

# MAKING

# STAR

# WARS

# SING AGAIN

**"JOHN WILLIAMS COMMUNICATES SO BEAUTIFULLY," SAYS GEORGE LUCAS, "THAT I CAN MAKE A SILENT MOVIE."**

*The Phantom Menace*, the eagerly awaited first film in Lucas's new prequel trilogy to *Star Wars*, isn't a silent movie. But neither were films of the "silent" era, which depended on musical accompaniment to make their full effect. Lucas knows his film history, and will quote the great Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein's dictum that "film is music."

No one can think of the *Star Wars* movies without hearing John Williams's music. Williams's score has even gone beyond the films to become part of the soundtrack to people's lives. In February, Williams and the London Symphony Orchestra were back in EMI's Abbey Road Studios to record the music for *The Phantom Menace*; Lucas was there to hear his new movie for the first time.

Lucas says he loves music, and it's clear he does. He remembers the music in the films he grew up with—Liszt's "Les Preludes" introduced the old *Flash Gordon* serials, which were a primal source for *Star Wars*. He calls the trilogy his "space opera," and there are many narrative and mythic parallels to Wagner's "Ring" cycle. He writes his scripts while he's listening to music; he listens to music when he's filming; he edits to a dummy track of existing music that gives each sequence the emotional charge he's looking for.

"You have no idea what John's music contributes to the films," says actor Anthony Daniels, who plays the golden tin man, C-3PO. "The first time I saw any of *Star Wars*, Ravel's 'Bolero' was still on the soundtrack."

It is easy to believe Daniels. In the first trilogy, Carrie Fisher's Princess Leia was flat-voiced, as plain, prosaic, and practical as a can opener, but from the moment the flute begins to intone her theme, she becomes pure romantic enchantment. The success of

the film, and of Williams's music, helped restore the romantic symphonic movie score to popularity. The gadgetry in the film, and the technology that makes it possible, are futuristic, but the story is built on classic patterns—and, the scroll at the opening reminds us, takes place "long ago" in a galaxy far away.

Now there is an even older story to be told in image and music. Most of the time, Williams meets with the directors of the films he's going to score to "spot" the scenes that are going to need music; with Lucas, he knows, "we are going to play through everything." There were 16 three-hour recording sessions to set down 900 pages of score, two full hours of music. The sessions were intense, exhausting, and utterly professional. As in every business, time means money, even though music represents only a modest proportion of the film's \$115 million budget.

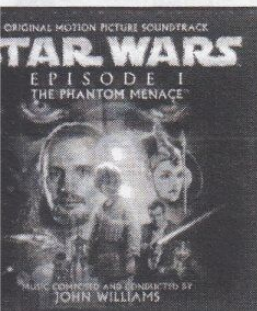
Despite the necessary tension and attention, everyone was casually dressed—Lucas in jeans and cowboy belt, Williams in his usual pairing of dark pants and dark turtleneck—and there was the feeling of a family reunion. Williams was surrounded by some of his longtime associates, including sound producer Shawn Murphy and Kenneth Wannberg, who has worked as Williams's editor since *Valley of the Dolls* in 1967.

Some of the actors dropped by to listen for a while, including Ewan McGregor, who plays the young Obi-Wan Kenobi; Ian McDiarmid, who plays the evil Senator Palpatine; and Daniels, as neat as C-3PO, but not as fussy. McGregor, clean-cut and idealistic in the film, looks scruffy and unshaven in the studio, but that's because of a stage role he is playing every night. One day he brings his young daughter to the sessions, and under his breath advises her that George Lucas's jeans are not the best place to wipe fingers covered with melted "chookies." *Star Wars* runs in the family: McGregor's uncle, Denis Lawson, appeared as a fighter pilot named Wedge in the first trilogy.

There's another special visitor. Williams introduces him to the orchestra—"Look who's here—the man who tamed dinosaurs and taught them to speak and act"—and the players applaud Steven Spielberg, whom they have already recognized with a gasp. Lucas cracks a joke at the expense of his friend since film-school days: "I just know he's going to take over..."

Spielberg has helped Lucas make these weeks a difficult time for their old friend, whom both filmmakers address as "Johnny." Williams had completed his score to an earlier cut of the film. After consultation with Spielberg, though, Lucas had recently re-edited the sixth and final reel, the last 20 minutes of the film, which present simultaneous actions converging on the climax.

Williams tries to be philosophical about the pickle this has dropped him into. "If I hit the ground running," he says, "I can write two minutes of music a day. If I were to have started all over again on the last reel, I would be ready to record in July—"



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# IN LONDON JOHN WILLIAMS PUTS SOUND TO LUCAS'S NEXT ADVENTURE BY RICHARD DYER

with the picture already in the theaters! So I've been making the music fit as we go along. That's why I'm constantly telling the players to drop measures 7 to 14."

## GIZMOS AND PLANETSCAPES

This is not the place to reveal secrets about *The Phantom Menace*. The chases, duels, battles, and action scenes look exciting, and there are plenty of new gizmos, including a nifty double-edged light saber; there is comic relief from curious extraterrestrial creatures and humans alike; there are gorgeous images, cityscapes and planets, and giant ships slice through space—the images directly reflect and expand upon the ones of the earlier films. There also seems to be a richer emotional texture: We are learning more about this story, who these people are, and how they got that way.

In the surge of pre-opening publicity some of the *Phantom Menace* secrets aren't so secret anymore—in fact, they haven't been secret for a while. Lucas has described the first trilogy as the story of the redemption of Anakin Skywalker, a.k.a. Darth Vader. The three new films tell the story of how the golden child Anakin went over to the Dark Side.

