

Notes on the Program

By James M. Keller, Program Annotator, The Leni and Peter May Chair

John Williams has been the pre-eminent composer of Hollywood film music for more than four decades. The son of a film studio musician, he grew up studying first piano and then trombone, trumpet, and clarinet. When his family moved to Los Angeles, in 1948, he began working with the jazz pianist and arranger Bobby Van Eps. During the early 1950s, he did a stint in the Air Force (conducting and arranging for bands) and studied piano at The Juilliard School with Rosina Lhévinne for a year. Later that decade, he was a composition pupil of Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco and Arthur Olaf Andersen.

Williams orchestrated numerous feature films in the 1960s and by the 1970s had emerged as an important film-score composer in his own right. Ronald Neame's *The Poseidon Adventure* (1973) marked one of his first incontrovertible successes, but his breakthrough came two years later with the Steven Spielberg blockbuster *Jaws*. Williams became that director's composer of choice, providing music that would mirror, support, and advance the action and emotional states depicted in his films. A selective list of

Williams's scores for more than 20 Spielberg films includes many "must-hear" entries, such as *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*, *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, *Jurassic Park*, *Schindler's List*, *Saving Private Ryan*, and *Lincoln*. The composer concurrently maintained close working relationships with other leading directors, including Alfred Hitchcock (*A Family Plot*), Oliver Stone (*Born on the Fourth of July*, *JFK*, and *Nixon*), and Rob Marshall (*Memoirs of a Geisha*).

Apart from Spielberg, the director-producer with whom Williams is most identified is George Lucas, creator of the *Star Wars* series. It began as a trilogy: *Star Wars*, in 1977 (retitled *Star Wars: A New Hope* upon its re-release four years later); *The Empire Strikes Back*, in 1980; and *Return of the Jedi*, in 1983. That sequence was later expanded by a "prequel trilogy"—*The Phantom Menace*, in 1999; *Attack of the Clones*, in 2002; and *Revenge of the Sith*, in 2005 — and is now being worked through a "sequel trilogy," of which the first installment, *The Force Awakens*,

IN SHORT

Born: February 8, 1932, in Flushing, Queens, New York

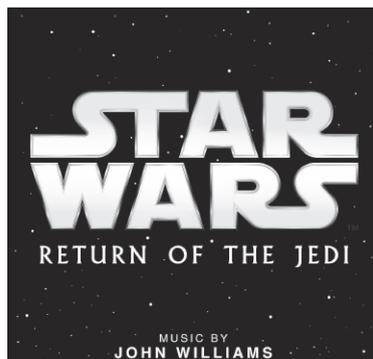
Resides: in Los Angeles, California

Work composed: 1983

World premiere: The film *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi* was released on May 25, 1983.

New York Philharmonic premiere: these performances, which mark the World Premiere of the score performed live to the complete film

Estimated duration: ca. 136 minutes



Star Wars: A Musical Language

John Williams was impressed by George Lucas's script for the original *Star Wars* (later subtitled *A New Hope*) when he first read it. "I thought the film would give me the opportunity to write an old-fashioned swashbuckling symphonic score," he said, and he convinced Lucas to opt for a completely original sound track rather than assemble one from existing classical compositions, as Stanley Kubrick had done with *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Williams explained:

What the technique of using pre-existing classical music doesn't do is to allow for a piece of melodic material to be fully developed and related to a character all the way through a film. ... For formal reasons, I felt that this particular film wanted such thematic unity.



"The Force Theme" returns with Luke Skywalker in *Return of the Jedi*, while new leitmotifs are introduced, including "Jabba the Hut," and the "Emperor's Theme."

Williams accordingly formulated about a dozen memorable, easily recognizable themes, each associated with a specific character or situation. These ideas could be revisited and worked into the evolving musical texture as the saga unrolled, in the manner of the leitmotifs famously employed as a structural and narrative element in the operas of Richard Wagner — works to which the *Star Wars* movies are frequently compared. Now instantly recognizable themes introduced in *A New Hope* include the sometimes quiet, sometimes heroic "The Force Theme," which underscores the scene in which a contemplative Luke Skywalker gazes out upon the binary sunset, and also accompanies the first appearance of Obi-Wan Kenobi; Princess Leia's romantic, yet regal theme; and the low-pitched "Imperial Motif," which presages the ominous "Imperial March" associated with Darth Vader (introduced in *The Empire Strikes Back*.)

Indeed, Williams's scores do have a Wagnerian cast, employing a large symphony orchestra with unmistakable grandeur. The goal was not to emphasize the futuristic aspects of the films, which might have invited electronic effects or extended instrumental techniques. Instead, Williams wrote original music that did not disguise its kinship to such earlier symphonic masters as Wagner, Bruckner, Stravinsky, or Korngold. In this sense, it mirrors the stance of the films themselves, which are unquestionably set in the land of sci-fi but also draw on more traditional Hollywood genres, from swashbuckling adventure epic to gun-slinging Western.

appeared in 2015, the second, *The Last Jedi*, is set to open on December 15, 2017 — and the third, the ninth *Star Wars* film is still in development.

