

Music Appreciation



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John Williams: *America's Composer*

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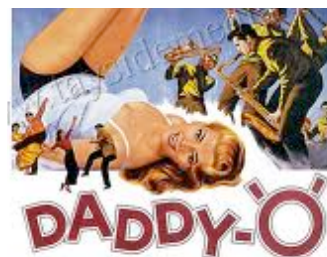


For nearly half a century his music has captivated the hearts of the young and old, but few know his name or the great number of his accomplishments.

John Williams, born 8 February 1932 in Long Island, New York, is most widely known as the guy who wrote the music in *Star Wars*; but John Williams' music has been filling our lives through more than just the *Star Wars* saga. From 1958, and continuing into recent years, Williams has written the music for over one hundred movies and TV shows, in addition to many other compositions. Though a large majority of his music was written for American films, it has found its way into many hearts around the world. While his name and face may not be widely known, his music is most certainly recognizable to a large majority. Because of that, the man behind the music of our hearts should be revealed to the unknowing admirers for who he is, John Williams, America's composer.

John Williams made his first contribution to

the film industry in 1958 when he composed the music for the movie *Daddy-O*. It could be said that the music was the saving grace of the film. As stated in the description of the film's music on johnwilliams.org, "the music is quite serviceable and just about the only competent contribution to this otherwise quickly forgettable effort." So it was with



a forgettable movie that John Williams began his career and went on to produce some of the most unforgettable music in American history.

A film greatly loved in the repertoire of American musicals, and rarely associated with John Williams, is the screen adaptation of *Fiddler on the Roof* (1971). Though not as popular as some of the other movies for which Williams composed, this movie was a milestone in his career for it won him his first Academy Award. Williams won his second Academy Award for the [suspenseful music](#) in the aquatic thriller about a killer shark, *Jaws* (1975). Since the special effects were nothing special, and the shark looked like a piece of rubber operated by a remote control,



it was truly the haunting music that created the suspense for which the movie is known. *Jaws* also rewarded Williams with his first Grammy award for Best Album of

Original Score and also his first Golden Globe award for Best Original Score.

Another movie for which he earned an Academy Award, a Grammy, and a Golden Globe was the heartwarming science fiction film *E.T. The Extraterrestrial* (1982), about a boy who befriended a benign extraterrestrial and helped him find his way back home. At



some time or another, most kids wonder about aliens and life in outer space; and with Elliot (the main character in *E.T.*), viewers get to embark on a journey

through a childhood fantasy. The [music](#) for *E.T.* perfectly coincides with the emotions of such a journey.

John Williams had a way with capturing the essence of a story and retelling it, not with words but with music. Along with the music already mentioned, such remarkable talent can also be heard



in the music written for the film *Superman* (1979), which gave Williams his seventh and eighth Grammy awards. The [main theme](#) for *Superman* fits perfectly with the

story about everyone's favorite superhero. By featuring the brass section in this score, Williams gave the music not only a powerful and majestic feel but also a sense of security and victory.

The music most widely associated with John Williams is perhaps the score he composed for the *Star Wars* saga (1977-2005). Not only did he write

the music for the original trilogy but he also teamed up with director George Lucas sixteen years later to compose for the prequel trilogy. Though there was a sixteen year gap between them, and despite



Williams not knowing in the '70s and '80s that he would later be composing for the first half of the story, the music in Episodes I-III flow marvelously into that of Episodes IV-VI. In a [1999 interview](#), John Williams stated "The challenge for me was to write music that was as effective as the first trilogy, but also that it would be wedded to the tapestry of the earlier films so that it would sound like a natural outgrowth." A perfect example of this can be heard in the way that [Anakin's theme](#), while youthful and innocent, reflects the darker future of Darth Vader and the [Imperial March](#). Referring to these pieces in the same 1999 interview, Williams made the comment "The music, like the boy, is going to turn into something darker and more complicated." It is this kind of musical brilliance that captivated his audiences. When asked in [1997](#) to explain the *Star Wars* phenomenon, Williams described it as being caused by the movies' unique ability to reach "across cultural bounds and beyond language into some kind of mythic, shared, remembered past -- from the deep past of our collective unconscious." Perhaps it is also because we would all like to believe that there is such a world in a galaxy far away. In these great movies for which John Williams has composed, the music calls to the suppressed imagination in each of us. When we want to believe in galaxies far away, superheroes, professors who travel the world in search of lost

treasure (*Indiana Jones* 1981), dinosaurs (*Jurassic Park* 1993), or Neverland (*Hook* 1991), John Williams' music takes us there. The 20th century certainly experienced an explosion with *Star Wars* enthusiasm, but the real phenomenon was the music of John Williams.

For a chronological filmography, click [here](#).

For a list of John Williams' awards, click [here](#).

To view an example of enthusiasm for John Williams' music and tribute to his career, click [here](#).



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