

John Williams: Scoring and Interpreting Emotions in Film Music

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Abstract

This research paper examines how John Williams's film scores convey an emotional narrative to the audience. First, the literature review will discuss pertinent theories on film music and emotions informing the current research. The paper then establishes Williams's composing style, and centers on his connection to the classical symphonic composers and to the film music of the Golden Age of Hollywood. The research then analyzes how John Williams's music influences emotions in prominent scenes from several of his films including *Jurassic Park*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and *The Empire Strikes Back*. Finally, the paper concludes with a discussion concerning how Williams's film scores provide a lasting emotional influence on the audiences of these films.

John Williams: Scoring and Interpreting Emotions in Film Music

One of the primary uses of music by composers is to serve as narratives for stories. This concept is seen in the instrumental music of the late Classic and Romantic periods. An early example of this is in Ludwig van Beethoven's Third Symphony from 1803, where he uses musical ideas to represent narratives within the composition. The idea of music created expressly for telling stories was further developed in the Romantic period with Hector Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* and was solidified and brought to its highest expressive power under Wagner. In the twentieth century, the newly created realm of cinema aimed to meet the same goals of emotional power as music. With the advent of sound films, the connection between the two disciplines became even more closely related. Musicians began to compose exclusively for films and incorporated classical techniques to express the emotions revealed in the scenes and characters in the film.

One of the most prolific film composers to draw heavily on the styles of these musicians is John Williams, who uses compositional techniques found throughout the Classical and Romantic periods. Williams's music helps to elucidate the emotions present in each scene that his music accompanies by providing musical cues that inform the listener of the intended dramatic content of the scene. However, the music goes beyond simply representing the drama onscreen. It becomes an integral part of the storytelling process. Therefore, it is paramount to study Williams's music in connection with the audience's perception of the emotions accompanying the story in the film. This thesis will examine several compositional techniques that John Williams employs from classical music and the Golden Age of Hollywood, analyze scenes from select films scored by Williams to discover how he musically conveys emotions to the viewer, and discuss how this music elicits an emotional response from the audience.

Literature Review

There are several research studies that address the relationship between the music and action in a film and the audience's emotional response evoked by the music. In a 1980 study, Claudia Gorbman advocates that film music must be analyzed differently because it contributes to the larger story told in the film, writing that "to judge film music as we judge "pure" music is to ignore its status as a part of the collaboration that is the film. Ultimately it is the narrative context...that determine the effectiveness of film music."¹ In addition to Gorbman's research, other scholars have commented on audience perception of the emotions associated with film scores. Patrik Juslin and Daniel Västfjäll, in a larger study on how music creates and influences emotions, note that visuals contain a strong mental connection to emotions and that this connection or stimulus increases with the aid of music.² They also write that "the listener is very much able to influence the emotions induced by the music. Although images might come into the mind unbidden, in general a listener may conjure up, manipulate, and dismiss images at will."³ This concept is helpful when analyzing how audiences have a continued emotional connection with film music even when heard separate from the visuals.

In a more targeted 2011 study, Berthold Hoeckner, Emma W. Wyatt, Jean Decety, and Howard Nusbaum discussed that film music does affect the audience's interpretation of a character. Additionally, the authors' discovered that by changing the music that accompanied the

¹Claudia Gorbman, "Narrative Film Music," *Yale French Studies*, no. 60 (1980): 181, doi:10.2307/2930011.

²Patrik N. Juslin and Daniel Västfjäll, "Emotional Responses to Music: The Need to Understand Underlying Mechanisms," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 31, no. 5 (October 2008): 567, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Fmusical-emotions-context-narrative-film%2Fdocview%2F212200012%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085>.

³Ibid.

same segment of film, the viewer's reactions to the characters were also altered.⁴ Siu-Lan Tan, Matthew Spackman, and Matthew Bezdek also conducted a study to determine how music influences an audience before and after the character associated with the music arrives onscreen. Their research concluded that "emotions were generally perceived to be more intense when the music was presented before the scene rather than after.... Pre-scene music can also affect viewer's interpretations of the internal states of film characters during more reflective moments in a film."⁵ Both of the above studies indicate that music directly affects the emotional relationship between the viewer and the characters and stories depicted in a film.

Research

One of the most appealing aspects of John Williams's film scores is his connection to the classical symphonic style. While film composers in the second half of the twentieth century experimented with new composing styles and techniques, Williams balances new ideas with the style and sound of past composers. While Williams's compositional style is influenced by Romantic composers, such as Richard Wagner, he also looks to Classical composers for inspiration, including Joseph Haydn.⁶ Williams's appreciation for Haydn and his contemporaries W. A. Mozart and Ludwig van Beethoven can be seen in his use of two classical compositional

⁴Berthold Hoeckner, Emma W. Wyatt, Jean Decety, and Howard Nusbaum, "Film Music Influences How Viewers Relate to Movie Characters," *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts* 5, no. 2 (May 2011): 150, <https://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=61166854&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

⁵Siu-Lan Tan, Matthew P. Spackman, and Matthew A. Bezdek, "Viewers' Interpretations of Film Characters' Emotions: Effects of Presenting Film Music Before or After a Character Is Shown," *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 25, no. 2 (December 2007): 146, doi:10.1525/mp.2007.25.2.135.

