

# **Williams, Wagner, and History**

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Film scores take the drama of a screenplay and make it shine. A great film score is to the screenplay as seasoning is to a good meal—becoming such a wonderfully integrated aspect that it enhances the characters, mood, and ideas emoted in the screenplay, but does not overtake or obscure them. In an article about modern film music, Todd Martens stated, “A film’s music is often considered a character itself.”<sup>1</sup> The greatest film music of all time is that which is recognizable by those who do not necessarily take an interest in music in general. It adds a layer of depth to a film, pushing it into a new dimension and giving directors yet another way to connect with the audience.

A master of composition in this genre, John Williams is known for writing some of the most recognizable film scores ever. Lucas Kendall, editor of *Film Score Monthly*, states that “[Williams] has a breadth and depth of talent and career . . . [he is] essentially the dean of American composers,” and, “His themes sound inevitable. They sound like they fell out of his sleeves; they sound like they’ve always existed. And it’s extraordinary how you get just two notes for *Jaws* or five notes for *Close Encounters* and have them feel like they’ve always existed.”<sup>2</sup> These opinions are echoed in Williams’ dozens of accolades, including forty-seven Oscar nominations in the category of “Best Original Score,” leading to five wins. The *American Film Institute’s* list of “100 Years of Film Scores” names *Star Wars* (1977) as the best score of all time.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, in recent years, musicians have often commented on the similarities of Williams’ scores to his other works, and to those of Richard Wagner. While Williams uses late Romantic compositional techniques similar to those of Wagner, his works are not singularly Wagnerian. Further, several of Williams’ scores seem to have the kind of lasting power and effect on the non-musical population to become a part of American history.

Williams himself has admitted to using Wagnerian aspects in his compositional technique. He has been quoted as saying (on *Star Wars*), “The music for the film is very non-futuristic. . . It was not the music that might describe terra incognita, but the opposite of that, music that would put us in touch with very familiar and remembered emotions, which for me as a musician translated into the use of a 19<sup>th</sup> century operatic idiom, if you like, Wagner and this sort of thing.”<sup>4</sup> So

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<sup>1</sup> Todd Martens, “For film scores, composers create a world, note by note,” *L.A. Times*, L.A. Times Music Blog (Dec. 5, 2012), <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/envelope/music/la-en-composers-brave-cloud-atlas-life-of-pi-anna-karenina-20121206,0,7347321.story> (accessed Dec. 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Lunden, Jeff, “John Williams’ Inevitable Themes,” *Deceptive Cadence: NPR Classical*, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/deceptivecadence/2012/11/10/164615420/john-williams-inevitable-themes?ft=1&f=10003> (accessed Dec. 2012).

<sup>3</sup> “Star Wars Tops AFI’s List of 25 Greatest Film Scores of All Time,” *American Film Institute* (Sept. 23, 2005), <http://www.afi.com/100Years/scores.aspx> (accessed Nov. 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Paulus, Irena, “Williams Versus Wagner or an Attempt at Linking Musical Epics,” Original Scientific Paper, The “Franjo Lucic” School (Croatia), 2000, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3108403> (accessed Dec. 2012): 154.

while *Star Wars* has become Williams' "space opera," and uses evident Wagnerian influences, it is not a "summary" or "copy" of Wagner's music by any means.

The "Main Theme" from *Star Wars* (Episode IV: A New Hope) and the "Raiders March" from *Raiders of the Lost Ark* are rife with Wagnerian aspects, including introduction and use of leitmotifs, *Klangfarbenmelodie*, amongst other harmonic techniques, a rather large and unique orchestra, and a sort of *Gesamtkunstwerk* aspect to the scoring as it relates to the films as a whole.