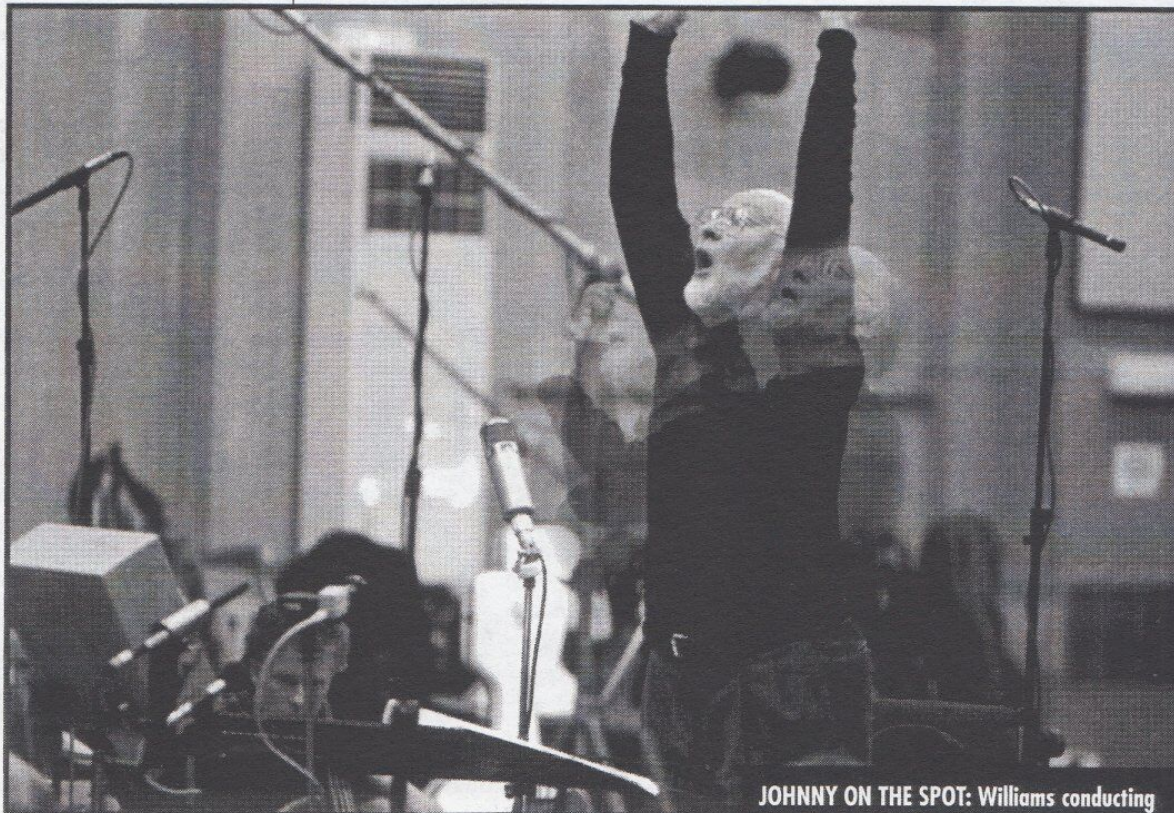
Lucas says he had to know the backstory in order to write the original trilogy, but admits with a sigh that it's unlikely that he will get around to writing and filming the third trilogy he used to mention as a possible sequel.

"It's taken nearly 30 years to get this far, and there are two more films to go," Lucas says, "that will take six more years." Later, he makes a film maven's comparison to Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane*. "We've seen the sled, Rosebud, and now we're back to telling the story, which across the six films and 12 hours of screen time covers 50 years. Each of the six films is a short story, not a novel. When we began, all I hoped was that we could get the first *Star Wars* to pay for itself—and it was a very thin hope. I didn't make the movie as part of a business plan or because my intention was to make a hit movie. I made it because I liked it. And then it turned out to be a hit movie."

Asked why there was such a long delay between the two trilogies, Lucas says, "I wanted to do some other things with my life besides this. I wanted to raise my family." (Lucas's daughter Amanda, now 17, was adopted near the end of his marriage to Marcia Griffin; Lucas is also the single adoptive parent of Kate, 11, and Jet, 6.) Lucas had to wait for some of the necessary

technology to be developed—by his own galaxy of companies, which were financed in part by the profits from the *Star Wars* trilogy.

From the start, Lucas had a conception of the big story he wanted to tell. Williams, on the other hand, says that back in 1977 he had no idea that he was beginning the score for a trilogy—let alone a sextet. "I'm afraid I thought of it as a Saturday-afternoon movie," he says. "A good one, though." Richard Wagner wrote the text to his "Ring" cycle rather the way Lucas wrote the *Star Wars* films, working backward, but



**JOHNNY ON THE SPOT:** Williams conducting the *Menace* soundtrack at Abbey Road.

he did have the advantage of composing the operas in order, an advantage that Williams has lacked.

*The Phantom Menace* contains many familiar *Star Wars* themes—it was a thrill to hear the most famous of them all appear in the trumpets again—but there are also new themes for new characters. The old themes and the new ones combine as they range across the spectrum of cinematic experience. There is scary music, exciting music, tenderhearted music, comic music, noble funeral music, and music of heroic resolve.

The 8-year-old Anakin has a theme that Williams says "is the sweetest and most innocent thing you've ever heard." That's how it sounds, though alert ears will be uneasy when they realize it is built on a chromatically unstable 12-tone row. But wait a minute—isn't there something familiar about this? The principal horn player voices the question: "Isn't this Darth Vader's music?" Later in the film there is a big celebration in some kind of coliseum. There's some funny music, a children's chorus, a



# A STORIED STUDIO, FROM ELGAR ONWARD

BY RICHARD DYER

**ABBEY ROAD WAS A LEGENDARY RECORDING** studio long before the Beatles started working in Studio 2 in the basement and had their pictures taken crossing the street outside.

