

Peoria Symphony Orchestra Program Notes
January 19, 2020
Michael Allsen

John Williams (b.1932), the greatest living American film composer, has created memorable music for well over 100 films. These include some of the greatest Hollywood blockbusters of the last 40 years: the *Star Wars* epics, the *Indiana Jones* series, *Jaws*, the *Jurassic Park* movies, much of the *Harry Potter* series, and many others. Williams' musical career began as an arranger and composer in the Air Force Band. He returned to New York to study at Juilliard and to work as a Jazz pianist. In the late 1950s, he moved to Hollywood to work as an orchestrator and as a studio pianist and conductor. He also began to compose scores for television and movies, and by 1967 had his first Academy Award nomination—the first of over 50(!) so far—for *Valley of the Dolls*. In his later career, Williams has earned equal fame as a conductor, leading the Boston Pops from 1980-1993 and making many guest conducting engagements annually. He is also recognized for his concert music: a symphony, several concertos, and concert versions of his film scores. Several of these concert versions—in Williams' own arrangements—are brought together in this program devoted to his movie music.

The Cowboys Overture

In 1972, Williams wrote the score for *The Cowboys*, a Western starring John Wayne. This film was fairly successful, though Williams actually received Academy Award nominations for two other scores he did that same year: the Robert Altman film *Images*, and the “disaster flick” *The Poseidon Adventure*. He later recalled how his *Cowboys* film music was transformed into *The Cowboys Overture*, our concert opener: “The movie required a vigorous musical score to accompany virtuoso horseback riding and calf roping, and when my friend André Previn heard fragments of the score, he suggested that a concert overture lay hidden within the film's music. Several years slipped by, and each time I saw the indefatigable Previn he would ask, ‘Have you made an overture of *Cowboys* yet?’ He kept this up until 1980, when I finally worked out the piece and played it at a Boston Pops concert. Both the orchestra and the audience seemed to enjoy the music to such an extent that it has been part of our repertoire ever since.” There is a lot to enjoy in this piece—and it's clear from the opening bars that this music is for a Western. The piece begins with bold energetic music and presents a series of distinctly “cowboy-style” themes. There is a long Coplandesque middle section that evokes the wide-open spaces of the movie's Montana setting. The piece ends with a reprise of the opening ideas.

E.T. Adventures on Earth

Williams's most enduring partnership is with director Steven Spielberg. In 1974, Spielberg—then a relatively unknown young director—worked with Williams on *The Sugarland Express*. This would be the first of over two dozen collaborations to date. The very next year, Williams wrote the score for Spielberg's *Jaws*—including the terrifying two-note tuba motive that has haunted the imaginations of swimmers ever since. Their sixth film together was *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), one of the sweetest “alien invasion” films ever made. Williams created one of his best scores for it: Spielberg liked

the music Williams wrote for the closing chase scene so much that he edited the film to fit what Williams had composed. The Oscar-winning score perfectly captures the film's sense of mystery and the alien's playful innocence. *E.T. Adventures on Earth* includes most of his music for the concluding scenes, in which the boy Elliott saves his alien friend from threatening government scientists.

Music of the Star Wars Saga

A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away... No one who lived through the 1970s and early 1980s is likely to forget the initial impact of George Lucas's *Star Wars* movies. They were stupendous box office hits, but they also had a lasting impact on American movies. The result, often dubbed a "space opera," projected a sense of optimism in a politically and economically depressing time. Part of the success of the *Star Wars* epics were the film scores. At the urging of Spielberg, Lucas hired Williams to provide full symphonic scores for the *Star Wars* movies. Williams' lavish scores became hits in their own right. They also spawned a whole series of cover versions, in styles that ranged from Disco to Jazz to Bill Murray's wonderfully smarmy lounge-singer take on *Saturday Night Live*. But it is Williams' original music that has endured.

In creating these enormous scores, Williams depended on a technique heard in operas by Richard Wagner and even earlier composers. He inherited the Wagnerian idea of *Leitmotifs*—musical phrases representing characters, objects, or ideas from the drama—from classic Hollywood composers of the 1930s and 1940s like Max Steiner and Erich Wolfgang Korngold. Just as in Wagner's operas, these motives link the drama together, across the film and across the whole series. They often provide a subtext for what is going on up on the screen, complementing the action or revealing additional meaning.

