

émergences

**PERSPECTIVES
NOUVELLES SUR
JOHN WILLIAMS**



Introduction – Perspectives nouvelles sur John Williams

(2) Écriture, imaginaires, circulations

Chloé Huvet

Grégoire Tosser

1 Faisant suite à « Perspectives nouvelles sur John Williams (1) : héritages et postérités¹ », ce second dossier consacré à John Williams entend poursuivre l'élargissement des approches sur l'œuvre foisonnante du compositeur, à la fois pour l'image et en dehors du septième art, au prisme d'une pluralité de méthodes et d'objets. Divisé en trois grandes sections thématiques, il propose cette fois-ci d'examiner dans un premier temps les procédés d'écriture harmoniques, mélodiques et orchestraux de prédilection du compositeur. Les contributions regroupées dans la deuxième section s'attachent ensuite au domaine de l'enfance, thématique que Williams a explorée tout au long de sa carrière à travers des genres aussi divers que la comédie, le drame, la science-fiction, le fantastique, le film d'aventures ou le film de guerre. Pour finir, le numéro explore les liens entre les musiques de Williams pour le cinéma à d'autres événements festifs, comme les manifestations sportives ou le concert.

2 Dans le texte inaugural de la première section, « **Techniques d'écriture** », **Frank Lehman** s'intéresse à la bande originale de *Jurassic Park* (Steven Spielberg, 1993), et notamment à deux *cues*, « A Tree For My Bed » et « Remembering Petticoat Lane », globalement négligés par une littérature souvent centrée sur les thèmes principaux. Ces interludes, en particulier leur conception harmonique et orchestrale, fondent une réflexion sur l'opposition entre éléments thématiques et non-thématiques, et leur relation fonctionnelle à grande échelle au sein du film. Dans l'article suivant,

1. Pour la bibliographie de référence, se reporter à [l'introduction du premier numéro](#).

Tom Schneller analyse l'utilisation du *Dies irae* grégorien dans la musique de Williams sur une vingtaine de films depuis 1968 jusqu'à 2015. En le traitant de manière souvent non littérale, mais plutôt fragmentée, renversée, déstructurée, Williams adapte le *Dies irae* aux besoins narratifs audiovisuels sans toutefois le vider de ses dimensions symboliques initiales. Le célèbre motif évoque alors la mort (comme on peut s'y attendre), mais aussi la culpabilité et le jugement. **Chloé Huvet** se penche, quant à elle, sur l'orchestration de la dernière trilogie *Star Wars* (2015-2019) et les défis rencontrés par John Williams au regard du renouvellement profond de ses techniques d'écriture orchestrale opéré sur la prélogie (1999-2005) et en dehors de la franchise intergalactique. S'inscrivant dans un cadre très référentiel, entre nostalgie et clins d'œil, Williams concilie dans les *sequels* starwarsiens des héritages multiples tout en introduisant des procédés d'orchestration spécifiques, caractéristiques de l'évolution de son écriture orchestrale au cours de ces vingt dernières années. Enfin, **Jérôme Rossi** analyse l'écriture soliste de Williams à travers trois styles, qualifiés respectivement de *cantabile*, concertant et improvisateur, dans des œuvres majeures telles que *La Liste de Schindler* (Steven Spielberg, 1993), *Arrête-moi si tu peux* (Steven Spielberg, 2002), et *Mémoires d'une geisha* (Rob Marshall, 2005). À travers le concept de timbre-personnage, l'auteur démontre comment Williams, en associant des instruments solistes spécifiques à des personnages ou des thématiques narratives, parvient également à évoquer des sphères culturelles et géographiques.

- 3 La seconde partie est consacrée aux « **Explorations musicales de l'enfance** » par Williams. **Magdalena Kempna-Pieniążek et Bogumiła Mika** présentent la manière dont Williams, dans *E.T., l'extra-terrestre* (Steven Spielberg, 1982) et *Rencontres du troisième type* (Steven Spielberg, 1977), suggère un regard enfantin par de courts motifs et des harmonies évoquant l'étonnement et la magie, et parvient ainsi à offrir aux spectateurs adultes un retour symbolique à l'innocence de l'enfance. Le travail du compositeur dialogue avec des visions nostalgiques, renforçant la perspective enfantine (*child gaze*) dans des récits souvent écrits et réalisés par des adultes. Cette exploration est poursuivie par **Jacob Friedman**, qui souligne, à travers les représentations idylliques ou fantastiques de l'enfance dans des binômes formés par *Hook ou la Revanche du capitaine Crochet* (Hook, Steven Spielberg, 1991) et *Harry Potter à l'école des sorciers* (Chris Columbus, 2001), *L'Empire du soleil* (Steven Spielberg, 1987) et *Jurassic Park, Les Dents de la mer* (Steven Spielberg, 1975) et *A.I. Intelligence artificielle* (Steven Spielberg, 2001), que Williams associe l'enfance à un espace émotionnel préservé, marqué par des harmonies accessibles, reconnaissables et des mélodies conjointes. Face à la perte de la naïveté propre à l'enfance, aux conflits et aux deuils, ces scènes représentent des refuges qui s'opposent de façon symbolique aux éléments plus sombres des films. Le troisième texte de la section, de **Stefan Swanson**, étudie plus en profondeur *A.I.* et

le thème de l'enfance à travers l'opposition entre humanité et intelligence artificielle. Utilisés en contraste constant, les motifs romantiques (humains) et répétitifs (robots) permettent à Williams d'exprimer la tension entre les personnages, notamment David, l'enfant-*méca*, et Monica, sa mère adoptive humaine. Mettant l'accent sur l'ambiguïté et le déséquilibre des interactions entre les protagonistes, la partition parvient ainsi à évoquer un conflit sous-jacent en multipliant les influences stylistiques variées.

