

Pops Series

Great Directors & Their Composers:

Steven Spielberg & John Williams

Friday 14 June 2019 7.30pm

Saturday 15 June 2019 7.30pm

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European Film Philharmonic Institute

Steven Spielberg is almost certainly the most famous film director ever. John Williams is definitely the most famous film composer in the history of cinema, and their careers are uniquely intertwined, in that over 45 years Spielberg has directed 31 films, and Williams has written the music for all but three of them. It is reasonable to say that Spielberg's enormous success owes more than a little to the music of John Williams - would *Jaws* really have become the biggest hit of all time without 'that' music? Conversely the high profile of Williams' work owes much to Spielberg's rarely matched knack of delivering movies the public flock to see, decade after decade.

So tonight we explore just some of the highlights from one of the most successful, certainly one of the most enduring collaborations in the history of cinema - music from 11 of the 28 films Spielberg and Williams have made together.

We could begin anywhere these filmmakers have taken us, but what better place than an excursion to *Jurassic Park* (1993) and a suite of themes from the film that made dinosaurs eternally cool? *Jurassic Park's* score is a treasure trove of action adventure music, but its greatest achievement is the sense of reality that Williams' music brings to the story. These dinosaurs are not Hollywood monsters, but endangered animals, thrilling, beautiful, and yes, at times, terrifying. Through his rich musical

imagination Williams gives these beasts character, even nobility, and convinces us that they are real, not animatronics or pixels in a computer.

What a difference the span of a generation from the film which made Spielberg name – 1975's *Jaws*. Back then the creature was definitely a monster, something Williams makes clear from the onset with his dread-inducing, pulsating main theme – an escalating crescendo of terror. After which he brings a classical elegance to the 'Shark Cage Fugue', an unforgettable musical set piece to accompany the equally unforgettable scene in which Richard Dreyfuss' character is trapped underwater.

In style *War Horse* (2011), one of Spielberg many war movies, pays homage to the great British war films of the 1960s. Old-fashioned in every sense, the film enabled John Williams, ever the anglophile, to evoke the pastoral spirit of 20th-century English classical music, most especially that of his namesake, Ralph Vaughan Williams. The result is one of Williams' finest scores of more recent years, from which tonight we will hear the timeless 'Dartmoor, 1912', a wonderfully nostalgic celebration of a world long gone by.

From the First World War to the Second, and Spielberg's greatest serious film, *Schindler's List* (1993). For this picture Williams returned, in far more sombre mood, to the Jewish musical territory he had originally explored in *Fiddler on the Roof* back in 1969. He won his first Oscar for his work on that musical epic, so it is perhaps fitting that he took home his fifth (and to date final) Oscar for his beautiful, heartbreaking score for the now classic Holocaust epic. Dominated by the haunting sound of the violin, which becomes a wordless song, a lament for the murdered, the score has a heart-wrenching power rarely rivalled in all cinema. We will hear two aspects of the score, first a portrait of a 'Jewish Town: Krakow Ghetto – Winter '41', then the inimitable main theme itself.

Spielberg and Williams are mercurial talents, able as easily to mourn the Holocaust as turn World War Two and its Cold War aftermath into the backdrop for a fun-filled romp. Cue Indiana Jones (1981-2008). Taking us into the interval, we will hear three pieces from the fourth film in the saga, Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull. The movie may have disappointed, but returning to the series after 20 years, Williams' music showed no signs of the tiredness which marred the film itself. The maestro treats us to the energetic 'Swashbuckler – The Adventures of Mutt', then takes 'A Whirl Through Academe', one of Williams' many thrilling trademark scherzos, before presenting a portrait of 'The Crystal Spell' – music not found in this version on the original soundtrack album. Finally, raise your hats for the rousing, joyous 'Raiders March', theme from the original and best Raiders of the Lost Ark – fedora not included.

Back from the intermission, in one way or another, the idea of flight links the five films in the second half of our concert.

Catch Me If You Can is one of Williams most intriguing scores, in that it found him in 2002, writing music for a story set through the 1960s, a period when he was already making a name for himself as a film and TV composer, though with a jazzier style than that of his later work. The film tells the story of a man who takes flight in every sense, fleeing from the law while pretending to be an airline pilot. Williams penned music with a sprightly jazz sensibility, wrapped in a nostalgic, deceptive heart. It is a seductive, not entirely trustworthy work, from which we'll hear three sequences, 'Closing In', 'Reflections', and finally the alto sax driven 'The Float'. Made two years later, The Terminal is something of a companion piece. Here Williams switches sax for clarinet for 'Viktor's Tale', a portrait of Tom Hanks' luckless protagonist, a man who finds himself living in JFK International Airport after the US no longer recognises his home country.

Hook (1991) was a massive box office hit, yet today this 'Peter Pan grows up' fable is a strangely overlooked film in the Williams

/ Spielberg catalogue. Filled with whimsical fantasy and playful magic, the score is much underrated – if you like ET you'll love this. The two scores share musical DNA, and the ecstatic 'The Flight to Neverland' is but one highlight.

And so to a pair of scores which complement one another perfectly, first for Spielberg's science fiction 'first contact' blockbuster, Close Encounters of the Third Kind (1977), then that movie's more intimate companion, ET. We will hear extensive excerpts from CE3K and the symphonic concert suite ET – The Extra Terrestrial: Adventures on Earth. Both sequences capture the essence of their respective films, both replete with a sense of wonder at an encounter with alien life, the former a little darker in tone, until finally exploding into a glorious, almost religious sense of transcendence, a triumph found also in the more child-like innocence of Williams' vision of a young alien lost far from home – at the climax of which the picture literally takes flight.

Tonight's selections could have been entirely otherwise, drawn from a completely different set of films, and yet still they could have demonstrated the sheer musical genius John Williams has brought to the movies of Steven Spielberg. There is so much more great Williams-Spielberg music to explore that, who knows, perhaps it won't be long before we are back for the inevitable sequel concert!

Programme notes by Gary Dalkin © 2019