The term 'leitmotiv' itself was first used by A. W. Ambros in an article discussing Wagner's operas and Liszt's symphonic poems. Leitmotifs are never defined precisely by Wagner himself, but he does describe them at length:

"These melodic moments, in themselves adapted to maintain our feeling at an even height, will be made by the orchestra into a kind of guides-to-feeling (*Gefühlswegweisern*) through the whole labyrinthine (*vielfgewundenen*) building of the drama. At their hand we become the constant fellow-knowers of the profoundest secret of the poet's aim, the immediate partners in its realisation between them, as foreboding and remembrance, there stands the Verse-melody as the borne and bearing individuality, conditioned by an emotional-surrounding consisting of moments of utterance drawn alike from its own promptings and from those of others, already experienced or yet to be experienced. These referential moments, for rounding-off the emotional-expression, withdraw into the background so soon as ever the individual comes to oneness with himself, and thus advances to the fullest expression of the verse-melody: *then* the orchestra will merely support this melody in its elucidatory function . . ."<sup>5</sup>

Wagner's verbose description is simplified and modernized in the definition of 'leitmotiv' given by the *Oxford Dictionary of Music*, which states, "... a short constantly recurring musical phrase or theme denoting a person, thing, or abstract idea. 'Representative theme.'"<sup>6</sup> This idea of leitmotiv has been tossed around by composers throughout history, and is found in the works of Mozart, Weber, Mendelssohn, and Berlioz, to name a few. While John Williams does not personally define his themes as leitmotifs, it is evident that a good many of them are—the famous two-note *Jaws* theme, the five-note *Close Encounters* idea, the six-note Indiana Jones motive. The term 'leitmotiv' applies here best—Williams is not simply using a film theme, which is to say, "any music—melody, melody-fragment, or distinctive harmonic progression—heard more than once during the course of a

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<sup>5</sup> Wagner, Richard. *Opera and Drama* (1852), trans. William Ashton Ellis (London: 1893), <http://users.belgacom.net/wagnerlibrary/prose/wlpr0063.htm#d0e1920> (accessed Dec. 2012).

<sup>6</sup> "Leitmotiv," *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, 2nd ed. rev. *Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t237/e6015> (accessed Dec. 2012).

film,” but is in fact attaching short themes to specific people, ideas, or objects.<sup>7</sup> In doing this, in using these small leitmotifs in a film score, Williams was in fact carrying on a long tradition of using leitmotifs in film, a tradition that had nearly died out. Irena Paulus states that, “The early film composers (Max Steiner, Erich Wolfgang Korngold, Franz Waxman) accepted the leitmotif as a perfectly logical means of describing film characters.”<sup>8</sup> Further, Paulus comments that, “[Williams’] themes are not mere banal film themes that show up whenever the composer runs out of inspiration, but are genuine filmic leitmotifs that with their manifold roles, transformations and mutual kinship create a web of leitmotifs in a Wagnerian sense.”<sup>9</sup> In a discussion of Williams’ themes, it was stated that, “They’re melodies that tend to have an immediate familiarity, even if you don’t know their names and haven’t seen the relevant film in years. They can blend into a film - and yet they always stand out.”<sup>10</sup> For example, the “Main Theme” consists of Luke’s leitmotiv, with a secondary theme used contains the mysterious “Force” leitmotiv, and a brief tangent into Darth Vader’s leitmotiv. For this reason, it rather serves as an overture, though the form is essentially a rondo (ABACDA’EA’AB’Coda). These mixed themes that create the “Main Theme” are all representative of someone or something that is important to the plot of the film. Luke’s leitmotiv is heard throughout the original trilogy (episodes IV, V, and VI) and is manipulated according to the state of the character—when he is in a state of emotional upheaval in *The Empire Strikes Back*, his theme changes and grows with him, exactly like Wagner’s operatic leitmotifs. When Luke interacts with other characters, as in the final scene of episode IV, when he is dealing specifically with Princess Leia and Han Solo and the mixed leitmotifs reflect that, combining Luke’s leitmotiv with Han’s and layering it over a warmer and brighter texture to reflect the Rebel success in destroying the Death Star.

In *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, the leitmotifs are equally evident. In the composer’s notes in the score of “The Raider’s March,” John Williams comments that, “I created the march as an ‘adventure’ theme to be associated with Indiana Jones, the colorful hero of the film.”<sup>11</sup> The march is literally in ‘march’ form (AABBAACCABD), and contains both of the original “Indiana Jones” themes that Williams came up with. When presented to Steven Spielberg, Spielberg couldn’t

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<sup>7</sup> Paulus, “Williams Versus Wagner or an Attempt at Linking Musical Epics,”

<sup>8</sup> Paulus, “Williams Versus Wagner or an Attempt at Linking Musical Epics,” 156-157.