- 4 **Tristan Paré-Morin** ouvre la dernière section, « **De la salle de concert aux stades olympiques** », en s'attachant à l'analyse des arrangements pour piano des œuvres de Williams, qui s'inscrivent dans la tradition historique de la transcription orchestrale. On peut concevoir la visée de ces arrangements comme triple : développer l'accessibilité de la musique de Williams aux amateurs, favoriser son interprétation dans des contextes académiques ou de concert et mettre au jour certains procédés de composition (notamment thématiques et harmoniques) qui sont parfois occultés dans les partitions originales. Avec l'article d'**Emilio Audissino**, c'est la carrière de chef d'orchestre de Williams qui est placée au cœur de la réflexion. À travers sa direction du Boston Pops, Williams opère une véritable transformation des concerts symphoniques en intégrant des musiques de film dans des programmes variés. Servi par la double compétence de Williams, le répertoire cinématographique accède ainsi à une légitimité artistique, tout en ouvrant la scène symphonique à de nouveaux publics. Enfin, **Yann Descamps** aborde une autre facette de la musique de Williams à travers ses fanfares olympiques, *Olympic Fanfare and Theme* (1984), *Summon the Heroes* (1996) et *Call of the Champions* (2002), qui entendent traduire les idéaux sportifs et mythologiques des Jeux olympiques. Williams y sublime le corps et l'esprit des athlètes, inscrivant leur performance dans un récit universel et intemporel, où musique et sport convergent pour célébrer les valeurs d'unité et de dépassement de soi.
- 5 L'ensemble de ce double numéro entend offrir des perspectives renouvelées sur John Williams, en parcourant les différentes modalités d'héritages et de postérités, puis les écritures, imaginaires et circulations au-delà de l'écran d'une œuvre singulièrement vaste et qui embrasse des styles extrêmement variés. Loin de se poser comme définitif, le jalon posé par ces « Perspectives nouvelles » appelle à poursuivre l'analyse et l'exploration – volontiers interdisciplinaires – d'une figure majeure dont l'influence continue de façonner les représentations sonores et les styles musico-filmiques d'aujourd'hui.
- 6 Nos ultimes remerciements reviennent à Jason Julliot et Jérémy Michot qui, à la direction de publication, à la rédaction et au secrétariat d'édition d'*Émergences*, démontrent chaque jour que la recherche peut être chaleureuse, exigeante, en ligne et en accès libre.

À PROPOS DES AUTEUR·RICES

Chloé Huvet

Chloé Huvet est maître de conférences en musicologie à l'université d'Évry Paris-Saclay (laboratoire RASM-CHCSC) et membre junior de l'Institut Universitaire de France. Cofondatrice et coordinatrice du groupe de recherche collective ELMEC (Étude des langages musico-sonores à l'écran) avec la Société française de musicologie, elle consacre ses recherches aux rapports entre musique, sons et images dans le cinéma hollywoodien contemporain. Autrice de *Composer pour l'image à l'ère numérique. Star Wars, d'une trilogie à l'autre* (Vrin, 2022) distingué par la Sélection du Prix du livre France Musique-Claude Samuel 2023, elle a notamment dirigé l'ouvrage *Ennio Morricone. Et pour quelques notes de plus...* (Éditions universitaires de Dijon, 2022) et codirigé *Errances et angoisses du troisième type : à l'écoute des bandes-son de science-fiction* (avec Cécile Carayol, Le Visage Vert, 2024).

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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.

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“Remembering Petticoat Lane,” Revisited: Themes, Topics, and Codes in the Music of *Jurassic Park*

« Remembering Petticoat Lane » : thèmes, topiques et codes dans la musique de *Jurassic Park*

Frank Lehman

Keywords: Williams (John), *Jurassic Park*, leitmotif, underscore, nostalgia

Mots clés : Williams (John), *Jurassic Park*, leitmotiv, *underscore*, nostalgie

ABSTRACT

While *Jurassic Park*'s musical legacy is dominated by its iconic “Main” and “Adventure” themes, much of the soundtrack is more atmospheric, dealing with subtler emotions and trading in more sophisticated, less overtly melodic compositional techniques. This article redirects attention to a brief but revealing stretch of quiet underscore: the celesta-inflected pairing of “A Tree for My Bed” and “Remembering Petticoat Lane” midway through the film. Through topical, harmonic, and motivic analysis, I show how these cues form a reflective interlude that negotiates wonder, nostalgia, illusion, and the film's self-critical stance toward spectacle. Channeling on the berceuse, bagatelle, and music-box topics, Williams shapes a delicate musical oasis, one whose apparent athematicism proves deceptive: “Petticoat Lane” is shot through with subtle permutations of the score's “Carnivore” Motif, linking Hammond's reverie to the film's underlying anxieties about control and creation. I close by considering what this scene reveals about the limits of motivicist analysis and the value of treating non-thematic underscore as analytically and interpretively central.

RÉSUMÉ

Si l'héritage musical de *Jurassic Park* est dominé par ses thèmes iconiques (« Main Theme », « Adventure Theme »), une grande partie de la bande originale se révèle plus atmosphérique, porteuse d'émotions plus subtiles et fondée sur des techniques compositionnelles plus sophistiquées et moins ouvertement mélodiques. Cet article s'intéresse particulièrement à un passage calme en *underscore*, court mais révélateur : le diptyque marqué par le célesta, « A Tree for My Bed » et « Remembering Petticoat Lane », au milieu du film. Par une analyse topique, harmonique et motivique, je montre comment ces deux *cues* constituent une parenthèse réflexive qui conjuguent émerveillement, nostalgie, illusion et position autocritique du film envers le spectacle. En mobilisant les topoï de la berceuse, de la bagatelle et de la boîte à musique, Williams façonne une oasis sonore délicate dont l'apparente athématicité s'avère trompeuse : « Petticoat Lane » est traversé de permutations subtiles du motif « Carnivore », reliant la rêverie de Hammond aux anxiétés profondes du film quant au contrôle et à la création. Je conclus en examinant ce que cette scène révèle des limites de l'analyse motivique et de la valeur d'une approche qui traite l'*underscore* non thématique comme un élément central de l'analyse et de l'interprétation.

- 1 Thirty years after its premiere in 1993, *Jurassic Park* stands firmly in the canon of great blockbuster films. Steven Spielberg's creature feature represents a true watershed in Hollywood's visual vocabulary. In today's CG-saturated Hollywood landscape, it is too easy to forget just how historic were the film's advances in computer-generated imagery, and how aptly monumental the end of those advances—nothing short of the resurrection of a menagerie of long-extinct, never-before-seen colossi. Released six months before *Schindler's List*, *Jurassic Park* contributed to something of an *annus mirabilis* for Spielberg, a year of unprecedented commercial and critical success after a handful of critical misfires in the previous years (*Always* in 1989, *Hook* in 1991). The movie's cultural imprint today remains, deep and reverberant as the footfall of its most celebrated character, Tyrannosaurus Rex.
- 2 John Williams's score, at the time his then thirteenth in collaboration with Spielberg, is no less well-regarded. While overshadowed in the year of its release by *Schindler's List* (which understandably and deservedly garnered more sales, awards, and general critical goodwill), *Jurassic Park*'s music remains a fixed and beloved component of the broader "Jurassic imaginary" that persists to this day. If the existence of recent think-pieces in outlets like *GQ*, *NPR*, and—not to be underestimated as a source of deep musical discourse—YouTube are any indication, Williams's colorful symphonic score retains a powerful fascination thirty years on.¹

1. See, for example, "The Best Part of Jurassic Park Is Its Music" on GQ.com (Rivera 2018), "The Theme to 'Jurassic Park' Hasn't Aged A Day" on NPR (Greiving 2022), and "Why Jurassic Park's Music is So Powerful" on the YouTube channel *Listening In* (Martin 2021).

