

FIEDLER SUCCESSOR

TUNEUP TIME FOR
POPS CONDUCTOR

By RICHARD DYER
From the Boston Globe

John Williams—composer of film scores for “The Empire Strikes Back,” “Star Wars,” “Superman” and “Close Encounters of the Third Kind,” as well as classical works—was to make his debut Tuesday night as the new conductor of the Boston Pops, succeeding the late Arthur Fiedler.

A week earlier, he came to lunch at the Boston Globe. Following are some of the questions and answers:

Question: Why would anyone give up everything you've given up to come to a town like Boston and a place like the Pops?

Answer: I don't feel I've given up anything; instead I have added something new and exciting to my life. I do plan to continue writing film music: Visibility in that area is important to me, and it could be important, in an oblique way, to the Pops. Of necessity I will have to do fewer films. But in the last 20 years I have done about 60 pictures, and it will feel good to take a breather from that. In any case, I am more a musician than a man of Hollywood and the attraction of this new position is the orchestra itself. After all, this is one of the great ensembles of the world, and any musician would find the opportunity to work with them every day irresistible.

Q: What sort of changes do you envision for the Pops?

A: Arthur Fiedler's tripartite program is a terrific format—the configuration of an opening section of older classical music, a middle section featuring some kind of concerto soloist and a final third of pop music. The most noticeable changes will be in the third part; we've got to try to update the Pops library, to add some new pieces. On our opening show we have a marvelous new bit that I'm already very proud of. Stephen Sondheim looms very large in the history of our theater in the last 10 years, but I was shocked to realize that none of his work, apart from an odd few arrangements of “Send In the Clowns” is available for orchestra. So we got Jonathan Tunick, who of the new generation of orchestrators seems to me the very best, to prepare a medley from “A Little Night Music.”

The first third of the program, too, will see some changes. In May we will be playing more than 60 numbers in the first part of the evening and, of them, approximately 35% are things the orchestra hasn't seen before, at least in this context. That's good, I think: It keeps the interest of the players up, piques the interest of the audience.

Q: Will you be composing for the Pops?

A: Of course. You know, the only time I ever actually spoke to Arthur Fiedler was when he rang me up last year and asked me to write a “brilliant 5-minute march” for his 50th anniversary concert. I had film commitments then, and I couldn't do it. But I want to do it now.

Q: In addition to the musical changes, do you plan to alter the visual presentation for the television audience?

A: I hope so. TV is very important to musical presentation. The challenge is to do more than to show the conduc-



John Williams, new conductor of the Boston Pops, comes to the podium with a record of film successes.

tor waving his hands and the closeup of the clarinetist moving his fingers during his solo bit. The Pops has a good television producer in Bill Cosel, who is a creative young fellow with wonderful ideas. Given our restrictions of time and budget, he wants to take the Pops out of the hall, to experiment with sound-over exterior work that will be artful, to do special visual things that will contribute to the ambience.

Q: Aren't some of today's pop idioms completely incompatible with the sound of the symphony orchestra?

A: Well, there are some things that shouldn't be tried. A symphony orchestra is never going to swing the way a jazz band does, it is never going to rock the way a rock band does. In arranging music for the Pops, it is important not to ask musicians to do something they shouldn't do, and that they cannot do. I do think, though, that there are some rock musicians today who have had good conservatory training, and some of these people may be capable of making a nice fusion of the rock-pop thing and the orchestra.

Q: What about the arrangements that are already in the Pops library that sound dated today? Is there anything you can do about them?

A: Some of our greatest composers were songwriters who were not orchestrators in the way that the great classical composers were. Their work has come to us through the work of an outside orchestrator. Some of these compo-

ers were very lucky. But most (of the work) of our songwriters is in very poor shape.

In the period between the first World War and about 1950 there was an explosion of creativity, but there are no definitive orchestral versions of the work of Porter, of Irving Berlin, of Harold Arlen, a major writer, of Harry Warren, of Jimmy McHugh, of Jerome Kern, who may have been the greatest of them all. One of the things I would like to see done for future generations, not only of Americans but of everyone, would be to have this treasure of ours put into shape for orchestra. I don't claim to be the prophet who can do it all, but the Pops is the kind of place where a lot of this kind of work could be done—the Pops is supposed to be the custodian of American popular music, and this is part of its job.