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Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra

Programme Notes Online

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- photos and brief biographies of conductors and soloists
- a list of contract orchestra members
- texts or translations of sung items
- a list of choir members, where appropriate
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Liverpool John Moores University Series

Music from the Star Wars Saga

Saturday 27 April 2019 7.30pm

Sponsored by Liverpool John Moores University

The phenomenal success of the original *Star Wars* in 1977 didn't just change the direction of popular cinema forever, but it transformed film music too. Just as the movie was a nostalgic throwback to the styles and subject matter of an earlier era of cinema (*Star Wars* was basically a WW2 RAF men-on-a-mission thriller crossed with an Errol Flynn swashbuckler in a Flash Gordon setting but with a proper budget), so suddenly the big, old-school melodic orchestral Hollywood sound was back in style, edging out the pop and jazz based scores which had ruled since the sixties began to swing.

This Christmas will see the release of the final film in a trilogy of *Star Wars* trilogies, and John Williams will, over a period of 42 years, have composed the music for all nine of them, an achievement unique in cinema history. The result will be a vast musical tapestry of multiple themes, endless variations and other incidental music. The whole will total around 20 hours of symphonic scoring – the only comparison point is Wagner's Ring Cycle of operas. Williams' *Star Wars* is truly a great space opera without words.

Tonight, in advance of *Star Wars* Episode 9, we can enjoy a tour through some of the highlights of the grand musical universe John Williams has crafted and which so elevates the adventures of Luke Skywalker et al to the status of modern myth. Note – we will be venturing through the *Star Wars* universe not in the order in which the scores were written, but in the internal chronological order in which the series unfolds.

20th Century Fox Fanfare

First though, the iconic 20th Century Fox Fanfare (with CinemaScope extension), written not by John Williams, but by Alfred Newman, originally for the 1931 film *Street Scene*.

Star Wars: Main Theme

This takes us directly into Williams' legendary 'Star Wars Main Theme', regularly voted the greatest film theme ever written.

Episode 1: The Phantom Menace Suite

Flag Parade

Anakin's Theme
Adventures of Jar-Jar Binks
Duel of the Fates

The Phantom Menace (1999) is a rather dull film about a trade deal. One element of the film which didn't disappoint was John Williams' score, from which we will hear four selections. 'The Flag Parade' is a rousing march, perhaps a homage to Miklós Rózsa's 'Parade of the Charioteers' from *Ben-Hur*. 'Anakin's Theme' brings out the child-like innocence of the young anti-hero, but pay attention to the last four notes, which foreshadow the second bar of 'The Imperial March', aka 'Darth Vader's Theme'. Williams brilliantly foreshadows music he wrote two decades earlier, hinting at the man the boy will grow up to be. 'The Adventures of Jar Jar' is a light-hearted musical portrait of the Star Wars Saga's least popular character, and Williams, the consummate professional, does him proud. The final selection is a majestic set piece, 'Duel of the Fates'. Williams' fatalistic musical powerhouse captures all the intensity and drama lacking in the film itself, tonight brought to spine-tingling life with the voices of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Chamber Choir joining the Orchestra.

Episode 2: Attack of the Clones

Across the Stars

Attack of the Clones (2002) was a much better film, for which Williams wrote one of his most heartfelt melodies, 'Across the Stars' capturing the romantic yearning of the young lovers at the heart of the story.

Episode 3: Revenge of the Sith

Battle of the Heroes

The prequel trilogy concludes with *Revenge of the Sith* (2005), for which the Chamber Choir return with the thrilling showcase 'Battle of the Heroes'.

Episode 4: A New Hope

Here They Come!

The Cantina Band

Princess Leia's Theme

Then it's back to 1977 for three pieces from the film then called simply *Star Wars*. Buckle in, because 'Here They Come!' a furious space combat sequence as TIE fighters close in on the Millennium Falcon. Time for a well-earned drink listening to the Benny Goodman-style jazz of 'The Cantina Band', Williams' tribute to the jazz his own father made his living playing in Hollywood 40 years earlier. Finally, we will hear the concert version of the lovely 'Princess Leia's Theme', demonstrating a lyricism which has always set the *Star Wars* movies aside from more straight-ahead action pics.

Episode 5: The Empire Strikes Back

The Asteroid Field

Yoda's Theme

Imperial March

1980 brought us *The Empire Strikes Back*, and 'The Asteroid Field' is a nimble, mercurial action piece following every twist and turn as Han Solo desperately seeks to evade the Empire's forces through a sea of swirling space rock. Yoda, the little green mystic, made his debut in this film, and Williams wrote a theme for him full of magical, glittering wonder. Oddly enough, in the 1977 film arch villain Darth Vader never had his own theme, but Williams gave him one for the sequel, and it is to the menacing strains of 'The Imperial March', complete with the chilling introductory music to the 'Carbon Freeze' sequence, that we stride confidently into the interval.

Episode 6: The Return of the Jedi

The Forest Battle

Luke and Leia's Theme

Parade of the Ewoks

Refreshed? Then it's time for the conclusion to the original trilogy, *Return of the Jedi*. From the film we will hear 'The Forest Battle', for which Williams penned a dazzling display of musical pyrotechnics, contrasting with a new theme written for Luke and Leia's relationship, now revealed to be siblings in the tender 'Luke

and Leia's Theme'. The adventure comes to an end with another march, this time a 'Parade of the Ewoks' in celebration of the valiant (teddy) bear-like aliens featured in the story.

Episode 7: The Force Awakens Suite

March of the Resistance

Rey's Theme

Scherzo for X-Wings

The Jedi Steps

A generation goes by in that galaxy far, far away while a mere decade passes here on earth, and suddenly it's time for *Star Wars* to relaunch itself with *The Force Awakens* (2015), from which we will hear a suite of Williams' new themes. 'March of the Resistance' is a score highlight, a collective theme for the new heroes which embraces a stoic propulsiveness – classic war movies fans might note a nod in the direction of Ron Goodwin's main title fugue from *Where Eagles Dare*. 'Rey's Theme' offers a thoughtful and noble portrait of the film's principal protagonist. Williams has a long history of penning thrilling scherzos for the movies, and his 'Scherzo for X-Wings', incorporating motifs going back to 1977, stands with the best of them. Then 'The Jedi Steps' brings the story full circle, music laden with a tentative dread and expectation, giving way to a perhaps not unexpected big reveal.

Episode 8: The Last Jedi

The Rebellion is Reborn

And so the stage is set for *The Last Jedi* (2017), in which 'The Rebellion is Reborn', a piece filled with martial optimism and just a hint of the inevitable darkness to come.

Throne Room and Finale

But then, for the end of our concert tonight, we fittingly go back to the beginning once more, or rather, this time to the end of the original *Star Wars* and the wonderfully uplifting 'Throne Room and Finale'. All darkness is cast aside as the triumph of good over evil is rewarded in the ultimate feelgood ending, all before a final statement of the original film's main themes as the end titles roll.

Programme notes by Gary Dalkin © 2019