3 At the center of *Jurassic Park*'s musical reception history is its theme. Or, rather, its *themes*. What is frequently referred to as the "Theme to Jurassic Park" is in actuality a concert suite arranged by the composer in 1993 and subsequently published by Hal Leonard in the *Williams Signature Edition* series. This piece is effectively a musical diptych. The suite's first half presents an extended version of the hymn-like MAIN THEME, drawn from the scene in which the protagonists first witness the Brachiosaurus early in the movie ("The Dinosaurs," with the cue designation 3m2). **Figure 1a** shows the opening (mm. 8–11) of this melody, assuredly one of Williams's most instantly recognizable.

4 Following the presentation of the MAIN THEME comes a modulatory transition (mm. 36–46 of the suite) based on a subsidiary, more lyrical idea heard in only one cue (14m2, "Leaving the Island"). From there, the suite launches into a rendition of the score's brassy and harmonically wide-ranging ADVENTURE THEME (**Figure 1b**), its fifty-odd measures imported with minimal alteration from the helicopter arrival sequence (2m3, "To the Island").² Filling in the edges of the arrangement (not shown) are a short preamble (mm. 1–7) centering on a four-note solo horn motto faintly connected to the score's CARNIVORE MOTIF (much more on this later), and a brassy climax and codetta drawn from the "End Credits" plus the conclusion of "T-Rex to the Rescue" (14m1).

2. In the score proper, the MAIN THEME only appears in one other cue, 9m3 ("A Tree for My Bed"), to be inspected closely in this essay. The ADVENTURE THEME is slightly more common, occurring definitively in 2m3 ("To the Island"), referenced in 2m3/3m1 [Untitled], 3m3 ("The Entrance of the Park"), 5m1 ("The History Lesson"), 5m2 ("Jurassic Park Gate"), 11m2 ("Preparing to Meet the Monster"), and at several key junctures in 14m2 ("T-Rex to the Rescue").

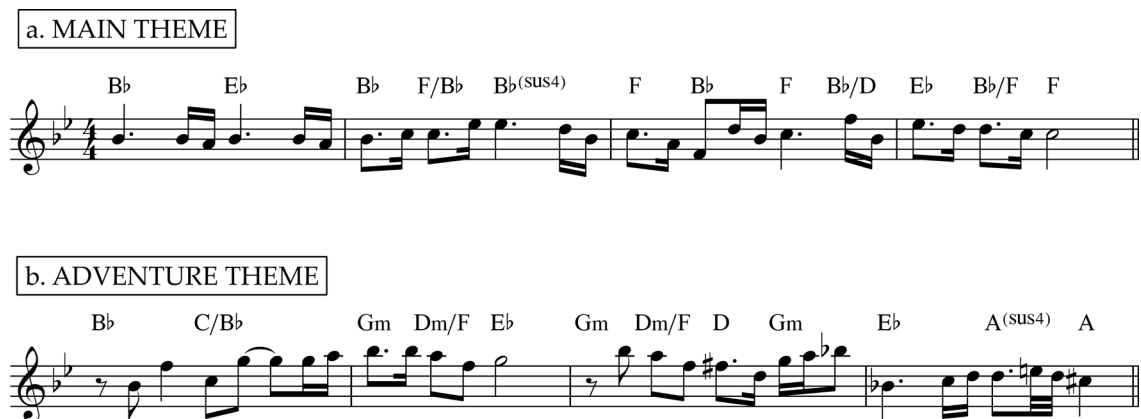


FIGURE 1
Jurassic Park, transcription of melodies featured in "Theme from *Jurassic Park*."

a. MAIN THEME. Film (16:37), OST Track 4 (05:07),
b. ADVENTURE THEME. Film (20:23), OST Track 4 (01:25).

5 Unlike most other post-*Jaws* soundtracks by Williams, from which he generally extracted multiple contrasting stand-alone arrangements, this "Theme from Jurassic Park" was the sole representative of the score prepared and conducted by the composer for concert use. Williams was

also curiously hesitant to revisit much of the material from *Jurassic Park* in its 1997 sequel, *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* (Steven Spielberg). A remarkable score in its own right, albeit far less iconic, *The Lost World* is very much its own musical animal: it makes only sporadic citations of the ADVENTURE THEME, hosts a single cue based on the CARNIVORE MOTIF, and treats the audience to a rather perfunctory replaying of the MAIN THEME at the movie's conclusion.³ Indeed, it is this "Theme from *Jurassic Park*" that enjoyed a surprising resurgence in interest in 2015, during the build-up to *Jurassic World* (Colin Trevorrow, 2015), when it clawed its way back to the top ten—admittedly in the humble domain of streaming instrumental tracks on Spotify.⁴ Nevertheless, this upswing in popularity was an achievement noteworthy enough to garner several articles in various newspapers and trade magazines (Maloney 2015; Trust 2015). Even with an unsteady dissemination following the original film, the noble and nostalgic melodic pair of the MAIN and ADVENTURE themes is undoubtedly what comes to mind for most who recall what *Jurassic Park* "sounded like."

6 Musical canons are, of course, selective and reductive by their very nature. But few cases in the canon of film music—or film musicology—are so misleadingly selective or reductive as the case of *Jurassic Park*. The dominance of the score's "Theme From" has led to a near-total neglect of the vast majority of the actual soundtrack, shockingly little of which is based on those two famous melodies. As a result, appreciation of Williams's actual achievement has been barely recognized outside of a few small insider fan communities, and has been oddly neglected in the John Williams studies literature besides a single, highly perceptive analysis by Chloé Huvet (2014).⁵ Missing from the concert suite, rousing as it is, is any suggestion that the bulk of the *Jurassic Park* score is *not* so melodious. Indeed, the primary theme itself only occurs three times in the movie, albeit in admittedly famous scenes! Rather, the overall soundtrack is at turns atmospheric, horrific, and pulse-quickeningly exciting. This less melodious material is less accessible for concert or billboard purposes (and less iconic for nostalgia-generating ones), but altogether more illustrative of Williams's technical mastery—in particular his unique alchemy of twentieth-century modernist ingredients and profoundly retrospective, romanticizing musical idioms.

7 Recent contributions to John Williams studies have helped direct analytical attention towards less strictly melodic matters.⁶ Nevertheless, there remains a strong emphasis in the study of this composer—and film music theory as a whole—on theme (or leitmotif) as a fixed object, as opposed to an active, evolutionary agent within the processes of dramatic underscore.⁷ This essay is offered as something of a corrective, if a provisional one: to better our understanding of the *Jurassic Park* score, and Williams's

3. *The Lost World* briefly invokes the ADVENTURE THEME in the following cues: "Revealing the Plan" (2m2), "After the Fall" (10m3/11m1), "Monster on the Loose" (12m5), and "A Neighborhood Visitor" (13m1). The CARNIVORE MOTIF reappears only in "Reading the Map" (8m3), and the MAIN THEME in "The Saving Dart" (14m2).