The great composer Sir Edward Elgar made the first recording in EMI's new studio when he recorded his tone poem "Falstaff" with the London Symphony Orchestra in November 1931. In a photograph hanging in the downstairs hallway, you can see George Bernard Shaw following Elgar's score. The association of Elgar with Abbey Road is particularly meaningful to John Williams; Elgar is his favorite composer, and Jacqueline du Pre made her famous first recording of Elgar's Cello Concerto in this same studio. Generations of great classical musicians, including Maria Callas, have made famous recordings there, and generations of pop stars too; posters and album cover line the hallways.

Studio 1 is a large, hangarlike room in the basement, across the hall from where the Beatles worked; it's painted in fading blue. More than 100 musicians are seated in chairs on the parquet floor, their belongings strewn around them, complex figurations of

microphones arranged overhead. A large movie screen, visible to the conductor, if not to many of the players, is at one end of the room; the windowed control room is at the other, together with a closetlike wooden booth for the synthesizer player. Behind Williams sits his longtime editor Kenneth Wannberg, and behind Wannberg, two assistants hover over a computer, a duplicator, and pages of score. George Lucas sits at a worktable in the booth behind the console, filling legal-size sheets of yellow paper with notes as the sessions

progress. He will look longingly at a doughnut, manfully refuse it, then, occasionally, succumb to the temptation of half a chocolate éclair—but only if an assistant eats the other half. He tells this reporter, who wants to know, the British names for the principal American candy bars.

Down the hall, there's a canteen for the musicians with an elaborate, eclectic menu—everything from Cajun chicken to cauliflower Mornay one day. A garden links the studio to a residential building next door, where a small apartment is maintained as a hideaway for Williams. During the recording sessions for *The Phantom Menace* he futilely tried to take quick naps there; and he did eat his preferred lunch of deli sandwiches with Coleman's mustard, washed down with mineral water.

When Williams returned to Abbey Road in 1997 to record some new *Star Wars* music for the Special Edition re-release, the members of the London Symphony Orchestra gave him a standing ovation; they knew he had made them part of film history. Most of today's crackerjack orchestra is too young to have played in the original *Star Wars* sessions in 1977, but some of them had recorded *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi* in this very room. Some of today's players were kids brought up on the trilogy. The principal horn told Williams he was so excited to be involved in the new film that he hadn't been able to sleep for three nights. And it was this same player who was the first to catch on to the secret of Williams's Anakin Skywalker theme.

Outside, around the corner from the London home of the great conductor Sir Thomas Beecham, a vendor sells Beatles T-shirts and reports with some excitement that the new *Star Wars* recording is going on inside. Over the years, the fence surrounding the studio has become a kind of community message board; pilgrims from around the world arrive to write their tributes to the Fab Four. The caretaker says the studio paints and whitewashes the fence every couple of months, "and a lot of good it does...." **FSM**

Reprinted Courtesy of The Boston Globe.



FAN-NY LANE: Outside Abbey Road Studio.

march. "It's struggling to be the Imperial March," Williams says. Then he shoots a rare grin. "And it's going to get there."

## COMPOSING IN RED AND BLUE

As it happens, not many *Phantom Menace* secrets were revealed during close observation of four days of recording sessions. Scenes from the film were projected out of sequence and without dialogue; the color registration was off; and most of the special effects were not in the work print yet (and music editor Wannberg points out that there are 2,000 special effects in this film, which works out to an average of almost 17 special effects per minute). More often than not the images were incomplete, with a live actor appearing in front of what looked like an architectural drawing, or an old print by Piranesi. These drawings, or just plain squiggles, represented what computers and special-effects wizards will fill in.

One of the new alien creatures in *The Phantom Menace* is called Jar Jar Binks, who looks like a friendly cross between a horse and a kangaroo; Jar Jar has eyes in the middle of his (or her) ears. (Lucas says he imagines his new species, then keeps

on describing them to artists until they are able to draw what he has in mind; the process sounds a little like what police artists do in trying to create a suspect's portrait.) This may be a bit of subconscious tribute to Williams, whose superiority as a film composer lies not only in his musical ability but in his skill at reading an image and at sensing the rhythmic and emotional relationships images create in movement. Williams reads a piece of film and feels the music in it the way Schubert or Benjamin Britten heard music when they read poetry.

The condition of the work print may have been responsible for Williams's one misjudgment—about four seconds in the first hour of music he recorded.

The young Queen Amidala (Natalie Portman) stares out of a palace window; she sees a tower with spacecraft circling around it. Everything looks red, and when we see the tower, Williams's music surges triumphantly. Lucas doesn't cry "Cut!" the way directors do in the movies. But he does speak quietly to Williams in the control booth. He is quite clear about the emotional texture he wants. "I thought of this as a quieter, more romantic moment," Lucas says. "She's very sad. Sad and



# THE CHORUS IS SINGING IN SANSKRIT. "THAT'LL GIVE THE FANS SOMETHING TO FIGURE OUT," LUCAS EXCLAIMS.

romantic—the story of my life, the story of everyone's life. The actual color here is not as red as that—it's more blue." Williams listens thoughtfully. "I was too red," he admits, "when I should have been blue. I'll fix it tonight."