⁶Jack Sullivan, "Conversations with John Williams," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 53, no. 19 (January 2007): B13, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Ftrade-journals%2Fconversations-with-john-williams%2Fdocview%2F214649715%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085>.

techniques. One such technique is the musical sentence, a method of composing musical themes that follows the structure, $n + n + 2n$. Williams uses this method in his construction of the Main Theme from *Superman*; the first portion of the theme contains two measures, which are then repeated, before being thematically developed into a segment that lasts four measures.⁷ While the *Superman* theme is not inherently a part of the classical genre, Williams pays homage to the classical style through structure. Another classical structural technique that he uses is a common phrase model, the period, which is one of the fundamental methods for grouping musical ideas into coherent thoughts. Konstantinos Zacharopoulos notes that this how the “Remembrances Theme” from *Schindler’s List* (Figure 1) is composed: “the antecedent begins with a lyric two-measure basic idea, followed by a contrasting idea, and closes with a half cadence; while the consequent repeats the initial idea and ends with a new contrasting idea with an imperfect authentic cadence.”⁸ Both the sentence and the period provide an orderly structure for the audience.



Figure 1. *Schindler’s List* “Remembrances Theme”

⁷Konstantinos Zacharopoulos, “Musical Syntax in John Williams’s Film Music Themes,” in *Contemporary Film Music: Investigating Cinema Narratives and Composition*, ed. Lindsey Coleman and Joakim Tillman (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 239-240, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1057/978-1-137-57375-9>.

⁸Ibid, 241-242.

The principal way that Williams maintains his connection to these composers is through his use of leitmotifs, or musical cues that become associated with characters or objects and function as musical identifiers. Leitmotifs were originally associated with opera and were used and developed by Richard Wagner. Wagner's compositional approach fully integrated music and drama in an idea which he called *Gesamkunstwerk*. Matthew Bribitzer-Stull credits this concept for providing film scorers the ideas of "musical coherence, history, dramatic emotionality, myth, and ineffability – that elusive *mélange* film-makers so desperately sought to capture.... Its ability to unite these things made it invaluable as a tool for reinforcing narrative across disjunct scenic cuts in space and time."⁹ In Williams's music, leitmotifs carry the same purpose as Wagner's, to introduce musical cues for characters and reuse the cues at specific moments throughout the film. One prominent example of leitmotifs in his music can be found in George Lucas's *Star Wars* trilogies. Roger Hickman compares *Star Wars* to Wagner's operas, writing that "For *Star Wars*, the first in a trilogy of films, Williams increased the number of themes, and he reused many of them in the subsequent films, just as Richard Wagner had done in his monumental *Der Ring des Nibelungen*."¹⁰ The music for *Star Wars* provides a unique opportunity for characters and their musical themes to be adapted over several stories that contain overarching plots in much the same way that Wagner's *Ring Cycle* follows a cast of characters. Like many operas, Williams

⁹Matthew Bribitzer-Stull, "The Modern-Day Leitmotif: Associative Themes in Contemporary Film Music," in *Understanding the Leitmotif: From Wagner to Hollywood Film Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 267, <https://www-cambridge-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/core/books/understanding-the-leitmotif/modernday-leitmotif-associative-themes-in-contemporary-film-music/D91B16832D766C060E0188E6E2B31ECE#>.

¹⁰Roger Hickman, *Reel Music: Exploring 100 Years of Film Music* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2006), 350.

uses his leitmotifs to represent the individual journeys of the characters, with each character's theme developing over time.

Hickman notes that in the original *Star Wars*, Princess Leia is given her own leitmotif:

The gentle, feminine quality of Leia's theme provides an effective contrast to the other melodies and is certainly appropriate when Luke is first attracted to her.... In *The Empire Strikes Back*, Leia, for the most part, loses her solo theme but gains a love theme that she shares with Han Solo.¹¹

This idea of leitmotifs representing change is further confirmed by Peter Larsen, who writes that "it is usually claimed that each new marking of the leitmotif will articulate and consolidate meanings that have been established earlier, but that the motif will furthermore accumulate new meanings from the new contexts."¹² Another example of Williams's use of leitmotifs can be found in the main theme for Steven Spielberg's *E. T. the Extraterrestrial*. The film contains several leitmotifs, including the instantly recognizable main theme (Figure 2). By reusing this theme to fit the necessary drama throughout the film, Williams creates an emotional and musical climax at the end of the film.¹³



Figure 2. E. T. Leitmotif

¹¹Hickman, *Reel Music*, 350.

¹²Peter Larsen, *Film Music* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2007), 214.