<sup>9</sup> Paulus, “Williams Versus Wagner or an Attempt at Linking Musical Epics,” 157-158.

<sup>10</sup> “Williams’ Force Symphony; John Williams’ Blockbusters Royal Concert Hall,” *Nottingham Evening Post* (May 11, 2012): 10-11, [http://www.lexisnexis.com.navigator-wcupa.passhe.edu/hottopics/lnacademic/?verb=sr&csi=166718&sr=HLEAD\(Williams%27+Force+symphony\)+and+date+is+May+11%2C+2012](http://www.lexisnexis.com.navigator-wcupa.passhe.edu/hottopics/lnacademic/?verb=sr&csi=166718&sr=HLEAD(Williams%27+Force+symphony)+and+date+is+May+11%2C+2012) (accessed Dec. 2012).

<sup>11</sup> Williams, John, *Raiders March* (Milwaukee, WI : Bantha Music and Ensign Music Corporation, 1981), 2.

decide which theme should be used because he liked both so much. He asked Williams to use both, thus resulting in the combination of the six-note “adventure” leitmotiv (first phrase) with the “Indiana Jones” leitmotiv (second phrase).<sup>12</sup> Notably, in the “Raider’s March,” Williams uses the love theme that is heard when Indiana is with, thinking about or otherwise engaged with his love interest, Marian Ravenwood. Most people associated this theme particularly with Marian, when truly it is a theme for their love, not for either of them individually. Williams comments that, “. . . I thought there was a real spark between the two of them, and a real sort of potential love story was there. But I thought the music was more lyrical and emotional and warm and the orchestra could sing this love theme, even if we didn’t have love love scenes that it might be permissible to interject that kind of musical emotion into their relationship.”<sup>13</sup> Williams is not really subtle about how he uses the leitmotifs in either score, and this is what separates his works from Wagner’s—Paulus points out that, “Wagner went according to the principle of developmental variation: every successive variation was a variant of the preceding one. . . Williams, however, created his own principle, and went in the opposite direction from the Wagnerian.”<sup>14</sup> That is to say, Wagner took one short leitmotiv and varied it every time individually, but did not combine leitmotifs to produce another one entirely as Williams did (for example, Luke and Leia’s themes combine to create Yoda’s theme. According to Barbara Hanning, “[Wagner] uses them not once in a while but constantly, in intimate alliance with every step of the action.”<sup>15</sup> Further, that, “. . . there is a complete correspondence between the symphonic web of leitmotifs and the unfolding of the dramatic action; but leitmotifs also unify a scene or opera just as the recurrent themes unify a symphony.”<sup>16</sup> Williams himself offers that, “The scores [of all the *Star Wars* movies] do seem unified to me, now that I look back. . . now I can see that it’s one effort really.”<sup>17</sup> On his themes, “They’re different, but they also marry up very well and you can interplay them in a contrapuntal way, and it will be part of a texture that is familial.”<sup>18</sup> Williams notes that he spends a significant amount of time finding the inevitable themes—

“. . . very simple little sequence of notes, but I spend more time on those little bits of musical grammar to get them just right so that they seem inevitable, seem like they’ve always been there, they’re so simple and I don’t know how many permutations I will go through

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<sup>12</sup> Williams, John, “The Music of Indiana Jones Featurette,” *Indiana Jones Bonus Material*, DVD, George Lucas, Steven Spielberg (Hollywood, CA : Paramount, 2003).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Paulus, “Williams Versus Wagner or an Attempt at Linking Musical Epics,” 173.

<sup>15</sup> Hanning, Barbara Russano, *Concise History of Western Music*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed, (New York : W.W. Norton & Company, 2010): 465.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Byrd, Craig L., “The Star Wars Interview,” *Film Score Monthly* 2, no. 1 (Jan./Feb.1997): 19-20.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 20.

with a six note motif like that, one note down, one note up and spend a lot of time on these little simplicities which are often the hardest to capture, I think for anybody.”<sup>19</sup>

Both methods resulted in similar conclusions—themes associated with people, things, or ideas that wove together to create a complex fabric of plot and thematic development in both the story and the music.

