

A CELEBRATION OF JOHN WILLIAMS

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The emotional character and success of a film in many ways depends on the wizardry and genius not only of the visual team, but also of the people responsible for sound production and music. A scary movie is made so much more frightening when the floor creaks ominously, or the wind whistles in your ear in a bone-chilling manner. The music that accompanies a scene can immediately set the mood in a visceral way that even the most striking imagery cannot reproduce. Think about classic scenes such as the helicopter attack in *Apocalypse Now* (Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries*), the shower scene in *Psycho* (Herrmann's iconic shrieking violins), or the ominous sound of Darth Vader approaching from the *Empire Strikes Back* (John Williams' *Imperial March*). What if we were to replace the music of these select scenes with something quite different, say the first movement of Mozart's

Eine Kleine Nachtmusik, or maybe the riding of the Swiss mounted guard from Rossini's *William Tell*? These pieces are also frequently used in cinema and television, but they instantly create a completely different affect. Would Vader appear so frightening if he were accompanied by Mozart's graceful string quartet? Would the tension and suspense of *Psycho* reach such intensity if Herrmann's score were replaced with Rossini's light-hearted gallop? These odd pairings would be comic, almost like Bugs Bunny, and certainly we wouldn't come away with any feeling of gravitas regardless of the fact that we watched the same scenes.

The ability to synchronize sound to film, starting in the 1920s, changed the complete dynamic of film-making and paved the way for great film composers. Rather than have a live musician improvise music to silent films, now the music could be custom-built to support the emotional content of the scene and further inspire and move filmgoers. The golden age of composers were classically trained com-

posers who used the lush and romantic sound of the orchestra to develop a new genre of music perfectly suited to movies. These masters included Erich Korngold (1897-1957), Alfred Newman (1900-1970), and Bernard Herrmann (1911-1975). These days we have many fantastic film composers, but I do not hesitate to say that it is John Williams (b. 1932) who is the Juilliard-trained successor to the tradition of grand symphonic soundtracks.

Let me just choose a few of William's more than 100 iconic soundtracks to highlight: *Jaws* (1975), *Star Wars* (1977-2019), *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), *Superman* (1978), *Indiana Jones Trilogy* (1981-89), *E.T.* (1982), *Jurassic Park* (1993), *Schindler's List* (1993), and *Harry Potter* (2001-04). Any single one of these would qualify as a masterful soundtrack, and yet Williams has an unbelievably fertile output. His gift for melody and creativity has allowed him to define Hollywood music for nearly 50 years, while ensuring that every film he works on has its unique themes and sounds.

Williams draws inspiration from many classical practices and he uses traditional harmonies, instrumentation and musical structures to set the mood and create melodies in ways that Classical masters such as Beethoven and Mozart could in their respective idioms. In *Don Giovanni* (one of my favorite of Mozart's great operas) for example, Mozart uses a relatively small palette of harmonies and instruments available to create a very wide range of emotions and aesthetics. In the 20th and now 21st centuries, composers have a much wider range of instruments, percussion and techniques to draw upon. And yet Williams is able to achieve much of his desired emotional outcomes using standard technique and not resorting to replacing craftsmanship with gimmicks and showmanship. This is just one of the reasons why he is able to come up with amazing music that accompanies and enhances the imagery he works with time and time again.

On today's program we celebrate the living legacy of John Williams in music both familiar and less-known. I hope you will enjoy the breadth and depth of Williams' music, as I know that everyone on stage will!

Program Notes by Yaniv Segal © 2019 ■