¹³Hickman, *Reel Music*, 358.

As E. T. and Elliot escape from the F. B. I. agents near the end of the film, E. T.'s leitmotif is interspersed between scales and repeated notes in the strings and brass countermelodies building to a tension-filled apex that resolves into the soaring melody of the "E. T. Theme." The theme is again used at the very end of the film when E. T. is reunited with his kind. The leitmotif takes on a triumphant form played in the high register of the strings accompanied by horns and woodwinds that provides a sense of finality to both the music and the story. Williams's use of leitmotifs to tell the emotional story of the characters achieves the necessary emotional effect wanted by the filmmaker.

Williams also continues the traditions of composers from the Golden Age of Hollywood, who were known for their lush scores. These composers, including Max Steiner, Ennio Morricone, Henry Mancini, and Elmer Bernstein, followed the more traditional theory of film composition, which views both music and film as complementary parts that are essential to conveying the meaning of the film.¹⁴ These two areas are so dependent upon the other that if the two do not blend well the entirety of the film suffers.¹⁵ Reflecting this idea, film scores from the Golden Age were closely tied to the narrative and visuals of the film. As the twentieth century progressed, scores written in the style of these composers declined, with contemporary sounds becoming favored by film score composers. These contemporary sounds included jazz bands and chamber ensembles instead of large orchestras and the utilization of pop and jazz styles and even avant-garde influences, such as atonalism, instead of symphonic scores.¹⁶ This modern approach

¹⁴Kathryn Kalinak, *Settling the Score: Music and the Classical Hollywood Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 29-30, muse. Jhu.edu/book/8442.

¹⁵Ibid, 30-31.

¹⁶Emilio Audissino, *John Williams's Film Music: Jaws, Star Wars, Raiders of the Lost Ark, and the Return of the Classical Hollywood Style* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), 61.

to film scoring foundationally changed the way that music influenced the narrative aspects of film. Emilio Audissino notes that “instead of a continuous stream of music based on interwoven leitmotifs, the score was structured through a series of isolated set pieces closed in themselves.”¹⁷ By eliminating the narrative cohesion and dramatic power of leitmotifs, film scores from the mid-1960s and early 1970s lack the storytelling focus of Williams’s works. Although Williams’s music is informed by the classical style, his music adapts the classical approach to fit more modern sensibilities. Audissino notes that Williams’s career began to flourish during the New Hollywood period of film scoring, a time during the 1970s in which filmmakers and composers consciously sought to recapture and emulate the Old Hollywood films and scores.¹⁸ Audissino considers Williams’s music to be neoclassic in style.¹⁹ Like the neoclassic composers of twentieth-century art music who took Baroque, Classic, and Romantic forms and fused them with twentieth-century tonality and harmony, Williams adapts older techniques from early Hollywood composers and combines them with newer music theory. While the overall style of the music is similar to classic Hollywood scores such as *The Magnificent Seven* or *King Kong*, Williams’s music is infused with polytonality, atonality, jazz, pandiatonicism, and quartal harmonies.²⁰ This synthesized approach to composition can be found in one of his earlier scores for Steven Spielberg’s *Jaws*. Timothy Scheurer notes that while the score was heavily influenced by both the atonal music of Arnold Schoenberg and the post-

¹⁷Audissino, *John Williams’s Film Music*, 59.

¹⁸Ibid, 104.

¹⁹Ibid, 107.

²⁰Ibid, 108, 111, 123.

romantic music of Claude Debussy and Igor Stravinsky, Williams's music remains its own appealing style while reflecting the rich ideas of more modern classical composers.²¹ The modern aspects of Williams's compositional approach allow his music to appear fresh and unique while maintaining a universal appeal.

Despite Williams's strong reliance on the classical tradition and his preference for using leitmotifs as a narrative tool, his neoclassic approach to composition also changed through time. Technological advances in both filmmaking and stereo technology resulted in changes to film music's compositional process. Williams's music is filled with expressive solo lines and parts for every instrument in the orchestra. However, Williams has had to adapt his style to fit newer methods of mixing music. His later works, notably the *Star Wars* prequels, featured tracks that were less dense to accommodate for compression in the mix.²² Because stereo mixes used fewer channels to record and store each part of the score, the thick textures found in older film music were too dense to provide a quality audio track. Additionally, Williams adapted his composing techniques to fit with the newer ways that filmmakers approached movies. Referencing the *Star Wars* prequels, Audissino notes that the scores feature fewer leitmotifs than the previous films and are written to exist in more self-contained segments than as a larger narrative. This change in compositional style stems from the advanced editing used on films during this time, which required greater flexibility in how the score fit together.²³ Constructing the film's music into self-

²¹Timothy Scheurer, "John Williams and Film Music Since 1971," *Popular Music and Society*, 22, no. 1 (1997), 61, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/208071271/fulltextPDF/8464AB78EC4142A9PQ/34?accountid=12085>.