Williams brought together the score heard here—six of the great musical moments from first *Star Wars* trilogy—in 1983, the year of the third film, *Return of the Jedi*. It opens with *The Asteroid Field* from *The Empire Strikes Back*. This tense music underscores a scene in which Han Solo and Princess Leia escape Imperial fighters by recklessly flying through a cloud of huge asteroids. *Parade of the Ewoks* comes from *Return of the Jedi*. It is a quirky, and slightly goofy march that perfectly captures the character of these primitive teddy bears. One of the most famous musical moments in the first movie, *A New Hope*, comes as Luke Skywalker and Obi Wan walk into a bar in that "wretched hive of scum and villainy," Mos Eisley Spaceport. *The Cantina Band* is a bit of 1920s-style Jazz played by the bar's house band of aliens. *Here They Come* is the dramatic, sometimes violent music that accompanies the climactic space battle of *A New Hope*. *Luke and Leia* is a lushly-scored moment from *Return of the Jedi*, played as the two begin to suspect their true relationship. The set ends with *The Forest Battle*, also from *Return of the Jedi*. This music accompanies the great struggle between the evil Imperial forces on one side and the Rebels and their Ewok allies on the other.

The Adventures of Indiana Jones

In 1981, just a year after the release of second *Star Wars* movie, Spielberg and Williams worked together again on *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. (George Lucas was also

involved as executive producer.) Like *Star Wars*, this would become a long-lived movie franchise. *Raiders* was in some ways a throwback to the old 1940s Saturday matinee movie serials: lots of bare-fisted action and thrilling cliffhangers at every turn. It was a huge box office hit, and Spielberg made two more movies during the 1980s starring its swashbuckling main character Indiana Jones (Harrison Ford). Both films had scores by John Williams. In 2008, nearly 20 years after the third Indiana Jones movie, Spielberg and Williams collaborated on a fourth movie in the series, *The Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*. (A fifth Indiana Jones film is reportedly in the works for 2021.) Williams' *The Adventures of Indiana Jones* includes several sections of his score to *The Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*. *Swashbuckler (The Adventures of Mutt)* is the bold, energetic music associated with the young Mutt, who becomes Indy's sidekick. In a nice bit of musical foreshadowing, Williams includes bits of the rousing *Raiders March* from the first movie to hint that Mutt is in fact Indy's son by Marion Ravenwood, Indy's love interest in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. When Marion herself appears in the story, Williams resurrects her music from the first film, the romantic *Marion's Theme*. *The Crystal Spell* is mysterious and spooky—music associated with the magical and powerful crystal skull. *A Whirl Through Academe* accompanies a wild chase scene on the campus where Indy is a professor. This hectic music portrays Indy and Mutt escaping from a pair of Russian agents. (Williams includes a subtle musical joke: near the end, there is a brief but clear reference to the *Academic Festival Overture* by Brahms!) *Irina's Theme* is the slinky, sexy music associated with Dr. Irina Spalko, an evil, mindreading Russian agent.

Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban

The phenomenally popular series of *Harry Potter* books by J. K. Rowling create a complex and fascinating universe around the school at Hogwarts and the exploits of Harry and his friends. In November 2001, Warner Brothers released the first of an equally successful series of movie adaptations of the *Harry Potter* books, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. Williams would write scores for the first three of what would eventually be eight *Harry Potter* films. Though he was not directly involved with the last five movies, the themes he created would be used throughout the *Harry Potter* film franchise. The Peoria Symphony Orchestra of course performed the entire Williams score for the second film, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*—with the film itself—at our program in October. Here, we end our program with Williams' suite from the third film, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. It begins with the nervous music titled *Witches, Wands and Wizards*, which includes a virtuosic flute solo. *Aunt Marge's Waltz* accompanies the hilarious scene where Harry's horrible Aunt Marge is transformed into a helium balloon. *The Knight Bus* is also a little whacky, underscoring Harry's wild ride through the streets of London in a magical double-decker bus. The quiet music of *A Bridge to the Past* is from a scene where elements of Harry's family background are revealed. Williams described *Double Trouble* as a kind of "homecoming song" for the students at Hogwarts. According to Williams, "[Director Alfonso Cuarón] sent me some literary material, including the witches' scene from *Macbeth*, which has 'double, double, toil, and trouble, fire burn and cauldron bubble.' I thought that was perfect, so I sort of helped myself to Shakespeare. We added 'something wicked this way comes' [also from *Macbeth*] and sent it to Alfonso as a text, which he loved."

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for program page

Not sure of the exact format of your program page, but here are the composer names, titles, and movements as I use them in the notes.

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John Williams
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Parade of the Ewoks
The Cantina Band
Here They Come
Luke and Leia
The Forest Battle

INTERMISSION [I'm guessing - please confirm]

John Williams
The Adventures of Indiana Jones

Swashbuckler (The Adventures of Mutt)
Marion's Theme
The Crystal Spell
A Whirl Through Academe
Irina's Theme

John Williams
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban

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Aunt Marge's Waltz
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Double Trouble