all in another life.

“Moments we Walked Together,” also plays briefly at the beginning of the oyster barbeque scene when the soldiers and Yoon Se-ri start to develop a friendship. In comparison to “Picnic,” and especially “The Wind of the Day,” this work is much lighter and bright, giving us a moment of

repose from the intensity of the ongoing drama and uncertainty of the future.

Towards the end of the barbeque, “Picnic,” reappears, and it plays into the next scene, the day after. This foreshadows the nostalgia that they will have with each other, which is so accurately musically described in “Picnic,” and especially “The Wind of the Day.”

“Like a Wildflower,” is an important piece that plays throughout the series as well. It often plays when Yoon Se-ri and Captain Ri Jeong-hyeok are together or thinking of one another, and it portrays their longing to be with each other, even before they were willing to admit it outloud. The first time this connection is firmly made is in the third episode about an hour in (a few minutes after the song “Picnic”) when Captain Ri Jeong-hyeok and Yoon Se-ri make their first attempt to send her back to South Korea, and it fails. The brilliance in this piece lies in its ability to create a deep sense of longing and loss at the same time while engaging the listener in a sense of bittersweet nostalgia, and even a small but recurring sense of hope. The wistful clarinet, (later replaced by flute) joined by the cello, sings with the piano to create a beautiful work, interwoven with a sense of yearning a love and togetherness that seems impossible, but still somehow exists as an inextinguishable hope. This remarkable theme, present throughout the series, is so wonderfully musically depicted through the careful and skillfully done arrangement and instrumentation of this work.

This piece plays again in the sixth episode about halfway through, this time during the first snow of the year. Yoon Se-ri explains to Captain Ri the myth that two lovers who see the first snow together end up staying together. This reiterates this

piece as a leitmotif for their love; this time, we hear more of the piece and more of its instrumentation, which signals their love is growing and advancing.

The brilliance of this score lies in its ability to describe the narrative apart from the visuals on screen. It is clear they are works that stand on their own. Their beauty and harmonies do so much more than just complement the series: they tell the story of these characters on their own.