

Introduction New Perspectives on John Williams

(2) Composition, Imaginaries, Circulations

Chloé Huvet

Grégoire Tosser

EDITOR'S NOTES

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to Conor Power and Vicki McNulty for their review and assistance in translating this text.

- 1 Building on “New Perspectives on John Williams (1): Legacies and After-lives,”¹ this second special issue devoted to John Williams aims to expand scholarly approaches to his prolific oeuvre, both for the screen and beyond, through diverse analytical frameworks and varied objects of study. The issue opens by examining Williams’s characteristic harmonic, melodic, and orchestral techniques. The second section addresses his engagement with the theme of childhood, explored across genres as varied as comedy, drama, science fiction, fantasy, adventure, and war cinema. Finally, the issue explores the links between Williams’s film scores and other festive events, such as sporting events or concerts.
- 2 In the opening article of the first section, “**Compositional Techniques**,” **Frank Lehman** examines the score of *Jurassic Park* (Steven Spielberg, 1993), focusing on two cues, “A Tree For My Bed” and “Remembering Petticoat Lane,” which are generally overlooked by a literature often focused on the main themes. These interludes, particularly their harmonic and orchestral design, illuminate the interplay between thematic and

1. For the reference bibliography, please refer to the [introduction of the first issue](#).

non-thematic elements and their large-scale function within the film. In the next article, **Tom Schneller** explores the use of the Gregorian *Dies irae* in Williams's music across approximately twenty films from 1968 to 2015. Treated in a non-literal, fragmented, inverted, and deconstructed manner, the *Dies irae* is adapted by Williams to suit the needs of audiovisual narrative without, however, stripping it of its initial symbolic dimensions. The famous motif then evokes death (as one might expect), but also guilt and judgment. **Chloé Huvet** examines the orchestration of the final *Star Wars* trilogy (2015–2019) and the challenges Williams faced following the substantial transformations in his orchestral writing introduced during the prequel trilogy (1999–2005) and beyond the franchise. Operating within a highly referential framework—between nostalgia and allusion—Williams reconciles multiple legacies in the sequels while introducing orchestration techniques that reflect the evolution of his writing over the past twenty years. Finally, **Jérôme Rossi** analyzes Williams's solo writing in three styles—cantabile, concertante, and improvisatory—across major works such as *Schindler's List* (Steven Spielberg, 1993), *Catch Me If You Can* (Steven Spielberg, 2002), and *Memoirs of a Geisha* (Rob Marshall, 2005). Through the concept of “timbre-character,” Rossi shows how Williams associates specific solo instruments with characters or narrative themes to evoke cultural and geographical spheres.

- 3 The second section is devoted to “**Musical Explorations of Childhood**” in Williams's work. **Magdalena Kempna-Pieniążek and Bogumiła Mika** examine how, in *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (Steven Spielberg, 1982) and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (Steven Spielberg, 1977), Williams evokes a childlike perspective through short motifs and harmonies suggestive of wonder and magic, offering adult viewers a symbolic return to the innocence of childhood. The composer's work engages with nostalgic visions, reinforcing the child gaze in narratives often written and created by adult filmmakers. This investigation is extended by **Jacob Friedman**, who analyzes the idyllic or fantastical representations of childhood by pairing *Hook* (Steven Spielberg, 1991) with *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (Chris Columbus, 2001), *Empire of the Sun* (Steven Spielberg, 1987), *Jurassic Park*, and *Jaws* (Steven Spielberg, 1975) with *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (Steven Spielberg, 2001). Friedman highlights the fact that Williams associates childhood with an emotionally preserved space, marked by accessible harmonies, recognizable motifs, and conjunct melodies. Against the loss of childhood innocence, conflict, and grief, these scenes function as refuges, symbolically counterpointing the darker elements of the films. The third article, by **Stefan Swanson**, offers a closer study of *A.I.* and the theme of childhood by contrasting musical characterizations of humanity and artificial intelligence. Employed in constant opposition, romantic (human) and repetitive (*mecha*) motifs

allow Williams to articulate the tension between characters, particularly David, the *mecha* child, and Monica, his human adoptive mother. Emphasizing the ambiguity and imbalance of the protagonists' interactions, the score conveys an underlying conflict while drawing on a variety of stylistic influences.

- 4 **Tristan Paré-Morin** opens the final section, “**From the Concert Hall to Olympic Stadiums,**” with an analysis of Williams’s piano arrangements, which follow the historical tradition of orchestral transcription. The aims of these arrangements can be understood as threefold: to make Williams’s music more accessible to amateurs, to encourage its performance in academic or concert contexts and to uncover certain compositional processes—particularly thematic and harmonic—that are sometimes obscured in the original scores. With **Emilio Audissino**’s article, the focus shifts to Williams’s career as a conductor. Through his work with the Boston Pops, Williams transforms the symphonic concert experience by integrating film music into diverse programs. Supported by Williams’s dual expertise, the cinematic repertoire gains artistic legitimacy while simultaneously opening the symphonic stage to new audiences. Finally, **Yann Descamps** examines another facet of Williams’s music through his Olympic fanfares—*Olympic Fanfare and Theme* (1984), *Summon the Heroes* (1996), and *Call of the Champions* (2002)—which seek to convey the sporting and mythological ideals of the Olympic Games. In these works, Williams exalts both the body and spirit of the athletes, framing their performance within a universal and timeless narrative in which music and sport converge to celebrate values of unity and self-transcendence.
- 5 This double issue aims to offer renewed perspectives on John Williams by exploring the various modalities of legacy and posterity, followed by the writings, imaginaries, and circulations beyond the screen of a body of work that is both exceptionally extensive and encompassing an extremely wide range of styles. Far from claiming to be definitive, the milestone established by these “New Perspectives” calls for the continued analysis and exploration—readily interdisciplinary—of a major figure whose influence continues to shape contemporary sonic representations and music-for-screen styles.
- 6 Our final thanks go to Jason Julliot and Jérémy Michot who, through their roles in publication management, editorial work, and editorial coordination at Émergences, demonstrate on a daily basis that research can be warm, rigorous, online, and open access.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Chloé Huvet

Chloé Huvet is an Associate Professor of Musicology at Université Évry Paris-Saclay (RASM-CHCSC) and a Junior Fellow of the Institut Universitaire de France (IUF). She is the co-founder and coordinator of the ELMEC research group (Study of Music and Sound Languages for the Screen), affiliated with the French Musicological Society. Her research focuses on music, sound, and image in contemporary American cinema. She is the author of *Composer pour l'image à l'ère numérique. Star Wars, d'une trilogie à l'autre* (Vrin, 2022), which was selected for the 2023 France Musique–Claude Samuel Book Prize, and the editor of *Ennio Morricone. Et pour quelques notes de plus...* (Éditions universitaires de Dijon, 2022). She recently co-edited *Errances et angoisses du troisième type. À l'écoute des bandes-son de science-fiction* (with Cécile Carayol, Le Visage Vert, 2024).

Grégoire Tosser

Grégoire Tosser is an associate professor in musicology at the University of Tours (ICD research unit, UR6297). His research primarily focuses on music after 1945, particularly contemporary French and Hungarian music, rock music and French song analysis, and film music.