²²Emilio Audissino, "John Williams and Contemporary Film Music," in *Contemporary Film Music: Investigating Cinema Narratives and Composition*, ed. Lindsey Coleman and Joakim Tillman (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 227-229, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1057/978-1-137-57375-9>.

²³Ibid, 228-229.

contained units allowed the film editors to change the order of and cut scenes without having to revise or rewrite the film score. While saving time and money in the production of the film, this approach to film scoring limited the narrative cohesion found in many of Williams's earlier scores. Although changes in the filmmaking industry necessitated that Williams rely less on his preferred methods of composing, his style is still firmly entrenched in the neoclassical idioms prevalent in his early works.

Analysis

John Williams uses his scores to augment and deepen the emotions and stories sought by the filmmakers. Six scenes from five of his most prominent scores: *Jurassic Park*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Home Alone*, *Schindler's List*, and *The Empire Strikes Back* will be analyzed from both musical and cinematic perspectives. The first scene for analysis is the reveal of the Jurassic Park dinosaurs from *Jurassic Park* (1993). In this scene, John Hammond reveals to Dr. Ellie Sattler and Dr. Alan Grant the Brachiosaurus created through his genetic cloning research. As the scene starts, the music contains low strings and horns that build tension through sustained tones and unresolved harmonies as the camera focuses on Dr. Grant's incredulous face looking offscreen. This initial tension is punctuated by the offscreen bellow of a dinosaur as the camera pans to the colossal creature. The music immediately switches tones, with a full string section playing the *Jurassic Park* theme (Figure 3) in harmony.



Figure 3. "Jurassic Park Theme" First Statement

The arch of the melody climbs higher with each repeat of the musical theme (Figure 4), presenting a contrast to the low sustained tones at the beginning of the scene. Williams keeps the music understated through sparse texture and slow-moving harmonies as each of Hammond's guests marvel at the seemingly impossible creature before them. As Hammond's visitors learn more about his creation, including the existence of a cloned T-Rex, the music continues to grow dynamically, incorporating added instrumentation and harmonic and melodic flourishes to represent the majesty of the dinosaurs.



Figure 4. "Jurassic Park Theme" Altered Melody Near Climax

The music rises to a climax with the melody achieving its highest peak and the harmonic progression reaching a final resolution as the camera pans to the herd of Brachiosauruses wandering across the plain. Williams's approach to the main theme highlights the majesty of seeing the cloned dinosaurs. The awe experienced by the characters at the beginning of the movie is later replaced by terror after the T-Rex and Velociraptors escape from their habitat due to a power failure, leaving the characters at the mercy of the dinosaurs. For now, the characters and the audience can immerse themselves in the sheer delight of seeing creatures that have been dead for thousands of years brought to life. Williams's score is not filled with complicated rhythms or chord progressions. Instead, it is almost reverent in its simplicity, containing one melody supported by a relatively simple harmonic structure with little variation. Despite the theme being an entirely new creation, John Williams is still influenced by the past, specifically

the works of Edward Elgar, Max Steiner, and Igor Stravinsky for the leitmotifs for the Brachiosaurus, Velociraptors, and T-Rex, respectively.²⁴

The 1981 Steven Spielberg film *Raiders of the Lost Ark* spawned the successful Indiana Jones franchise and features a memorable score. The “Raider’s March” is composed in standard march form consisting of two strains and a trio. While the first portion of the song utilizes a march feel and dotted rhythms that illustrate the lively personality and life of Indiana Jones, the trio associated with Jones’s love interest Marion is softer and more romantic with straighter rhythms and a flowing melody. Harrison Ford, the actor who portrays Indiana Jones, noted that Marion’s theme is less about representing Marion and more about telling the audience what she means to Jones. Ford notes that the theme:

Does not appear when he meets her in a bar, but when a car blows up and he thinks she is dead, encouraging the audience to be aware of the hero’s sense of loss—a great example of how Williams uses music to reinforce the emotional connection between the audience.²⁵

The piece serves a double emotional function by presenting a stirring opening melody representing the adventurous spirit and lifestyle of Jones, while also emulating the romance associated with the pulp adventure genre through “Marion’s Theme.” Williams’s ideas are further incorporated through the orchestration of the piece. The opening theme highlights the action nature of the movie through prominent and active horn lines with multiple layers of countermelodies and supporting harmonies. As a contrast, “Marion’s Theme” (Figure 5) is

²⁴Larry M. Timm, *The Soul of Cinema: An Appreciation of Film Music* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2003), 284-285.

²⁵Jennifer Nelson, *Saturday Night at the Movies* (London: Elliot and Thompson Limited, 2018), 201.

played almost exclusively by the string section, with a single melody line portrayed prominently by the violins.