Lucas is full of praise for Williams's versatility and skill. "John's music tells the story. Each character has a theme that develops and interacts with the themes of the other characters; the musical themes connect the themes of the stories and make them resonate. He also creates an emotional context for each scene. In fact you can have it both ways, because you can play a scene against the emotions that are in it because the music is there to tell you the truth. The music can communicate nuances you can't see; it says things the film doesn't say."

And Williams is confident enough with Lucas to spring some surprises of his own. Unlike Spielberg, who enjoys coming into Williams's studio at Amblin Productions in California to sit on the piano bench and listen to the music as it emerges, Lucas usually doesn't hear Williams's score until it's being recorded.

One day 88 professional singers from London Voices arrive to record two episodes with chorus. One is funeral music for one of the film's emotional climaxes; the other is for the closing credits, a terrifying, primitive pagan rite that makes even Stravinsky's "Les Noces" sound tame. Lucas loves this dark, driven music so much he shows off the recording for Spielberg when he arrives. Spielberg says to Williams, "I'm glad I didn't drop around for a cigar on the day you wrote that." Lucas says Williams doesn't know it yet, but this music will accompany a crucial scene in the third new film.

The words the chorus is singing in this dark, demonic cue are clear, but the language is unfamiliar. It turns out it's Sanskrit. ("Sanskrit!" Lucas exclaims when Williams tells him. "That'll give the fans something to figure out.") Williams had been strongly affected by a phrase from an old Welsh poem by Taliesin, "The Battle of the Trees," that the poet Robert Graves had cited and translated in "The White Goddess." "Under the tongue root, a fight most dread, /And another rages behind in the head" seemed to fit the evil ritual. Williams arranged to have these English words translated back into the original Celtic and into other ancient languages. "I chose the Sanskrit," he says, "because I loved the sound of it. I condensed this into 'most dread/inside the head,' which seemed both cryptic and appropriate. For the funeral scene, I had my own words, 'Death's long sweet sleep,' translated into Sanskrit too."

At the close of the day, Lucas, Spielberg, and Williams line up against the wall in front of a *Star Wars* poster for a television interview.

"They call you Johnny," the interviewer remarks.

"You should have seen how young I was when they met me," Williams responds.

## GETTING F-SHARP RIGHT

High tech will be everywhere on the screen, and in the studio there's far more of it than anyone could have imagined 22 years ago, when this adventure began. Williams's score is in a computer, which produces the parts for the players; even the speakers in the control room look like droids from the movie. "They have all this new stuff," Williams observes, a bit ruefully. "But we're all still down there trying to make sure that F-sharp is in tune."

Williams knows that not every F-sharp will be heard; he's a

team player, and Lucas praises him for that. "John knows the movie has to come first. Each participant in a movie is like a musician in an orchestra. Everybody—the sound people, the photographers, the special effects artists—has to be just as good as a soloist—but no matter how good he is, he can't be a soloist. It's my job to be the conductor."

Whether anybody will hear that F-sharp or not in the final film isn't a problem Williams lets himself worry about. Instead he concentrates on getting it right. The effect he is after may be subliminal and hidden behind dialogue, or the ricochet of light sabers, but it is still there.

The process for each musical cue is the same. The orchestra reads the passage through—and the LSO is famed above all other orchestras for its sight-reading. Then Williams rehearses the music, sometimes repeatedly. When it is ready, the passage is recorded, sometimes several times; Williams and the orchestra listen to the advice of the producer. Williams goes into the control room to listen to the takes, often accompanied by key members of the orchestra. Then they go out again and work until they get it the way they want it. And then they move on to the next cue. It's an exhilarating and exhausting process.

Nothing seems to ruffle Williams's composure or the old-fashioned courtesy that seems fundamental to his nature—not even 10 successive takes of the same passage. "Thank you," he says to the players after a problematic reading. "I have learned some more things that I needed to know. I think we can get it together better, and I know I can conduct it better." "Let's see if we can make a more noble sound," he will say to the brass and percussion, including himself in the equation. His experience shows in everything. "It's not too loud," he says, "but the sound is too close; it will obscure the dialogue." "Could you menace without getting louder?"

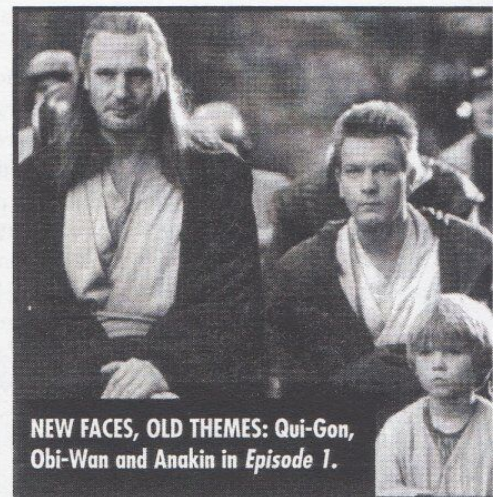
he asks. "The audience should feel this rather than hear it." "Let me ask the harp not to play here—I think the sound of the harp will take the eye away from what it needs to see right here." "I'd love to take it that slowly," he says, looking at the screen, "but I can't."

Williams cannot conceal his delight, however, at how some things are turning out. He will deftly sidestep a compliment: "That's my homage to old man Korngold," he says, paying tribute to the great Viennese prodigy Erich Wolfgang Korngold, who fled from Hitler and wound up in Hollywood writing the scores to classic Warner Bros. adventure movies like *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, *The Sea Hawk* and *Captain Blood*. After the tremendous, charging rhythmic excitement of one cue, Williams jokes, "That ought to be enough to scare the children of the world."

When the music soars, Williams seems to soar a little too. "I'm a very lucky man," he says, smiling. "If it weren't for the movies, no one would be able to write this kind of music anymore."