Williams’ harmonic texture is just as rich as the use of leitmotifs; again, this is not unlike Wagner. Wagner’s use of *Klangfarbenmelodie* (sound based on harmony and tone color) is thought to mark the beginning of atonality by some.<sup>20</sup> This included his famous *Tristan* chord, used first and most applicably in his opera, *Tristan und Isolde*. *Klangfarbenmelodie* began a push towards modern music and techniques composers use today, from atonality to electronic music. Williams does not use *Klangfarbenmelodie* in such a dense manner as Wagner, but rather in a less complicated manner—vertically simplified, so that the *Klangfarbenmelodie* tone color was produced particularly because the intervals were the factor that created the appropriate sound structure. The theme of the short desert critters with burgundy cloaks and golden glowing eyes that capture R2D2 and C3PO (“Jawe”) is repeated three times when it is first introduced, but due to the orchestration, the color is used to give the music direction as opposed to other methods.<sup>21</sup> As Scheurer says, “. . . [Williams] never strays very far from the language of the late romantic composer. . .”<sup>22</sup>

Where Wagner was applying the idea of *Klangfarbenmelodie*, Williams was hearkening back to some of his predecessors (film composers Korngold and Steiner, Berlioz, Wagner, etc.), not unlike how neo-classicism combines some more recent musical developments with the definitive style of the classical period. They have both created lovely leitmotivic melodies that float above a rich and colorful *Klangfarbenmelodie*-like harmonies that best suit the needs of the music, the plot, and the emotional content. For example, the opening incidental music in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*—the use of plucking in the strings in chords that were not necessarily tonal, but not precisely atonal, either. As Indiana Jones gets into more and more trouble, his adventure theme finally announces itself over the plucked chords as he swings on a vine into the river where his plane floats. The true differences between Williams’ and Wagner’s harmonic concepts lie in how they achieved this happy marriage between melody and harmony with their respective genres of opera and film. Wagner mostly kept specifically to his *Klangfarbenmelodie*, where Williams was able to simplify that and then step away from it, towards other harmonic styles, including more firm tonality and the juxtaposing atonality. In the end, their methods

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<sup>19</sup> Williams, “The Music of Indiana Jones Featurette.”

<sup>20</sup> Bice, Brian, “*Klangfarbenmelodie*,” *New Music Forum*, [http://newmusicforum.com/?page\\_id=363](http://newmusicforum.com/?page_id=363) (accessed Dec 2012).

<sup>21</sup> Paulus, “Williams Versus Wagner or an Attempt at Linking Musical Epics,” 177.

<sup>22</sup> Scheurer, Timothy E., “John Williams and Film Music Since 1971,” *Popular Music and Society* 21, no. 1 (Spring, 1997), <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1338691?accountid=14971> (accessed December 12, 2012): 64.

came together by a simple notion—a love for and a belief in the necessity of a large symphonic orchestra as the vehicle for their music.

Wagner demanded a symphonic orchestra of ninety-one musicians, not including the countless percussionists needed to make his demands. To record the score of *Star Wars*, the London Symphony Orchestra used eighty-seven pieces. While it did not include Wagnerian tubas and the like, it was, for the time, still a notably large orchestra for film. It is noted in many sources that where Wagner added his Nibelung tuba, Williams similarly used many lesser-known instruments to create certain effects, including synthesizer, kazoo, children's piano, tuned bells and various other peculiar percussion instruments. This is very evident in the famous "cantina" scene. Per Williams, George Lucas gave him the cut of the scene with the instructions, "What if these little creatures on this planet way out someplace, came upon a rock and they lifted up the rock and underneath was sheet music from Benny Goodman's great swing band of the 1930s on planet Earth?"<sup>23</sup> Williams then took that idea and went with it, writing the "... silliest little series of old-time swing band licks, kind of a little off and not quite matching," using steel drums, kazoo, and various small reed instruments.<sup>24</sup>

According to Paulus, Wagner and Williams are equally enthusiastic about the symphonic orchestra, stating, "For Wagner the orchestra was so important that in *Opera and Drama* he wrote: 'anyone who separates the harmony from the instrumentation when talking about my music is doing me as great an injustice. . . ' while John Williams in a similar spirit was to say that 'symphony orchestra itself is one of the greatest inventions of our artistic culture.'" <sup>25</sup>