Figure 5. “Marion’s Theme” Leitmotif

“The Raider’s Theme” is primarily constructed through leitmotifs, which are developed throughout the film. One prominent use of the first part of the theme is found in a chase scene halfway through the film. The Nazis have stolen the Ark of the Covenant. Anxious to catch up with the group and reclaim the Ark, Jones borrows a horse and sets off after the truck housing the artifact. The music fits the urgency of the scene, with the fanfare from the “Raider’s Theme” occurring as Jones races after the group. The theme occurs in multiple forms, containing both the original melody and a harmonically varied form of the melody. The theme is accompanied by countermelody flourishes in the brass. These countermelodies contain a darker minor tone than the harmonies found in Jones’s theme, highlighting the danger. He meets up with the escaping vehicles and proceeds to jump onto the moving truck. From this point the music uses variations of the main theme interspersed with harmonies and sustained tones in the strings and horns that punctuate the tension of the scene. A notable example of this feature is found when Jones drives the truck through several support beams at an archaeological site to fend off the Nazi soldiers. The horns perform quick musical interjections while the strings play arpeggiated passages; the harmonies outlining the figurations are diminished seventh chords. Furthermore, the strings play in the top of their register, creating an eerie quality within the passage that complements the

musical line. Musically and dramatically, the climax of the scene occurs when Jones is working his way underneath the truck after being thrown through the windshield. To highlight the intensity, Hickman notes that Williams’s score uses “action music with repeated chords. Unpredictable accents and fragments of March a are heard. A disjointed trumpet line joins the accompaniment to the March”²⁶ (Figure 6). Once Jones has climbed underneath the truck to surprise the driver and reclaim the Ark, Hickman writes that “the accompaniment rhythm and action music suggest danger. A darker version of March b is heard when he climbs back on the truck. The March accompaniment and then the phrase a return in a fuller statement with his victory”²⁷ (Figure 7).



Figure 6. “Raider’s March” a Leitmotif



Figure 7. “Raider’s March” b Leitmotif

Williams takes music that the audience is already familiar with and changes it into something with a darker edge by altering the melody to lack resolution and by adding tension through musical patterns and harmonies. He informs the audience of the high stakes associated

²⁶Hickman, *Reel Music*, 361.

²⁷Ibid.

with recovering the Ark by musically conveying this danger and tension. While it is highly unlikely that something bad would happen to Indiana Jones, the music suggests that the audience should be concerned about his well-being during moments of peril and have as much reason to celebrate as he does when he triumphs for the time being over his adversaries. This scene illustrates one of Williams's most prominent techniques in his compositional style, building upon current musical themes and leitmotifs and changing them tonally to reflect different dramatic moods through the film, giving the viewer a deeper connection to the onscreen action through the music.

Another example can be found in the "Star of Bethlehem Theme" from the 1990 movie *Home Alone*. This theme is found in various forms throughout the film. The song utilizes the Phrygian mode to imitate the modal sound found in many Christmas carols and sacred choral compositions. Additionally, the piece flows at a slow tempo that emphasizes the majesty of its subject matter. Williams uses instrumental versions of the piece throughout the film. It is prominently heard during Kevin's preparation for the Wet Bandits' attack on the house. This theme is interspersed among the other themes found throughout the film, highlighting the importance of Kevin's plan and bringing a climatic feel to this essential part of the film through intertwined melodies and thicker instrumentation. The strings are the driving force throughout the scene with active rhythms that support the underlying actions, while the woodwinds and bells play both melody and supporting figurations. The "Star of Bethlehem Theme" is played almost exclusively by the French horns during this scene, giving the theme prominence within the scene's score that separates it from the other musical themes. By adding in theme fragments already displayed throughout the film, Williams uses the music to immediately draw the audience into the preparations onscreen. The merging of almost all previously heard music from

the film complements the culmination of Kevin's encounter with the Wet Bandits. Although this scene does not have an emotional or action-oriented impact, it is important to the narrative, and Williams highlights this focus through the score's intensity.

While Williams is known for his more lighthearted or action-oriented films, he has done a substantial amount of work in the genre of drama. His collaboration with Steven Spielberg provided him the opportunity to work on Spielberg's 1993 film *Schindler's List*. The film focuses on the life of Oskar Schindler, a German responsible for saving the lives of many of his Jewish workers from the impending Holocaust. The gravity of the subject matter requires a similar seriousness in the music associated with the film. Williams's score is appropriate to the tone of the film, and Timm notes that "the way in which this score is so masterfully interwoven into the fabric of this film qualifies this score to be in the upper echelon of textbook examples of how a dramatic score is supposed to work..."²⁸ The main theme that Williams composed for the film is a beautiful piece of music that fully embodies the empathy and sadness associated with the story. One of the most powerful scenes occurs near the very end of the movie when Schindler is meeting one last time with the Jewish workers that he saved before they part ways to flee to safety. They present him with a ring and thank him for saving their lives. Schindler regrets not being able to free and save more of them, while the group assures them that he has done enough. Throughout the scene he becomes more overcome with emotion as he grapples with the gratitude of his friends while feeling seemingly undeserving, repeatedly crying that he "could have saved one more." After a tearful embrace, Schindler and his wife leave the workers to escape from the war. The main theme of the movie plays throughout the entire scene, providing a musical