FSM

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NEW FACES, OLD THEMES: Qui-Gon, Obi-Wan and Anakin in Episode 1.



# THE SOUNDS OF THE EMPIRE

## IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE A WORLD WITHOUT STAR WARS.

For over 20 years, the franchise has established itself as a unique permanence in 20th century culture. Unfortunately, at times the folderol—as is the hype—is overwhelming. So much has been made of the films' official place in our culture that we're missing the forest for the trees. Or to put it in *Star Wars* terms, everyone keeps talking about the moons, but no one ever looks at the planets.

*Star Wars* is a throwback—a B movie with A production values. It's a modern myth. It's regurgitated junk culture. It's a stymie for legitimate cinema. It revitalized the industry. It destroyed Hollywood by implementing the so-called blockbuster mentality. We've become so preoccupied with cataloguing and debating *Star Wars* culture (and cult) minutia that serious looks at these films' constructions have become few and far between. This is especially true with regards to John Williams's scores. We've packed nearly six hours of music into a tight little box, swung it around, and primarily discussed what it hit. Now, as the first *Star Wars* film in over a decade appears in cinemas, it's time to open the box again. How exactly did John Williams handle *Star Wars: A New Hope*, *The Empire Strikes Back*, and *Return of the Jedi*? And how will that approach extend to *Episode One—The Phantom Menace*, if at all?

Doubtlessly, Williams's cohesive construction of the scores can be pinned on any number of elements: the pervasive harmonic language; the postmodern Neo-Romantic orchestrations; the external, internal, multiple-external arc of the three films. But, first and foremost, these are thematic creatures. Analyzed here—in true fawning-over-the-details style—are all of Williams's themes from the first *Star Wars* trilogy. Coming next time are the themes of *The Phantom Menace*.

### 1. LUKE SKYWALKER'S THEME/ MAIN THEME

John Williams describes Luke's theme as "Flourishing and upward reaching, idealistic and heroic... a very uplifted kind of heraldic quality. Larger than he is. His idealism is more the subject than the character itself I would say." Tellingly, this theme, which represents Luke's outlook, goes through a number of permutations as the story progresses. In *A New Hope*, the theme is generally brash and brassy, heard in quick, flashy statements. *Empire* puts the theme primarily in the minor mode, especially for the Dagobah training sequences where

Luke's optimistic determination is put to the test. (In the scenes following, where Luke tries to play the hero once again by prematurely rushing off to help his friends, the theme returns to the major mode, but loses its bravura-based foothold with subdued solo wind statements over fragile chromatic figures.) In *Jedi*, this theme is as much applied to the Rebellion as it is to Luke, suggesting that the character has matured enough to understand his place in the larger effort. The readings are generally more stolid and determined, no longer so headstrong.

The melody itself is constructed with a series of rising and falling cells based around a basic major pentachord—here, the first five notes of a major scale. But, since the post-/Neo-Romantic sound of the *Star Wars* scores dictates a chromatically fluid sense of melodicism, Williams is careful always to layer this simple theme over harmonically adventurous material (even the main title music adds some mixolydian and quartal support, which helps it blend into the territory still to come). Like so many of Williams's melodies, the *Star Wars* theme revolves upon an ascending perfect fifth to evoke a sense of boldness and honor. (See themes from *The Cowboys*, *Superman*, *E.T.*, *Amazing Stories*, *JFK*, *Home Alone*, *Hook*, etc.) This open fifth—which suggests no mode by itself—allows Williams to tweak the inner notes without veiling his theme.

**FYI:** It's long been speculated that Williams modeled his theme on Erich Wolfgang Korngold's theme from *Kings Row*. Although there is a superficial resemblance between the two, (see example [1a]) it may be stretching the point to dub Korngold's theme the model.

Likewise, much discussion has concerned the extent to which the *Star Wars* opening music was influenced by Gustav Holst's *The Planets Suite*. Examples [1b] and [1c] compare the closest relation between the two—a series of dissonantly pounding chords.

### 2. MAIN THEME, B THEME

This theme, which tempers the primary theme's aggressiveness with a bit of elastic lyricism, serves little leitmotivic purpose in the score. Its readings in the score proper fluctuate between gentle reflection and brash heroism—again, usually associated with Luke, but not always. Its most visible use in the films comes during *A New Hope*'s throne room sequence.

**FYI:** This theme has its closest relative in the B Theme from Williams's *Superman*—both of which lead off with an upward major second.

### 3. OBI-WAN KENOBI'S THEME/ THE FORCE THEME

The only minor-moded theme associated with the good guys,



# ANALYZING THE THEMES OF THE STAR WARS TRILOGY

BY DOUG ADAMS

this theme pulls double duty as the musical representative for both Obi-Wan Kenobi and the Force. Interestingly, this is also the only heroic *A New Hope* theme in which Williams employs large downward intervallic leaps (although it still begins with a characteristically rising perfect fourth). The other major heroic character themes all reach out with a sense of yearning and impetuosity, yet this theme is more introspective, suggesting both the timeworn heroism of Kenobi and the omnipotent intangibility of the Force.

This theme's default setting is a reverent, reflective chorale for rich strings or mid-range brass. While this is probably the *Star Wars* theme most permanently tied to its harmonization (try playing it in a major mode and you'll quickly realize why the composer never did that), Williams makes use of it in any number of settings. At times it takes on a hue of embroiled tragedy (its entrance indicates the defeat of the rebels in *Empire*); at others it's as exciting as any action motif in the scores (refer to the fugato variation which initiates the climactic battle in *A New Hope*)... its use in the battle scenes insinuates that the Force (i.e. God) is on the rebels' side—a true Lucas/Williams paradigm of absolute goods and evils.