Many in Hollywood believed that with Herrmann had died the great symphonic tradition of film score (most prominent in the 1930s); they now all seem to agree that Williams was one of the first to bring that back. On the score, Scheurer comments that, "... it really is a throwback to the grand style of film music composition of the 1930s à la Steiner and Korngold. The success of the soundtrack album was doubly striking because it was a two-record set—there was a lot of music."<sup>26</sup> *Star Wars* itself is a massive undertaking, and given the time it was filmed and the lack of modern technology that would ease the making of it, it is truly a work of art. John Williams stated in an interview, "The score [of *Raiders*] is probably very close to being two hours. The orchestra is playing pretty much all the time, which is wonderful for the music, to have an opportunity where a film will hold that much music, not drown in the process."<sup>27</sup> The magic of *Star Wars* is that it hasn't drowned, not at all. Similarly, Wagner's operatic acts, "... are the longest uninterrupted stretches of great music in existence."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Byrd, "The Star Wars Interview," 21.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Paulus, "Williams Versus Wagner or an Attempt at Linking Musical Epics," 178.

<sup>26</sup> Scheurer, "John Williams and Film Music Since 1971," 62.

<sup>27</sup> Williams, "The Music of Indiana Jones Featurette."

<sup>28</sup> Magee, Bryan, *Aspects of Wagner*, (New York : Oxford University Press, 1988): 60.

The music from *Star Wars* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* is a significant part of a larger work—the films as a whole are much like Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk* theory. Magee states that, “To say that opera should be a synthesis of the arts to which each art makes an important contribution is not the same as saying that the synthesis should or even can be one in which all the arts are of equal importance.”<sup>29</sup> This is a valid point, but *Star Wars* and even *Raiders of the Lost Ark* give it a run for its money. *Star Wars* is commonly referred to as a “space opera,” and it is—not just the music, but the acting, story, special effects, lighting, and various other aspects that truly combine to create a massive overall experience that is very nearly a *Gesamtkunstwerk*. While discussing the music and how it fits into *Raiders*, Williams states that, “. . . both of those gentlemen [George Lucas and Steven Spielberg], they are interested in music and use it in a very theatrical way that gives the music an opportunity to project itself and gives me an opportunity to write in the theatrical way that wouldn’t be possible in all kind of films.”<sup>30</sup> If the directors, technicians, actors, musicians, composer, and everyone else involved come together in a film and the right opportunities are offered, the film can go beyond the typical movie into the realm of *Gesamtkunstwerk*—the world of true and all encompassing art, or as Wagner called it, “The Artwork of the Future.”<sup>31</sup> *Gesamtkunstwerk* is by no means a small feat, and is not a simple matter to attempt to create—the composer Gottfried Huppertz asked his director, “. . . to follow his tempo instructions and the sequence of on-screen events with special attention ‘so that film and music . . . will merge into a *Gesamtkunstwerk*.”<sup>32</sup> *Star Wars* was no small feat, and could easily be considered a *Gesamtkunstwerk* simply based on the number of Academy Awards it was nominated for or won—in 1977, it was nominated for ‘Best Actor in a Supporting Role,’ ‘Best Directing,’ ‘Best Picture,’ and ‘Best Writing (Screenplay Written Directly for the Screen—based on factual material or on story material not previously published or produced),’ and it won Oscars in ‘Best Art Direction,’ ‘Best Costume Design,’ ‘Best Film Editing,’ ‘Best Original Score,’ ‘Best Sound,’ ‘and Best Visual Effects.’ Each category of the Oscars is really an art of its own right. To garner this many nominations and awards speaks to the fact that every aspect of the film was exquisitely done and the world has responded with overwhelming positivity for the movie and those that followed it, even more than thirty years later. Williams points out that, “[*Star Wars*] can make you believe in miracles in any collaborative art form . . . when all these aspects come together to form a humming engine that works and the audience is there for it and they’re ready for it

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<sup>29</sup> Magee, *Aspects of Wagner*, 75.

<sup>30</sup> Williams, “The Music of Indiana Jones Featurette.”