4. Michael Giacchino's music for the quasi-reboot *Jurassic World* in the 2010s both cites and reworks Williams's established melodies in new contexts, albeit with very few overt presentations of the big two themes. Don Davis, in his underrated score for *Jurassic Park III* (Joe Johnston, 2001), is both more liberal in his quotes of those iconic themes, and much more thorough in his assimilation of Williams's tonal and orchestral idiom from the original.

5. As with all things John Williams, this score has been plumbed *extensively* on the long-standing aficionado website JWfan.com, in particular on its persistently active message boards, with over 150 separate threads and thousands of individual posts on this score alone.

6. Notable examples include Schneller (2014), Kmet (2018), Sapiro (2018), and Huvet (2022).

7. Within screen music theory broadly, a set of recent projects suggest this theme-fixation is finally beginning to dissipate. See, for example, Yorgason (2020) on credits and logo music and Murphy (2023) on harmonic progressions. See also the various essays in Lehman (2024), *Film Music Analysis. Studying the Score*, that do not take themes as their central object of investigation: Oden on timbre, Motazedian on key, Lofthouse on form, Eaton on tempo, Powell on meter, and especially Buhler on affective modes of film underscore.

art more generally, I will draw attention to precisely those corners of the soundtrack that are *not* defined by the aforementioned “big two” themes that have so dominated discourse and reception of this musical text.⁸

- 8 My central case study is a pair of cues, “A Tree for My Bed” and “Remembering Petticoat Lane.” The latter is a “one-cue wonder”: a discrete span of film music, which (on first glance at least) is athematic and without anticipation or corroboration elsewhere in the score. “Petticoat Lane” (10m1) is set apart from the rest of the *Jurassic Park* soundscape both in its eschewal of already-established leitmotifs and its dissimilarity in tone from either the majestic materials (over)represented in the suite, or the more typical suspense and action underscore that supports the bulk of the film.⁹ It comes paired with “A Tree for My Bed” (9m3), with which “Petticoat Lane” is almost contiguous. That cue *does* foreground a recurrent melody—the MAIN THEME—though in a way that reveals interesting new layers of meaning, rather than merely replicating the simplistic awe and splendor of its more famous guises. Together, these two cues form a larger sequence that might be called *Jurassic Park’s celesta interlude*, a musical refuge that foregrounds the instrument’s unique timbre and draws from its rich array of extramusical codes and emotional resonances.
- 9 Beyond its singularity within the melodic and timbral soundscape of *Jurassic Park*, the celesta interlude (01:21:43–01:28:29) is an attractive subject for music analysis for two reasons. First are the sequence’s complex and, for a blockbuster of this sort, *subtle* themes. I mean “theme” not in the musical sense, but rather as an interpretive issue or narrative concern. The interlude thematizes the interlinked affects of wonderment and nostalgia, elements at the very core of Williams’s and Spielberg’s aesthetic. In a less obvious but no less potent way, “Petticoat Lane” also thematizes issues of commerce, illusion, and even the ideology of entertainment itself.
- 10 The second commending feature is the fact that the celesta interlude comprises a span of *quiet* dialogue underscore. That such an oasis of calm music occurs within a soundtrack that is, for long stretches, written at an ear-shredding *forte*, is remarkable in itself. Focusing on this span of low-key music thus fills an additional lacuna in John Williams studies. When not focused on flashy recurring themes, analytical attention has naturally tended to fall on loud and foregrounded cues like action set-pieces or love scenes—music that, by the composer’s own admission, is often in something of a competitive relationship with other demands on the audience’s attentional bandwidth, especially sonic (think roars, screeches, stomps, and so on). This is at the expense of understanding the delicacy of Williams’s quieter moments, a topic made somewhat more difficult to broach from a scholarly perspective because the composer himself rarely speaks to his process with respect to non-thematic, self-effacing

8. By emphasizing the score *Jurassic Park*, I do not wish to downplay the enormous significance of the other sonic elements of the film. The movie’s sound design is every bit as iconic as Williams’s orchestral contribution—and in some cases, like the footfalls of the T-Rex, “musical” in both conception and effect. For a detailed investigation into *Jurassic Park’s* overall soundscape, including insight on the interaction of non-diegetic musical score and diegetic sound design, see Heidi Wilkins’s (2014) essay “Steven Spielberg’s *Jurassic Park*. Sounding Dinosaurs.”

9. Although Williams wrote “Petticoat Lane” to accompany just one scene, a segment is repurposed (“tracked”) at the end of the film, accompanying a pensive and regretful close-up on Hammond. Though unintended by the composer, the poetic aptness of this splice will become apparent once we unpack the cue. Huvet (2014, 34) writes compellingly of this moment’s rueful pregnancy, with the tracked cue suggesting a shattering of the dream of *Jurassic Park* earlier expressed by Hammond: “The first time this music played, it accompanied John Hammond expressing unwavering faith in the park’s potential for technical improvement. Here, it starts in sync with a close-up of a mud-splattered car door bearing the park’s logo—a stark symbol of John’s dream falling apart. The reprise of the ‘Remembering Petticoat Lane’ theme thus marks the reversal that unfolds in the film’s final act.” (“Lors de sa première occurrence, cette musique intervenait lorsque John Hammond exprimait une foi inébranlable en la possibilité d’une amélioration technique du parc. Ici, elle débute en synchronisation avec le gros plan sur la portière à l’effigie du parc, souillée par des éclaboussures de boue, symbolisant l’effondrement du rêve de John.”)

dialogic underscoring. Granted, Williams may be at his most memorable with big set-pieces and broad themes. But what makes him a master *film* composer is his sheer musical emotional intelligence, his intuition for when to pull back, when to insinuate, ruminate, to gently stir feelings or memories—all without drawing attention to the score as such—or, as the celesta interlude demonstrates, ever compromising technical rigor or musicality for which the composer is so admired within the industry.

La reprise du segment musical de 'Remembering Petticoat Lane' emblématise alors le renversement opéré au cours de la dernière partie du film.”)

- 11 Close inspection of “A Tree for My Bed” and “Petticoat Lane” will lead us down a number of interpretive avenues. After a quick summary of the sequence as a formal unit, we will consider the self-reflexive, even self-critical, quality of Hammond’s monologue and the peculiar subjectivity being represented through its accompanying music. This will lead to an examination of three style topics—the berceuse, the bagatelle, and the music box—that infuse both cues and provide stylistic continuity with other musical works both within and outside Williams’s oeuvre. The most music-analytically intensive portion of the article follows, re-associating the ostensibly standalone “Petticoat Lane” with the rest of the *Jurassic Park* score, through its embedding of the pervasive (and also seldom discussed) CARNIVORE MOTIF. While edifying as a purely formal exercise, insofar as it demonstrates the motivic economy and inventiveness in Williams’s underscore, the analysis is motivated by a more hermeneutic concern, one which strengthens and complicates the self-reflexive reading proffered at the beginning of the analysis. A somewhat more rhapsodic conclusion rounds off the essay, in which we consider the nature of musical codes and consider the responsibilities of analyzing the less-obviously thematic aspects of John Williams’s art.