Often working at a pace of about two films per year, Williams has now completed more than 100 scores, not counting television movies, shorts, or adaptations. He has been recognized with an impressive succession of honors, among them fifty Oscar nominations and four Academy Awards for Best Original Score (for *Jaws*, *Star Wars: A New Hope*, *E.T.*,

and *Schindler's List*), plus another for Best Scoring Adaptation and Original Song Score (*Fiddler on the Roof*), four Golden Globes, three Emmys, and 23 Grammys, in addition to induction into the Hollywood Bowl Hall of Fame (in 2000), a Kennedy Center Honor (in 2004), and the National Medal of Arts (2009). In 2016 he became the first composer to receive the American Film Institute Life Achievement Award.

When director and writer George Lucas was creating the original *Star Wars* film in

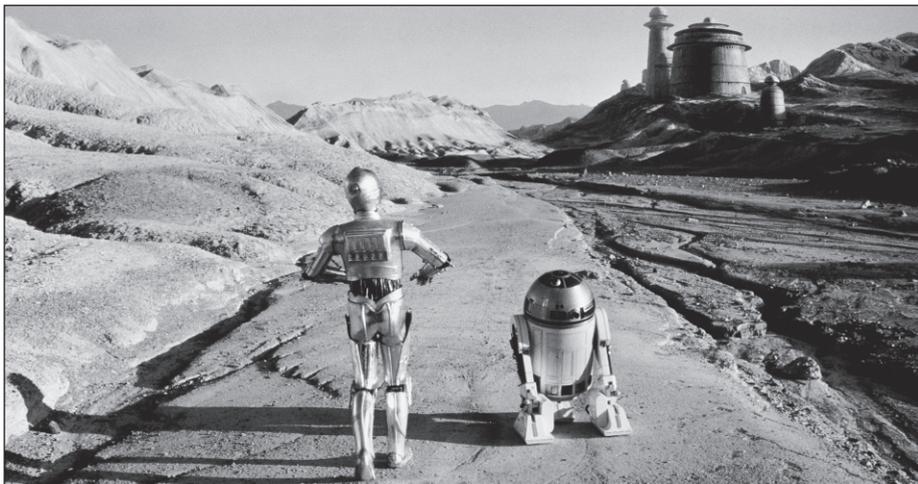
In the Composer's Words

When we did the initial recording in London in 1977, I didn't have any inkling that there would be a second film or, let alone, a third film. I thought that *Star Wars* would be a wonderful sort of Saturday afternoon show for the entire family, and then in a few weeks it would be gone.

And what happened, of course, is that it ignited in some way. The wonderful historian Joseph Campbell explained how the mythological elements of the story struck the psyches of people worldwide. But that came later. I certainly couldn't have predicted this when we made the film, but the magnetism of the piece itself became so powerful and so appealing to people, maybe billions of people by now.

When I've returned over the years to work on subsequent *Star Wars* films, I've always felt that it is a bit like getting back on your teenage bicycle, which you haven't forgotten how to ride, and it takes only a few hours to get back in the swing of the modalities of the prior films. I hope people will find that the music for these later installments is fresh and new, but at the same time interrelated with the earlier material that has become so familiar and so often performed.

— John Williams



C-3PO and R2-D2

1977, his friend Steven Spielberg recommended that he hire John Williams to compose an original score. The film was an immense success, and Williams's score became an instant classic in its own right; the movie was honored with six Oscars, including one for Williams's music. Its 1980 sequel, *The Empire Strikes Back*, garnered four Academy Award nominations, including one for Best Original Score.

A further sequel arrived in 1983 — *Return of the Jedi*, with George Lucas again as executive producer and this time with Richard Marquand directing. While hewing to the recognizable musical vocabulary of the first two *Star Wars* films, Williams threaded new leitmotifs into *Return of the Jedi* to support evolving complications of the plot and to introduce new characters, including the “Jabba the Hut” theme (scored for solo tuba), the sinister “Emperor’s Theme,” and the playful “Parade of the Ewoks,” creating a score of stunning originality.

Instrumentation: three flutes (one doubling piccolo, and one doubling piccolo and alto flute), three oboes (one doubling English horn), three clarinets (one doubling bass clarinet, another doubling E-flat clarinet and bass clarinet), three bassoons (one doubling contrabassoon), six horns, three trumpets, four trombones, tuba, timpani, orchestra bells, xylophone, vibraphone, marimba, chimes, snare drums, side drum, military drum, field drum, tuned drums, muffled drum, log drum, Javanese drum, tom-toms, low / deep drum, deep guillotine drum, bass drum, tam-tam, anvil, triangle, tambourine, bell tree, gong, medium Siamese gong, cymbals, suspended cymbal, sizzle cymbal, finger cymbals, bongos, congas, ratchet, rattles (plus sistrum), shaker, loose African shaker, gourd scraper, bamboo sticks, Japanese sticks, boobams, claves, harp, piano (doubling celeste), synthesizer, and strings.

Listen for ... the Boobam



Boobam? This rhythmically named instrument — a frame-mounted set of tuned bongos — is just one member of the percussion battery John Williams deploys in his score for *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi*. Boobams take their name from a scrambled spelling of bamboo, as the tubes were originally made of large bamboo pipes, with the varying lengths providing the tuning. The instrument became popular with jazz and popular groups after the founding of BooBam Bamboo Drum Company in 1954 in Sausalito, California.

A variety of drums, cymbals, gongs and bells, rattles, and even an anvil can be heard sprinkled throughout the score. The percussion section takes over entirely for the “Ewok Drums” sequence, which features African shakers, marimba, log drum, and congas.

— The Editors