<sup>31</sup> Tambling, Jeremy, “The Power of Emotion: Wagner and Film,” in *Wagner and Cinema*, edited by Sander L. Gilman and Jeongwon Joe (Bloomington, IN : Indiana University Press, 2010): 276.

<sup>32</sup> Mueller, Adeline, “Listening for Wagner in Fritz Lang’s *Die Nibelungen*,” in *Wagner and Cinema*, edited by Sander L. Gilman and Jeongwon Joe (Bloomington, IN : Indiana University Press, 2010): 85.



and willing to embrace it.”<sup>33</sup> This kind of longevity and artistic achievement is embodied within the definition of *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

Even more incredible is that the success was almost (but not quite) repeated in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, which was nominated for nine separate Oscars and won five of those. There are three specific people that both of these films have in common—Harrison Ford as Han Solo and Indiana Jones, John Williams composing the music, and George Lucas as director or producer. With Harrison Ford doing his own craft (acting), and since Lucas fills two different roles, it can only be assumed that one of the main reasons that these two films were and continue to be well-received and popular is at least in part because of the music. The score to *Star Wars* was so popular that, “In 1977 the score’s influence was probably best measured by the numerous cover versions of the theme that rapidly appeared. . . the Meco version of the *Star Wars* theme reached number one in the US music charts in October 1977 and remained there for two weeks.”<sup>34</sup>

John Williams commented on the success of many of his film scores and their near constant performance by professional orchestras—“The fact that the music, that I can still play it in concerts and people still will do that from time to time is enormously gratifying to me that people remember it on its musical legs so to speak . . .”<sup>35</sup> The praise for these two works abounds, with nearly every source pointing out the “*Star Wars* phenomenon.” Williams’ explanation for this is very clear, stating, “. . . they reached across cultural bounds and beyond language into some kind of mythic, shared remembered past, from the deep past of our collective unconscious. . .”<sup>36</sup> Lucas Kendall wrote an entire essay on the topic, stating that it gives the audience, “. . . two hours of pure fun, free from earthly concerns,” and the blatant good versus evil dichotomy, as well as, “. . . its perfect mix of something old and something new. For a story that deliberately takes place ‘a long time ago in a galaxy far, far, away,’ the *Trilogy* is loaded with images and story points drawn from the here and now,” that is not unlike a fairy tale with themes and lessons meant for all time.<sup>37</sup> It is timeless, and Kendall believes the music is a major contributing factor in that, commenting, “The through-composed nature of John Williams’ music has contributed to the *Trilogy*’s longevity. Even when the films were brand-new, they felt like they had existed forever, just waiting to be watched, relaying events in the past tense.”<sup>38</sup>

Scheurer believes that, “Williams brings to this film [*Star Wars*] and the others he scored in the series an added dimension: his music confirms the mythology that films should be bigger than life.”<sup>39</sup> So it’s no surprise that Scheurer also expounds on the influence Williams has had on the film industry, citing

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<sup>33</sup> Byrd, “The *Star Wars* Interview,” 19.

<sup>34</sup> Malone, Chris, “Recording the *Star Wars* Saga,” *Malone Digital* (March 2012), <http://www.malonedigital.com/starwars.pdf> (accessed Nov. 2012): 3.

<sup>35</sup> Williams, John, “The Music of Indiana Jones Featurette.”

<sup>36</sup> Byrd, “The *Star Wars* Interview,” 18.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>39</sup> Scheurer, “John Williams and Film Music Since 1971,” 64.

composers such as Jerry Goldsmith, Danny Elfman, James Newton Howard, James Horner, and Bruce Broughton—truly, a vast majority of the biggest names in recent film music history.<sup>40</sup> John Williams is truly making music history here, and as Scheurer notes, “His scores speak to the power and ability of film to enlarge our vision of life, to take us places we have never been, to feel things that maybe we think we should not feel or that are not fashionable any more and to dream things that some say cannot or should not be dreamed.”<sup>41</sup> Even better than this is the idea that, “[Williams’] predecessors Erich Korngold and Herrmann argued that film music helped keep classical alive, and he is convinced this phenomenon is now truer than ever.”<sup>42</sup> Could film music be the new frontier for classical music? With *Star Wars* being one of the most recognized film score by non-musicians and musicians alike, it’s possible. Even Spielberg recognizes Williams’ massive contribution to the repertoire, commenting that, “. . . I have to say, without question, John Williams has been the single most significant contributor to my success as a filmmaker.”<sup>43</sup> Williams is overcoming a stigma that film music is not “real classical” music, starting with this thought on his 2004 induction into the Kennedy Center Honors, “. . . he is pleased that the country may be at last recognizing the genuine importance and impact that movie music composers have had on 20<sup>th</sup> century American culture. Arguably, they created—and continue to develop—a significant new musical art form even as traditional composers of serious music began their long descent into postmodernist banality and atonality.”<sup>44</sup> Williams has, like many of his idols (Haydn, Stravinsky, Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Bartók, Duke Ellington, and Billy Strayhorn) made his place in history with his own idiom, and left a path for future composers to follow.<sup>45</sup>