**FYI:** This theme figures into the *Star Wars* trilogy's two most music-fueled scenes: Luke's sunset contemplation of his future in *A New Hope*, and the throne room celebration at the end of the same film. (Williams explains that he used the theme here because the rebel victory was a validation of now-departed Ben's ideals.)

## 4. LEIA ORGANA'S THEME

If it is Williams's tendency to drive his heroic male themes with perfect fifths, then perhaps it can be said that, for a short time, he was likewise inspired to represent female objects of adoration with leaping major sixths. (See Han and Leia's Theme [5] as well as Marion's Theme from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.) Intriguingly, this theme plays against the character of Princess Leia. Leia is an independent, spitfire type of girl, but this theme paints a portrait of passive romantic splendor with its arched, chromatically weaving lines. Two options: 1) The theme actually takes the idea of Leia as its starting point—the princess from a far-away land in need of rescue. 2) The theme is Leia as framed by Luke and Han's (and the majority of the adolescent male audience's) point of view—an object of romanticized desire. Unwittingly chauvinistic? Perhaps "old-fashioned" may be a better term. Either way, it's one of Williams's best themes from the first film with its ever upward-reaching melody continually reset by casually shifting chromatic harmonies.

**FYI:** Many have wondered why Williams employs Leia's theme for the scene where Ben Kenobi is struck down. Williams explains, "I felt it had the most sweeping melody of all the themes in the score. This wildly romantic music in this tragic setting represents Luke's and the Princess's reaction to leaving Ben behind." In other words, he used the theme because it fit musically, even if escaped the leitmotif boundaries. Although it re-imposes the overdone Ring Cycle comparison, it should be noted that Wagner, too, often employed his themes in non-leitmotivic ways in order to support dramatic effect.

## 5. HAN SOLO AND THE PRINCESS'S THEME

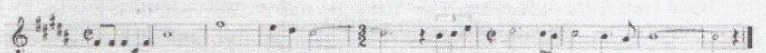
This theme represents Williams's most literal-minded connection of thematic material within the *Star Wars* scores. Introduced in *Empire*, Han Solo and the Princess's Theme takes up where Leia's Theme [4] leaves off. Both begin with Williams's signature romantic rising major sixth interval before settling downwards. And as with Leia's, Williams's treatment of this theme is highly chromatic. (These love themes, which present the most adult ideas in the *Star Wars* saga, are colored by Williams's most advanced and mature harmonic language—see also Luke and Leia's Theme [6].) Here, Williams builds in a sense of melodic instability where phrases almost fold into one

## MUSIC EXAMPLES

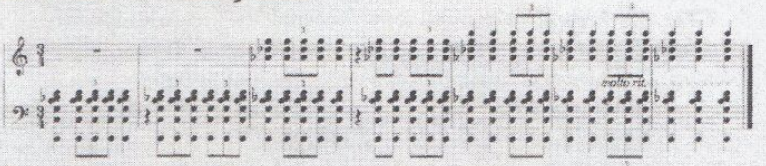
### 1. Luke Skywalker's Theme/Main Theme



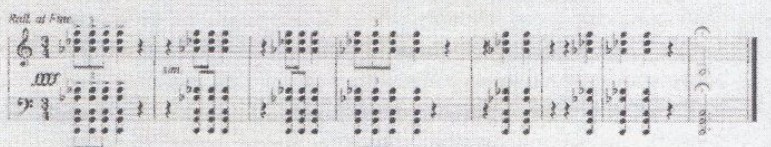
### 1a. King's Row Main Title



### 1b. Star Wars 1m1- Building Chords



### 1c. The Planets Suite: Mvt. 1, Mars the Bringer of War (last 8 bars)



### 2. Main Theme, B Theme



### 3. Obi-Wan Kenobi's Theme/The Force Theme



### 4. Leia Organa's Theme



### 5. Han Solo and the Princess's Theme





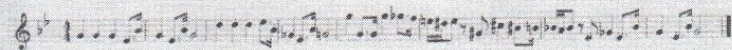
6. Luke and Leia's Theme



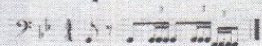
7. The Imperial Motive



8. Darth Vader's Theme/The Imperial March



8a. The Imperial March Ostinato



9. The Emperor's Theme



10. Yoda's Theme



10a. Yoda's Playful Theme



another. This gives the theme a feeling of tumult and developing love—perhaps why the theme seems more associated with Han than with Leia. Although Han Solo has no personal theme in the films, he, as an individual, is often represented by this tune (see *Empire's* opening), while Leia retains her theme from the first film. This suggests that Solo's most dynamic character trait—hence the most deserving of music—is his propensity for change and that change's effect on his surroundings.

**FYI:** This theme has a close relative in *Raiders of the Lost Ark's* Marion theme. It also bears a slight contour resemblance to Tchaikovsky's *Allergro moderato* movement from his *Violin Concerto in D flat*.

6. LUKE AND LEIA'S THEME

This theme, introduced, though sparingly used, in *Return of the Jedi*, is the most adult of the *Star Wars* themes. It's written in the same advanced chromatic/triadic language as Han and Leia's Theme [5], but harmonically and rhythmically, it's much more stable. Tonal areas congeal for several bars at a time, and half and whole note figures abound. If Han and Leia's tune represents blossoming passion, then this theme transforms the notion into a warm, familial kind of love. It's still a theme of awakenings and developing emotions, but here it's hooked to more comfortable relationships.