Seeking sanctuary

- 12 Two-thirds of the way through the action-packed runtime of *Jurassic Park*, there is a seven-minute oasis of quiet, celesta-filled calm. Having barely survived the jaws of T-Rex, Alan Grant (Sam Neill) and the kids Timmy and Lex (Joseph Mazzello and Ariana Richards) retire to the jungle canopy to rest and recover. Ellie Sattler (Laura Dern), fresh from her own close call with the surprisingly fleet-footed beast, heads to the park’s cafeteria to find John Hammond (Richard Attenborough), alone with his thoughts. These two paired scenes are where the movie catches its breath. The characters find, if briefly, sanctuary from the carnage surrounding them. This occurs in terms both spatial (in an unreachable treetop; in the proactive arms of an adult) and psychological (under a parental figure’s watchful eye; in gustatory pleasure; in the throes of nostalgia).

- 13 The first scene sees Grant, the erstwhile child-hater, assuming the role of surrogate father to the traumatized Lex and Tim. From their arboreal perch, Grant indulges in some sonic communing with the herbivorous—if still intimidating—sauropods dining in their midst. Once this serenade concludes, the “A Tree for My Bed” cue gently emerges. As the kids nestle into Grant’s embrace, he offers them both the individualized comfort they need: humoring Tim’s bad but tension-puncturing jokes, and promising to stay up all night to watch over Lex. Before drifting off, Lex asks Grant, “What will you and Ellie do now if you don’t have to dig up dinosaur bones anymore?” Grant answers, “I don’t know, I guess. Guess we’ll just have to evolve too.” The scene’s melancholic concluding shot is an obvious but elegant visualization of character growth: Grant tosses away the fossilized raptor claw he has held onto like a talisman. The claw, previously an emblem of his inflexibility and dedication to a now-obsolete profession (and, more symbolically, his lack of parental instincts) is now just deadweight. Grant has far more important things to care about.
- 14 “A Tree for My Bed” continues, bringing a shift of scene to the visitor center, with a slow and loving pan over Jurassic Park-branded toys and merchandise. One might think this would be an astonishingly self-undermining juxtaposition of genuine sentiment with almost sacralized treatment of commercial merchandise, were it not presented with such earnestness!¹⁰ As it happens, that very earnestness is discreetly challenged in the exchange to come. Sattler, spying Hammond alone, eating a cup of melting ice cream, offers him an update on Ian Malcolm’s (Jeff Goldblum) recovery. A short gulf of un-scored sound separates the end of “Tree for My Bed” and “Petticoat Lane.” The latter cue commences as soon as Hammond begins reminiscing on his early career, when he was a much more modest species of showman. As it forms the textual crux of the analysis in this chapter, the whole exchange is worth reproducing.

10. Lester Friedman (2006, 134) notes that this merchandise shot is a microcosm of the movie’s ambivalent self-reflexivity: “one cannot be certain if [Spielberg] means this as an ironic comment on our commodified culture or a sly advertisement: is it a Marxian critique or a spot on the Home Shopping Network?”

Dialogue Between Hammond and Sattler

Hammond: You know the first attraction I ever built when I came down south from Scotland? Was a Flea Circus, Petticoat Lane. Really quite wonderful. We had a wee trapeze, uh, a merry-go... carou... carousel. And a seesaw. They all moved—motorized, of course. But people would swear they could see the fleas. “Oh I see the fleas, mummy! Can’t you see the fleas?” Clown fleas, and high-wire fleas, and fleas on parade. [Pauses] But this place... I wanted to show them something that wasn’t an illusion. Something real. Something they could see and touch. An aim not devoid of merit.

Sattler: But you can’t think through this one, John, you have to feel it.

Hammond: [Chuckles]. You're right, you're absolutely right. Hiring Nedry was a mistake, that's obvious. We're over dependent on automation, I can see that now. Now the next time everything's correctable.

Sattler: John...

Hammond: Creation is an act of sheer will. Next time it will be flawless.

Sattler: It's still the flea circus. It's all an illusion.

Hammond: When we have control...

Sattler: You never had control! That's the illusion! I was overwhelmed by the power of this place. But I made a mistake too! I didn't have enough respect for that power, and it's out now. The only thing that matters now are the people we love. Alan, Lex, and Tim. John—And they're out there where people are dying... [Pause to wipe tears.] So... [Reaches for ice cream]. It's good...

Hammond: Spared no expense...

- 15 The celesta interlude concludes with a scene transition back to Grant's treetop, now bathed in morning's light. The end of Williams's "Petticoat" overlaps with the onset of the next cue, "My Friend, the Brachiosaurus" (10m2). This piece begins with a solo French horn intoning a pacified variant of the CARNIVORE MOTIF before launching into more luscious, quasi-impressionistic music for an up-close encounter with one of the gigantic leaf-eaters.
- 16 Credit is due to Spielberg and his screenwriter David Koepp for this sequence. The two scenes conjoined by the celesta interlude make up one of the more thoughtful ruminations on the responsibilities of art and the power—and risks—of fantasy, among many in Spielberg's filmography. Truthfully, the scene-pair is rather "on the nose," in the sense that it renders explicit several themes that were previously only implied in the narrative: Grant's discarded raptor claw as a symbol of his out-of-date and unsympathetic mindset, Hammond's flea circus as a well-intentioned but equally-fake precursor to Jurassic Park, Sattler's reproach of Hammond's exploitative and inhumane reliance on technology. Sattler's accusation concerning the illusory, hubristic nature of human control has to it the makings of a more drastic critique, even if her character does not go so far as to explicitly implicate the theme park industry, or, more broadly, the whole entertainment industry under late capitalism. Still, with those shots of plush dinosaur toys and expensive Jurassic Park-branded desserts fresh in the filmgoer's mind, it is hard not to hear Sattler's criticism as

Spielberg and Koepp's way of implicating not just Jurassic Park the park, but *Jurassic Park* the film.¹¹

- 17 The celesta interlude is a musical character study, providing listeners a glimpse into Alan Grant's subjectivity, then Hammond and Sattler's in alternation. The empathic identification both cues elicit enables in turn a non-verbal point of access into the film's conversation with itself. Williams's music here reflects on the film overall, on its ethics, the illusory nature of spectacle, and the hollowness of the virtualized sublime. As argued by Constance Balides in her essay "Jurassic Post-Fordism," the "Petticoat" scene permits Sattler an almost-radical social analysis because at the end, the character endorses a basically conservative "family values" kind of solution to the ills represented by the park. Sattler refrains from challenging the underlying wonderment-for-profit system. Balides notes that "*Jurassic Park* foregrounds the presence of its own products, and in this moment of commercial self-reflexivity, makes its own merchandising economics explicit" (2000, 150). She goes on:

Curiously, while *Jurassic Park* celebrates its commercial success, it also critiques the theme park mentality as well as the entrepreneurial culture underpinning neoconservative ethics... In *Jurassic Park*, the ethical problem of the commercialization of science in the park is resolved by the ethics of the new familialism. The film negotiates its critique of Hammond's entrepreneurialism ("spared no expense") and overweening techno-hubris ("next time it will be flawless") by displacing ethics onto affect ("you can't think your way through this one, John, you have to feel it") and systemic critique onto personalist solutions ("the only thing that matters now are the people we love")... (Balides 2000, 155–156)

- 18 Balides's diagnosis, part of a larger analysis of film's self-implicating political economy, is persuasive. And, with only minimal adjustment it may be applied to Williams's score, as we shall see. There is an audacity to the sequence as a whole. Any tent-pole action film that takes a minutes-long break to pick apart its own ideological foundations—and unsightly inculcate its filmmakers and audiences alike!—is worth admiring. Perhaps, the sequence's ideology is strained, incoherent even, due to the film's mixed-messaging. But, as Balides rightly contends, these ideological fissures make the sequence, and the film as a whole, far more engaging for the audience than a didactically clear warning about this late-capitalistic systemic ills could ever be.
- 19 Regardless of its aesthetic coherence or political efficacy, there is a clear ideological strain conveyed through imagery and dialogue in this scene: a tension between admiration for and suspicion towards the Jurassic Park project. The cues that constitute the celesta interlude also replicate this anxiety, and arguably with less hedging, more emotional directness

11. David Koepp has spoken in several venues about the tension expressed within this scene—the most rewritten of the whole screenplay—in particular the odd balance it struck with its critique of commercialism sandwiched within an extravagantly commercialist film. In one interview, he recalls that "I was writing about these greedy people who are creating a fabulous theme park just so they can exploit all these dinosaurs and make silly little films and sell stupid plastic plates and things. And I'm writing it for a company [Universal Studios] that's eventually going to put this in their theme park and make these silly little films and sell stupid plastic plates. I was really chasing my tail there for a while trying to figure out who was virtuous in the whole scenario—and eventually gave up." (Quoted in Shay and Duncan 1993, 56). See also Koepp on the "shot that pans lovingly" over merchandise (Hibberd 2025) and on the many drafts of this sequence (Koepp 2022).

and honesty, than the screenplay itself. “Petticoat Lane” especially seems to strip away a layer or two of the artifice and manufactured sentiment central to the Jurassic Park project, be that feeling uncomplicated awe (such as heard in the ADVENTURE THEME) or fear (such as heard in any number of dissonant, frantic suspense cues). With these cues, by contrast, the filmgoer is offered a richly ambivalent, quiet nocturne in which Williams expresses a complex and ultimately irresolvable mix of regret, wonderment, and guilt.

20 While both cues are united by their celesta obbligato, an instrument whose associations we shall examine presently, it will serve first to inspect how the affective gestalt of the interlude is based on an important *tonal* contrast. “A Tree for My Bed” is completely diatonic: not a single pitch across its twenty-six measures belongs outside the governing D major scale. “Petticoat Lane” meanwhile is bristlingly chromatic, even though its primary theme is no less functional than its predecessor. (Its tortured middle section is a different matter, as we will see).

21 **Figure 2** displays the first seven measures of “A Tree for My Bed.” The opening five bars consist of a celesta solo based on silky two-voice counterpoint. This sets the berceuse-like tone of the whole cue before it launches into the film’s MAIN THEME (only the first two bars of which are rendered).

INTRO (Non-Thematic)
Children nestle up to Grant
♩=50
Celesta solo

Lex: "What are you and Ellie going to do now..."

MAIN THEME (Antecedent)
Grant: "I don't know, I guess. ..."
Tim: "What do you call a blind dinosaur?"
D(add2) D(sus₄) D(add2) A⁹(sus4) D(sus4)
Strs + Harp

FIGURE 2
Jurassic Park, “A Tree for My Bed,” transcription of first 7 measures.
Film (01:23:28), OST Track 10 (00:01).

- 22 Even its moments of dissonance—note the assorted added-note and suspended chords within the MAIN THEME—are diatonically referable. The celesta solo glances by non-consonant vertical intervals harmlessly, particularly in its opening sentence, whose various unprepared sevenths, ninths, and elevenths as often as not fall on strong beats. These glints of dissonance are indicated with asterisks in **Figure 2**. Without this bed of safe, entirely traditional harmony as an overture, the chromatic and restive “Remembering Petticoat Lane” would lose a great deal of its contrastive valence. “A Tree for My Bed,” in its guileless diatonicism, does not just serve the immediate needs of tucking Grant and the kids away in a cozy tonal bed; it provides an affective conduit into Hammond’s monologue, into his childlike mindset as the purveyor of (genuine) fakes and (mechanically reproducible) wonders.
- 23 On a larger scale, “A Tree for My Bed” consists of two rotations through the *Jurassic Park* MAIN THEME, which correspond to a pair of slow-moving camera shots. The first rotation accompanies a crane shot moving slowly away from the children, safely nestled in the arms of their reluctant guardian. The second, rendered in full in **Figure 3**, follows the aforementioned loving pan over the lunch boxes, stuffed dinos, and other crass park merchandise. After securely cadencing in its twenty-first measure, the cue concludes with a recollection of the opening celesta solo. As Sattler joins Hammond at the café table, Williams allows the cue to trail off on a pair of widely-spaced dyads (E4+C#5, F#4+E5) that rise over a wistful diatonic cluster in the strings (an inverted G-major13 sonority)—a hint of tensions still unresolved, but nevertheless still radiating major-mode warmth.
- 24 As noted earlier, the MAIN THEME is surprisingly infrequent within the runtime of *Jurassic Park*, making its extended airing in “A Tree for My Bed” all the more salient. The other two iterations come at similarly powerful moments. The first, famously, is disclosed as Sattler, Grant, and Malcolm—here functioning as audience surrogates—behold for the first time the dinosaurs by the lake (19:50). In that context, the wellspring for the concert suite mentioned earlier, the melody is offered almost like cinematic sacrament: a sublime hymn, replete with literal “oohs” and “ahhs” from a wordless chorus.¹² The variation offered in “Tree for My Bed,” by contrast, is domesticated into the least threatening, least sublime genre imaginable: a lullaby. The third iteration, which arrives at the very end of the film (01:58:06), blends timbral and affective elements of the first and second.¹³ In that guise, the MAIN THEME accompanies a visual echo of the tree-top scene, with Lex and Tim again safely sleeping on Grant’s shoulders as he and the rest of the survivors are elevated high above danger—now in a helicopter racing away from Isla Nublar. Beginning with a soft, solo piano rendition, the melody surges into a grand orchestral

12. Franchise-savvy viewers will recall Ian Malcolm’s line in the sequel: “yea, ‘ooh,’ ‘aah,’ that’s how it always starts; but then there’s running, screaming...”