²⁸Timm, *The Soul of Cinema*, 285.

underscore to the intense emotion felt by both Schindler and the Jews that he has come to protect. The principal instruments of the score are a solo violin and an English horn, which trade off the melody. The violin's line is mournful in tone, featuring scales and arpeggios that undulate between the instrument's high and low range (Figure 8). The melody is heavily rooted within the home key of D minor and utilizes leading tones and raised scale degrees that lack resolution. This lack of resolution is further felt through the ostinato construction of the melody.



subtract instruments and melodic activity in accordance with the actions shown onscreen. Timm expounds upon the construction of this theme, noting that Williams infuses the music with several conventions that add to its dramatic power, namely, “the prevailing minor mode, the occasional, augmented-second intervals, and the expressive use of the minor second create an overall unified mood.”²⁹ The simplicity of the music, while presenting an emotional story on its own, fully allows the onscreen drama to shine through, proving that film music is as powerful when understated as it is when in the foreground of the piece. Furthermore, he has devised the music in such a way that it seamlessly blends into the narrative, almost becoming invisible to the fully enraptured viewer.³⁰ Williams’s work on *Schindler’s List* accomplishes perhaps the truest meaning of film music; the story told both in the musical and onscreen narrative are combined so well that they become one.

The final analysis will focus on Williams’s music and leitmotif style from the original *Star Wars* trilogy. An example of this approach to film scoring can be found halfway through *The Empire Strikes Back*. The following scenes all present several leitmotifs that remind the listener of important ideas and plots in the film. As the first scene opens, Princess Leia and Han Solo are taking refuge from the Empire in what they believe to be a cave. The two begin to argue as Leia attempts to fix a lever on the *Millennium Falcon*. However, the argument soon turns to flirtation and finally ends with a kiss. While the dialogue begins with tension and Han and Leia’s ever-present disagreements, the music used by Williams immediately suggests otherwise. Like “Marion’s Theme” from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, the theme is orchestrated using mostly strings

²⁹Timm, *The Soul of Cinema*, 285.

³⁰Hickman, *Reel Music*, 427.

and woodwinds, again serving as a contrast to the primarily horn driven adventure themes found throughout the movie. Williams also adds a harp part to the score that creates a dreamlike feel, musically representing the emotions of being in love. The chord structure also highlights the flirtatious nature of their relationship with moments of tension and resolution within the progression.

In the current scene, “Han and Leia’s Theme” (Figure 10) is heard faintly in the background and grows ever more present as the argument evolves into a kiss, suggesting to the audience that the two are destined for each other. As Han and Leia attempt to remain hidden from the Empire, Luke Skywalker tries to convince Yoda to train him as a Jedi. While Yoda continues to deny Luke’s request, Obi Wan Kenobi’s voice is suddenly heard, explaining to Yoda that Luke is ready to begin Jedi training. Obi Wan’s speech is accompanied by the “Force Theme” (Figure 11) heard prominently in *A New Hope*, the first *Star Wars* movie. Obi Wan Kenobi does not physically exist anymore, so the music serves as a reminder for the noble ideas that he stood for as one of the last existing Jedis.



Figure 10. “Han and Leia’s Theme” Leitmotif



Figure 11. “Force Theme” Leitmotif

It also speaks to Luke’s own strong association with the Force and centers the viewer on the heart of Luke’s journey. In addition to the “Force Theme’s” prominence in this scene, Williams further parallels the literal dialogue onscreen with a musical dialogue by incorporating the leitmotifs found in Luke’s (Figure 12) and Yoda’s (Figure 13) individual themes into the score.³¹ These leitmotifs, especially that of Luke and the Force, serve as aural reminders to the audience of both Luke’s personal quest to become a Jedi and the overarching goal of the main characters to defeat Darth Vader and the Empire.

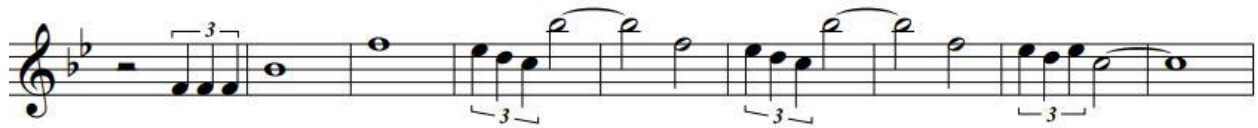


Figure 12. “Luke’s Theme” Leitmotif



Figure 13. “Yoda’s Theme” Leitmotif

These two scenes serve as examples of Williams’s implementation of leitmotifs into his themes for the *Star Wars* movies. “Han and Leia’s Theme” is incorporated as a symbol of their love, with the music’s poignant melody and chord progression serving as an aural reminder to the audience that the characters genuinely care about each other, even if they deny it. Luke’s story is shaped by his friendship with the late Obi Wan Kenobi. The “Force Theme” fulfills one of the primary purposes of the leitmotif, to recall important ideas central to the plot. In the Star

³¹Hickman, *Reel Music*, 354.