**FYI:** This theme's opening tones resemble Leonard Bernstein's "Make Our Garden Grow" from his operetta, *Candide*.

7. THE IMPERIAL MOTIVE

The great missing link of the *Star Wars* scores, this was the Imperial theme before *Empire* introduced The Imperial March [8]. (*A New Hope* portrayed its heavies less as characters with motivations and more as plot-necessitated creations to antagonize the heroes—hence this evil-for-evil's-sake musical representation.) While the Imperial March does a better job evoking the nefarious military machine of the Empire, this little motive is still used very intelligently in the first score. As a single line, the theme is set in a Phrygian mode, but Williams often doubles it a minor third lower which puts it in a diminished scale—

one of the characteristic sounds of *A New Hope's* score—inspired by Holst's Mars?

8. DARTH VADER'S THEME/  
THE IMPERIAL MARCH

The Imperial March may be the *Star Wars* theme with the highest pop-culture visibility rating. It's a uniquely catchy and brutally militaristic work—all angles and polish. In an ingenious move, the first half of the melody is entirely major, even to the point of arpeggiating major chords. However, its harmonization is built upon third-related minor chords which gives the theme a Sousaesque popular sensibility, but with a heart of stone. This theme first arrives in the second film where Vader's character shifts from being a thug to a motivated villain.

For a theme seemingly so sewn into one guise, there are many variations upon the Imperial March melody in the *Empire* and *Jedi* scores. Militant brass octaves lay over an ostinato unique to this theme (see The Imperial March Ostinato [8a]); dour French horns sink the theme into murky, threatening waters; and during Vader's death, harp and wispy string harmonics let the theme's final statement quietly seep out.

**FYI:** At times Williams uses the octave-popping second half of the theme by itself.

9. THE EMPEROR'S THEME

The Emperor's theme exudes wicked malice with a series of minor triads. Williams often scores this theme for wordless male chorus to add a touch of mysticism to the character. There is a tenuous harmonic relationship between this and Vader's theme where each is set for distantly related, pure minor chords.

10. YODA'S THEME

Yoda's gentle, wizened theme is the most soothing in the *Star Wars* oeuvre, partially due to the crystalline timbers of its lydi-an opening. Like Obi-Wan's Theme/The Force Theme [3], this melody takes downward leaps—again equated with a sort of internal contemplation. In fact, though the register continually raises on Yoda's theme, the melodic motion is almost always falling. Yet, while Ben's theme conveys a sense of duty and dogged honor, Yoda's theme, which tends towards more advanced harmonic territory, seems rooted in a kind of inner contentment. (Yoda's playful side is represented by a simpler spry tune in the second half of the unabridged theme [10a].)

As with Leia's theme, Williams uses Yoda's theme in one major scene where it doesn't literally represent the character. As Luke maneuvers the Imperial troops in Cloud City, a dashing setting of Yoda's melody urges him along suggesting that either A) Luke is recalling his teacher's warnings or B) Williams is once again using the romantic sweep of a theme rather than the character associations.

**FYI:** Yoda's theme is the only *Star Wars* theme that Williams ever used in a non-*Star Wars* setting: A child's Yoda Halloween costume in *E.T.* earns the pacific tune.

Near his death scene, Yoda's theme takes a turn towards minor modes. From this develops the Brother and Sister Motif [23].

11. THE DROIDS' THEME

This deceptively secondary theme gets quite a workout during *Empire's* Hoth and Dagobah music (examine the scene where Artoo is swallowed by the swamp-dwelling creature, complete



# THEME WITH THE HIGHEST CATCHY AND BRUTALLY MILITARISTIC

with a pungent tuba reading of the tune). The music toys with octatonic harmonies, but never fully adopts them, remaining freely and impishly chromatic.

Strangely, this theme seems to all but disappear in *Return of the Jedi*. One of the Endor scenes suggests the tune (during the final battle), but other than that it exists exclusively in the second film.

## 12. JABBA THE HUTT'S THEME

Williams's most physically inspired melody, this sight gag of a tune ripples grotesquely upwards and downwards with a combination of chromatic licks, minor triads, and extended augmented chords. It usually appears on a solo tuba.

## 13. THE EWOKS' THEME

Williams's puckish, Prokofiev-esque Ewok melody dances around piquant diminished triads to add just a bit of bite to the cutesy woodland creatures. Some of the composer's most inventive orchestrations are attached to this music: the tune appears scored for almglocken (tuned cowbells), pitched temple blocks, and even a toy piano.

**FYI:** *The Ewoks' Theme* may have a close relative in Prokofiev's *March of the Three Oranges*.

## 14. BOBA FETT'S THEME

He gets about as many notes as he gets lines, but like the character himself, Boba Fett's theme leaves an indelible mark on the *Empire* score. Williams's theme exudes non-specific malice with a rattling, descending half-step figure score in the bassoon's lowest range.

## 15. THE JAWAS' THEME

While it's only used in one or two sequences in the trilogy, the Jawas' theme perfectly captures the scurrying little scavengers with sounds as dry as the desert itself: pizzicato strings, low marimba, and a winding English horn solo with some octatonic inflections.

## 16. CLOUD CITY THEME

This slow march relies upon a Walton-like sense of added-tone chords in order set the stage for the regal, well-to-do Cloud City. The theme, featuring middle strings and French horns, first plays as Lando gives Han, Leia and company a tour of his facilities. Williams re-uses the theme as the heroes make their escape from the Empire's trap.

## 17. THE THRONE ROOM THEME

While certainly not a theme in the leitmotivic sense, the Throne Room Theme, which Williams describes as having a "land of hope and glory"<sup>3</sup> feel to it, earns a fleeting repeat performance as the rebel armada assembles in *Return of the Jedi*. The tune itself is a rousing, major-moded melody stressing the I, IV and V chords, not entirely unlike William Walton's *Crown Imperial: A Coronation March*.