13. This distinctively Spielbergian amalgamation of the sentimental and epic was noted by James Hoberman in a critical diagnosis of the director’s oeuvre: “In a sense, Spielberg synthesizes Disney and Hitchcock. Astoundingly attuned to mass-audience psychology, he is at once ruthlessly sadistic and cloyingly saccharine, a filmmaker who opened his first blockbuster by implicating the audience in an aquatic sex-murder committed by a giant serial-killer shark [*Jaws*, Steven Spielberg, 1975], and the only filmmaker since Disney who might sincerely employ “When You Wish Upon a Star” [the original closing music for *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, Steven Spielberg, 1977]. Naturally privileging sentiment above reason, Spielberg’s movies are shamelessly dependent on such cues” (Hoberman 2007). And what could be more cloying than the tinkling of a musical toy, playing a literal cradle song for sleeping children and their innocent playthings?

MAIN THEME (Antecedent)

Slow pan over JP-branded merchandise

16.4

D(add2)/A A7(sus4) D A7(sus4) D(sus4) D

Cel.

Flute + Eng. Horn

Hammond, Ellie come into view

19

Em/D F#m/D D(sus₄²) A7(sus4) D A7(sus4)

OUTRO (Non-Thematic)

Ellie moves to sit with Hammond

21

Cel. solo.

23

F#m/A Gmaj13 F#m/A D/G Gmaj13/D

+Strs.

FIGURE 3
Jurassic Park, “A Tree for My Bed,” transcription of final 10 measures.
Film (01:24:47), OST Track 10 (01:19).

rendition that ushers in the movie’s credits. Here, at the end, Williams effectively synthesizes the domestic and epic aspects of the theme.¹⁴

The Bagatelle, the Berceuse, and the Music Box

25 Several veins of dark irony only lightly suggested in “A Tree for My Bed” are mined in the subsequent “Petticoat” exchange. Put reductively, Spielberg, Koepp, and Williams are baiting the audience. First, they lure and console the filmgoer with sweets: imagery of home and hearth, heartwarming dialogue, thematically familiar music. Then, with the viewer’s defenses lowered, the filmmakers can steer them into discomfort—a

14. The degree to which Spielberg was successful in balancing sentimentalism and family-values style messaging with suspense and violence remains one of the film’s “problems.” W.J.T. Mitchell notes that “a family cannot be brought together by a film that is too violent for the children in it to see. Spielberg thought that the film would be too frightening for his own children.” (Mitchell, quoted in [Gordon 2008, 208](#)). Indeed, this is my own experience with the film: despite being dinosaur-obsessed as a nine-year-old, I was

tense confrontation of characters, a scratching at the film's ideological underpinnings, a haunted and at times keenly dissonant musical set-piece. It is in this respect that the guileless mood of "A Tree for My Bed" is strategic; a child's nightmare hits harder if they were lovingly tucked into bed beforehand. On its own, Williams's "Petticoat Lane" cue would be too much an outlier, detached from both the affective and thematic substance of the score as a whole. But with its beautiful, consoling predecessor introducing the musical terms (timbral, topical) and thematic stakes (affective, philosophical), the first half of the celesta interlude guides—or perhaps *lulls*—the filmgoer into Spielberg's moment of self-reflexivity and incipient social criticism.

prohibited by my parents from seeing the film in theaters at the time of its release. I turned to paratexts—collectible trading cards, television documentaries on the "Making of Jurassic Park" and, not so incidentally, the soundtrack, to direct my imagination.

- 26 In fact, a comparable strategy of *first lull, then challenge* is enacted at the level of cue construction in "Petticoat Lane." The piece is structured as a rounded binary form. **Figures 4a** through **4c** depict the three portions of this cue, along with annotations to indicate where each line of Sattler and Hammond's dialogue falls. The first paragraph (**4a**) presents a bittersweet but still reassuringly traditional and predictable celesta melody, the PETTICOAT THEME. It is followed by a much more discursive, often unnerving slice of musical prose (**4b**) wherein the celesta goes silent in favor of more plaintive sounds from solo winds and dark strings. The final four measures (**4c**) consist of a truncated recollection of the opening's tune. More than serving as a mere symmetrical bookend to the cue, these bars restore—or, more forcefully, reassert—balanced, harmonically functional *melody* as the primary driver of, and emotional bedrock underneath, the *Jurassic Park* score. Those final measures also ease the entry into the next cue, "My Friend the Brachiosaur." A variant of the film's opening four-note horn motto (also shown in **4c**) is another seeming throwaway detail that will turn out to be fairly significant in drawing the celesta interlude's motivic threads taut.
- 27 The PETTICOAT THEME treads a thin wire between outward plainness and inward sophistication. It is a simple—but by no means a simplistic tune—more world-weary than ingenuous, particularly by the standards of the "naïve" compositional tropes identified by Jacob Friedman (2025) that Williams applies to comparable cues involving memories of youth. Nearly every measure features a surprising octave displacement, a plangent leap, a chromatic alteration, or all three. **Figure 5** renders the theme in two ways. At the bottom of the diagram is a direct reproduction, with every melodic and harmonic interval indicated, and those that are dissonant (both in absolute and local, contextual terms) flagged with asterisks. The top of the diagram is a rhythmic reduction that displays the melody's essential structure.

The image displays a musical score for the film *Jurassic Park*, specifically the track "Petticoat Lane". The score is divided into three systems, each with a section label in a box (Bridge, B1, B2) and a measure number (15, 19, 24). Lyrics are provided in speech bubbles above the vocal lines. Instrument markings are placed within the musical staves.

System 1 (Bridge, measures 15-18):

- Measure 15: Hammond: "...not devoid of merit."
- Measure 16: Sattler: "But you can't think your way through this one John, you have to feel it."
- Measure 17: Hammond: "You're right, you're absolutely right!..."
- Measure 18: Sattler: "John..."
- Instrument markings: Hm, Vla, Vc.

System 2 (B1, measures 19-23):

- Measure 19: Hammond: "Creation is an act of sheer will."
- Measure 20: Sattler: "It's still the flea circus"
- Measure 21: Hammond: "When we have control..."
- Measure 22: Sattler: "You never had control! That's the illusion! I was overwhelmed by the power of this place!..."
- Measure 23: Sattler: "The only thing that matters now are the people we love..."
- Instrument markings: Cor, Ang, +Clar, +Bsn, Harp, Strs, Clar, Harp, Bsn.
- Chord markings: A(b6)/C#, N.C.