Wars universe, the Force is essential to not only Luke Skywalker's personal story but to the entire rebellion against the Empire. The *Star Wars* leitmotifs contain their own musical personalities that perfectly match the characters and story themes found in the films. Han and Leia's leitmotif is fully romantic in its melody and orchestration. The Force's leitmotif resembles a slow march and uses a dotted rhythm that moves at a stately tempo, suggesting nobility of purpose as well as a sense of longing through an upward reaching melody. The construction of this piece is innately tied to Luke and his desire to follow in Obi Wan Kenobi's footsteps as a Jedi knight. Additionally, Luke's leitmotif is found in the main *Star Wars* theme. The brass orchestration again serves to represent the action and military associations between the Rebels and the Empire. The theme's association to Luke Skywalker also speaks to his role as the catalyst and heart of the story. Yoda's leitmotif represents his wisdom through arpeggios and diatonic harmonies that lack tension. Through his masterful combinations of the individual leitmotifs and themes, Williams paints a musical narrative that further allows the viewer to be drawn into the overarching storylines across the saga.

Discussion

This discussion will demonstrate how John Williams's music makes a lasting emotional connection between the audience and the characters' stories. Music, especially instrumental music, can prompt a deeply emotional connection with the listener. With no lyrics to influence meaning, the listener provides his or her own meaning in addition to the composer's original purpose. While film music does have an inherent meaning associated with the visual story it accompanies, the viewer is able to make deeper, more personal connections with the emotions in the music.

Because Williams's film scores rely heavily on the classical tradition, the methods he uses to achieve these emotional effects are also rooted within this musical idiom. Although the average listener does not know the technicalities of why certain musical themes portray a given emotion, he or she does know how the music makes them feel. This concept can be traced back to the Baroque and Classical periods of music when composers believed that certain musical modes and scales would create certain affects in the listener.³² While this belief is outdated, the overall concept is still implemented into musical compositions. An example of this concept is the use of prominent intervals in Williams's music. For instance, the "Star Wars Main Theme" also known as "Luke's Theme" is built around the interval of a perfect fifth, a consonant interval often used to provide resolution to the tonic in music. This resolution provides a sense of determination within the opening notes of the theme. Additionally, the brass playing the melody provides a grand and commanding presence to the theme. By hearing this interval, the viewer immediately associates the "*Star Wars* Theme" with heroism and bravery. Certain chords also have an influence on the audience's emotions. Found prominently in both "Han and Leia's Theme" from *Star Wars* and in "Marion's Theme" from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, the half-diminished seventh chord is a staple of Williams's romantic themes.³³ Theoretically, the half-diminished seventh chord is structurally unstable, with a strong need to resolve. While not as dark sounding as the fully diminished seventh chord, the musical tension inherent in the chord compares to the romantic tension experienced by the characters. The chord evokes memories of a

³²J. Peter Burkholder, Donald Jay Grout, and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music* 10th ed., (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019), 286-287.

³³Tom Schneller, "Modal Interchange and Semantic Resonance in Themes by John Williams," *The Journal of Film Music* 6, no. 1 (2013): 64, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Fmodal-interchange-semantic-resonance-themes-john%2Fdocview%2F1661915640%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085>.

bygone era; Tom Schneller writes that the music provides “a touch of nostalgia in keeping with the retrospective aesthetic of the Star Wars and Indiana Jones series, which constantly evoke visual and narrative tropes from 1930s and '40s cinema.”³⁴ The long term impression the half-diminished seventh chord makes upon the listener’s mind, even in subsequent hearings just of the score itself, evokes the poignancy and love found in the relationships between the characters.

The emotional connection between the music and the audience can be attributed to psychological factors. These factors influence how music relates to and impacts the emotional state of the listener. In the study by Hoeckner, Wyatt, Decety, and Nusbaum, the researchers discovered that one of the causes of the emotional connection the audience feels with the characters is related to empathy.³⁵ The audience empathizes with the character because the music allows the viewer to see the character’s own emotions and thoughts, which then influences the viewer’s emotional state. An example of this is the scene from *Schindler’s List*: the wistful and melancholic music provides insight into Schindler’s own emotional journey and the plight of the Jewish workers, enabling the audience to empathize with the characters and share in their story. Furthermore, the emotions the viewer experiences do not necessarily correlate with emotions that the viewer would experience were he or she going through the same events as the character. Tuomas Eerola and Jonna K. Vuoskoski, mentioning studies by Petri Luukka and Marcel Zentner, remark that “musical versions of these emotions seem to have a different character. For example, sadness in music is not usually associated with the aversive aspects of the emotion such

³⁴Tom Schneller, “Modal Interchange and Semantic Resonance in Themes by John Williams,” 64.