## 18. THE REBEL FANFARE

It's only four parallel chords, but the rebel fanfare's chromatic third relationships set the standard sound for otherworldly adventure for two decades worth of sci-fi scoring. Williams's deployment of these chords is clever enough that, after three

films, they still maintain an enthusiastic charm.

**FYI:** *This figure bears a slight resemblance to a set of chords appearing about half-way through Paul Dukas's *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*—best known as the Mickey Mouse sequence from *Fantasia*.*

## 19. THE DEATH STAR MOTIVE

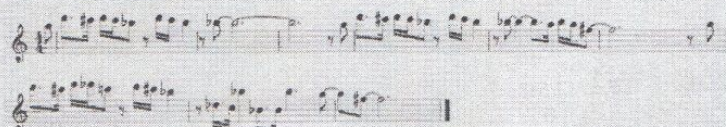
Here's the reverse side to the Rebel Fanfare—a snapping chordal flip used to represent the Empire's "ultimate power in the universe," the Death Star. (The Imperial music in *A New Hope* is comprised mainly of variations of this and The Imperial Motive [7].) Williams's variations on this theme are as endless as the possibilities. Often he employs pedal point writing (as seen in Example [19]) with minor or augmented chords.

## 20. "TIE FIGHTER ATTACK" THEME

This action theme plays in three major set pieces throughout the scores: the TIE fighters vs. Millennium Falcon sequence in *A New Hope*; the sail barge action set-piece from *Return of the Jedi*; and the attack on the new Death Star in *Jedi*. The chordal series is based on slight chromatic shifts in the inner voices (which neatly set up the signature *Star Wars* augmented triad sound) and chromatic third major chords. The theme is set in the same harmonic language as the Rebel Fanfare [18]—which is never far behind.

(continued on page 47)

### 11. The Droids' Theme



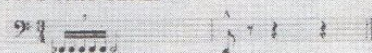
### 12. Jabba the Hutt's Theme



### 13. The Ewoks' Theme



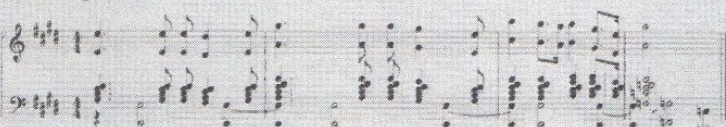
### 14. Boba Fett's Theme



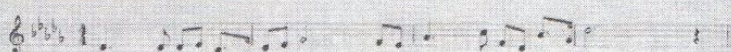
### 15. The Jawas' Theme



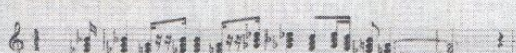
### 16. Cloud City Theme



### 17. The Throne Room Theme



### 18. The Rebel Fanfare



### 19. The Death Star Motive





## SOUNDS OF THE EMPIRE (continued from page 25)

### 21. THE "UNKNOWN" CHORDS

More pedal point writing which Williams may or may not have thought of as part of his *A New Hope* arsenal: a two-chord sequence used in a couple of important spots in the first score, such as the flight of the droids' escape pod to Tatooine. If they represent anything, the chords convey a sense of uncertainty—of an ill-defined future path. Interestingly, in the concert version of "The Throne Room," Williams again uses these tri-tone separated chords, leading one to assume that even if they didn't represent anything in particular, Williams probably did consider them a constructional part of the first score.

**FYI:** Williams uses triads (in minor chords) separated by a tri-tone to evoke the unknown mysteries of the Ark of the Covenant in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

### 22. ACTION OSTINATO

It's not a theme per se, but Williams gets a good bit of mileage (in the first and third films) out of this repeating rhythmic motif. Its chief use is as tonic pedal for chordal figures.

Williams occasionally uses tripletized versions of this pattern—see the first cue in *A New Hope*.

### 23. THE BROTHER AND SISTER MOTIF

In essence, this theme is only four notes long, though Williams often loops them into a floating ostinato. The tune, which is associated with the revelation that Luke and Leia are siblings, is pulled from a minor version of the second phrase of Yoda's Theme [10].

### 24. THE VICTORY MOTIF

Versions of this short, brassy motif in the lydian mode play at two key spots in the third score: first, after the defeat of Jabba, and second, after the destruction of the new Death Star.

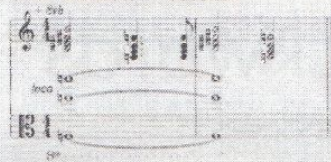
### 25. THE VICTORY CELEBRATION THEME

As John Williams again gears up for a new *Star Wars* trilogy, many wonder whether or not this theme, specially composed in late 1996 for

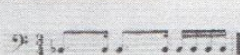
### 20. "TIE Fighter Attack" Theme



### 21. The "Unknown" Chords



### 22. Action Ostinato



### 23. The Brother and Sister Motif



### 24. The Victory Motif



### 25. The Victory Celebration Theme



the *Return of the Jedi* Special Edition finale, will have some significance in the new films. As it stands now, it's somewhat of an anachronism in the *Star Wars* scores. It's a sort of a world-music jamboree setting, but the theme is based on the same reaching minor triads of much of the existing scores. Only time will tell if Williams is hinting at things to come.

## NEXT TIME: The Themes of THE PHANTOM MENACE.

### Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Interview with John Williams, *Film Score Monthly*, Volume 2, Number 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Star Wars Original Soundtrack LP liner notes*.

<sup>3</sup> *Star Wars Original Soundtrack LP liner notes*.