With the world becoming a digital place, films such as *Star Wars* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* are gems of an age that is quickly becoming history. The reality is that John Williams has used an approach to film music that involves countless styles from the past and brought them together into a neo-classical, neo-romantic, often tonal, sometimes atonal style that elaborates and beautifully simplifies some of Wagner’s greatest ideas and concepts. He made the leitmotiv idea easier to grasp by the average listener in countless films; he harmonized those lines in ways that created *Klangfarbenmelodie* when called for and others that perfectly juxtaposed and contrasted it. Essentially, he told the stories through sound, and set it to the films in a way that walks the fine line between too little music and too

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Scheurer, “John Williams and Film Music Since 1971,” 68.

<sup>42</sup> Sullivan, Jack, “Conversations with John Williams,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 53, no. 19 (Jan. 12, 2007), <http://chronicle.com/navigator-wcupa.passhe.edu/article/Conversations-With-John/4906/> (accessed Dec. 2012).

<sup>43</sup> Lunden, “John Williams’ Inevitable Themes.”

<sup>44</sup> Ponick, T. L., “John Williams,” *The Washington Times* (Dec. 3, 2004), [http://www.lexisnexis.com/navigator-wcupa.passhe.edu/hottopics/lnacademic/?verb=sr&csi=8176&sr=HLEAD\(JOHN+WILLIAMS\)+and+date+is+December+3%2C+2004](http://www.lexisnexis.com/navigator-wcupa.passhe.edu/hottopics/lnacademic/?verb=sr&csi=8176&sr=HLEAD(JOHN+WILLIAMS)+and+date+is+December+3%2C+2004) (accessed Dec. 2012).

<sup>45</sup> Sullivan, “Conversations with John Williams.”

much. Drawing on Wagner's ideas was inevitable, because "If you're an artist, it's hard to avoid Wagner's latent presence."<sup>46</sup> Further, "'Just as Wagner fitted his music to the emotions, expressed by words in his operas, so in the course of time, no doubt, the same thing will be done with regard to the moving pictures.'"<sup>47</sup>

Williams renewed the tradition of using a symphonic orchestra as the ensemble of choice to perform his music, leading to a renaissance of sorts in film music. He made good use of the setting, adding instruments as he saw fit and orchestrating with the idea of *Klangfarbenmelodie* to get the appropriate tone colors he sought. The work he did with the symphonic orchestra was a significant part of the *Gesamtkunstwerke* his music is a part of. Instead of overwhelming the films, his music accompanied them and drove them close enough to the edge to saturate the films but not drown them.

The popularity of Williams' work is phenomenal, even among non-musicians. It is on practically every list of scores to be heard and is programmed often by professional ensembles all over the world. While popularity during his lifetime is not necessarily a marker that a composer will make history, the compositional style and pulling together of historically classical elements into a genre that is growing in popularity has singled Williams out and is perhaps the best indicator that he will be a part of music history books in the near future and beyond.

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<sup>46</sup> Joe, Jeongwon. "Introduction." *Wagner and Cinema*, edited by Sander L. Gilman and Jeongwon Joe (Bloomington, IN : Indiana University Press, 2010): 1.

<sup>47</sup> Buhler, James, "Wagnerian Motives: Narrative Integration and the Development of Silent Film Accompaniment, 1908-1913," *Wagner and Cinema*, edited by Sander L. Gilman and Jeongwon Joe (Bloomington, IN : Indiana University Press, 2010): 27.

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