³⁵Hoeckner, Wyatt, Decety, and Nusbaum, “Film Music Influences How Viewers Relate to Movie Characters,” 150.

as feeling gloomy, depressed, or unhappy.”³⁶ This aspect of the audience’s response to emotions in films reflects the classical idea that music and drama, whether independently or combined, allow the listener or viewer to vicariously experience a variety of emotions, ranging from joy to terror, from happiness to loss, without having to experience anything personally. Ben Winters further elaborates upon this idea by making a direct comparison between musical emotions and film emotions, noting that these emotions are not real much like the characters in the film. However, the audience can become so attached to the characters’ emotions, that they believe their own emotional responses to be real.³⁷ Williams and his filmmaker collaborators accomplish this idea through their work. Jedi and Rebel forces on other planets do not really exist, but the audience establishes an emotional connection to their struggles against the Empire. While the emotions may not stem from a personal experience, the music still enables the audience to relate to and empathize with the inhabitants of the stories they are watching.

In addition to establishing an empathetic connection, film music also functions as a marker of character. Berthold Hoeckner notes that the type of music used to represent each character directly influences whether the viewer perceives that character as likeable or not.³⁸ John Williams’s music utilizes this concept frequently to contrast the heroes and the villains of the stories as Williams once noted in an interview: “In the case of Darth Vader, brass suggests

³⁶Tuomas Eerola and Jonna K. Vuoskoski, “A Review of Music and Emotion Studies: Approaches, Emotion Models, and Stimuli,” *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 30, no. 3 (2013): 313, <https://doi.org/10.1525/mp.2012.30.3.307>.

³⁷Ben Winters, “Corporeality, Musical Heartbeats, and Cinematic Emotion,” *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 21-22, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Fcorporeality-musical-heartbeats-cinematic-emotion%2Fdocview%2F756588558%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085>.

³⁸Berthold Hoeckner, *Film, Music, Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 189, ProQuest Ebook Central.

itself because of his military bearing and his authority and his ominous look. That would translate into a strong melody that's military...that is...in a minor mode because he's threatening."³⁹ Darth Vader presents a direct contrast to Luke, whose theme Williams describes as "flourishes and upward reaching; idealistic and heroic, in a very different way than Darth Vader of course, and a very different tonality—a very uplifted kind of heraldic quality."⁴⁰ While these characters are not real, the music helps the audience to see them as real by establishing character traits that deepen the audience's relationship to them and their story. Jessica Green notes that music does more than denote whether a character is a hero or a villain. Film characters, much like real human beings, are extremely complex, and the music helps to bring to light their desires and motivations and the emotional impetus that drives them to achieve their goals.⁴¹ This concept relates directly to Williams's own belief that his music helps to reveal the characters' true hearts and morals. Additionally, Robert Ellis and Robert Simon have discovered that the success of a "film music's ability to evoke emotion is contingent upon its ability to bind with a visual narrative, and if the music were somehow prevented from associating with this narrative, the music may be seen as merely adjunctive."⁴² Williams's music is deeply connected to the stories the filmmakers are trying to tell, which allows the audience to become more

³⁹Craig L. Byrd, "Interview with John Williams (1997)," in *Celluloid Symphonies: Texts and Contexts in Film Music History*, ed. Julie Hubbert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 419, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pnb5m.55>.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Jessica Green, "Understanding the Score: Film Music Communicating to and Influencing the Audience," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 44, no. 4 (2010): 89, <https://doi.org/10.5406/jaesteduc.44.4.0081>.

⁴²Robert J. Ellis and Robert F. Simons, "The Impact of Music on Subjective and Physiological Indices of Emotion While Viewing Films," *Psychomusicology*, 19, no. 1 (Spring, 2005): 35, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Fimpact-music-on-subjective-physiological-indices%2Fdocview%2F200012899%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085>.

invested in the characters' plotlines and emotional arcs. Williams notes that one of the aims of his music is that it allows the audience to relate to and believe in the stories and characters that the filmmakers have created.⁴³ The successful integration of this idea contributes to the music's staying power. To the audiences and fans of the movies, the music represents not only the characters but also the viewers' own relationships with these stories.

Conclusion

John Williams's film music is worthy of study by both musicians and filmmakers, drawing upon both old and new styles and techniques to create masterful scores to complement the stories of some of Hollywood's most memorable films. Williams's scores serve to convey and strengthen the emotions of the characters which in turn provides the viewer with an emotional connection and experience. These emotions allow the audience to suspend their disbelief and to become fully invested in the filmmakers' stories. While Williams's music can certainly be examined in a technical light, it contains an emotional core that cannot be expressed through mere music theory analysis. It is the heart and thought behind the music that makes it truly special and unique. This is perhaps the reason listeners respond so strongly to the music. The scores truly showcase the heart of each film's characters and touches the viewer's own heart and emotions.

⁴³Byrd, "Interview with John Williams (1997)," 420.

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