System 3 (B2, measures 24-28):

- Measure 24: Hammond: "The only thing that matters now are the people we love..."
- Measure 25: Hammond: "The only thing that matters now are the people we love..."
- Measure 26: Hammond: "The only thing that matters now are the people we love..."
- Measure 27: Hammond: "The only thing that matters now are the people we love..."
- Measure 28: Hammond: "The only thing that matters now are the people we love..."
- Instrument markings: Synth Strs, Harp, Clar, Bsn, Strs, Hm, Vla, Vc.
- Chord markings: F, Gb/Bb, Bbm/Db, Emaj13, E/D#, E/C.

FIGURE 4A
Jurassic Park, "Petticoat Lane," transcription of mm. 1–14.
Film (01:25:57), OST Track 12 (00:01).

Hammond: "...it was a flea circus..."

PETTICOAT THEME: DOUBLE PERIOD (Incomplete)

Lead-In **Antecedent**

♩=ca. 90 Synth Celesta

A1

Key: B♭ min

B♭m F7/A E♭m/G♭ C7/G F7(b9)

Strs. Cel. Harp

i V⁶ iv⁶ V³/V V

HC

Hammond: "They were... they were motorized of course..."

Consequent

6 B♭m D♭/A♭ F7/A F7 E♭m F7(b9) B♭m G♭m/B♭ B♭m

i III⁶ V⁶ V iv V i

IAC

Hammond: "...but this place. I wanted to show them something that wasn't an illusion."

Antecedent **Consequent (Truncated)**

10 B♭m F7/A E♭m⁶/G♭ C7/G F7(b9) B♭m B♭m⁶/A♭

Vlns. Vla Vc

i V iv⁶ V³/V V i i⁶

HC

FIGURE 4B
Jurassic Park, "Petticoat Lane," transcription of mm. 15–28.
Film (01:26:58), OST Track 12 (01:03).

Sattler: "So..."

Consequent (New)

Em(maj7)/B Em⁶/B F[♯]°/B B11(b9) E(omit3/5)

29 Celesta

Key: E min

A3

Celesta Harp Strs

Key: E min 14 = V⁶ V³

PAC

Overlaps with onset of 10m2 "My Friend the Brachiosaur"

CARNIVORE MOTIF/OPENING HORN CALL (Variant)

1 Fr. Horn

+Wws +Strs

...

FIGURE 4C
Jurassic Park, "Petticoat Lane" and "My Friend the Brachiosaurus," transcription of mm. 29–32, 1–4.
Film (01:26:10), OST Track 12 (02:19) and Track 8 (02:29).

2

Simplified

Horizontal Interval: d5 m2 m6 d10 m9 m3 M3 m7 M2 m2 M2 m2 m3 A4 m2

Original

Vertical Interval: P8 M7 M3 m3 m6 P8 M2 P5 m6 m6 M7 P8 M6 P8 m3 P4 m6 m7 M3 A4 d7 m2 M3 P4

Asterisk = dissonance

6

Simplified

Horizontal Interval: ibid d5 M6 M6 m2 m2 m2 M2 m2 m3 m2

Original

Vertical Interval: ibid P4 m7 M6 m7 m3 d4 P4 m3 A3 M3 P8 M6 P4 P5

FIGURE 5
Jurassic Park, "Petticoat Lane," underlying melodic and intervallic structure.

- 28 Several nice details emerge from this analysis. Note the infrequency with which vertical and horizontal dissonances coincide, despite the preponderance of unexpected pitches and odd contrapuntal configurations. Besides one convergence across the bar line of measures 1–2 (the horizontal d10 to d9, a vertical M2), Williams is studied in his avoidance of linear preparation/resolution of non-consonant sonorities. Note too the delicate mirroring of the theme's concluding phrase, which pivots on a melodic inversion (mm. 2–3: F4 to E♭5 versus mm. 6–7: E♭5 to G♭4). Many other such details could be singled out: the composing out of a chromatic double neighbor figure, the convoluted counterpoint in measure 7, the whiff of the minor flat submediant in measure 9. Collectively, these touches lend the PETTICOAT THEME an uncanny air, a sense upon hearing that one is not sure exactly how such a musical object is able to operate as seemingly smoothly as it does.
- 29 As noted, the “Petticoat” theme that appears in **Figures 4a** and **4c** has little in the way of obvious linkage with the rest of the *Jurassic Park* score. It is, however, exceptionally dense when it comes to *extratextual* references and resonances. Foremost is a trio of closely related style topics, which shall be considered in turn: the bagatelle, the berceuse, and the music box. The bagatelle topic consists of an instrumental melody of a distinctively “old country” cast. Not quite a folk song but possessed of a certain vernacular accessibility, a bagatelle is very likely conceived for a pianist of modest ability. Although it has precedents in music of the early eighteenth century ([Brown 2001](#)), the genre is closely associated with Beethoven, who wrote several Bagatelle sets and singletons, the most famous of which is undoubtedly *Für Elise*. Bagatelles are light and sentimental in tone, often in the minor mode, and colored with a few poignant chromatic pitches, tangy dissonances, or expressive leaps. Their harmonies are functional but amenable to enrichment, and typically articulated through broken or arpeggiated chords (especially as triplets). While not contrapuntally inactive *per se*, linear interest is subordinated to a clear projection of a tune. More important than any one structural quality, however, is the topic's essential affective *remoteness*: the bagatelle occupies a stylistic idiom that is both geographically foreign and somehow behind the times. It is affecting precisely because it is temporally and spatially displaced.
- 30 The bagatelle topic is seldom heard in Williams's output, though there are some manifest precedents for “Petticoat Lane.” The clearest of these is the love theme for *Monsignor* (Frank Perry, 1982), a melancholic and vaguely Italianate piece, in its own context strongly identified with a solo trumpet. This theme is itself probably indebted to Nina Rota's *Godfather* waltz (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972), perhaps cinema's most iconic “old-country” style melody. **Figure 6** displays the *Monsignor* tune in isolation,

while a secondary staff juxtaposes it against “Petticoat”: note the degree to which the openings of these themes align, like neat little mirrors of each other.

MONSIGNOR LOVE THEME: Antecedent

Consequent

Comparison with PETTICOAT THEME

FIGURE 6
Monsignor, transcription of the love theme and comparison
with *Jurassic Park*'s PETTICOAT THEME.

- 31 More common in Williams's output is the second major style topic active in the celesta interlude, the berceuse (alternatively lullaby, *Wiegenlied*). Defined by Kenneth Hamilton (2001) as “a gentle song intended for lulling young children to sleep,” trope-defining instances stem primarily from the nineteenth century, Chopin's op. 57 *Berceuse in D♭* being particularly important in codifying the genre's expressive and formal expectations. Those expectations include: keyboard texture, compound time signature, tonic pedal point, and, as Hamilton observes, “a ‘rocking’ accompaniment oscillating between chords I and V.”
- 32 Williams-composed cues that invoke this consoling and soporific genre tend to overlap with the next style topic and its bell-like timbres, but a few of the most prominent instances make use of an instrument other than the celesta. Nodding to the Romantic-era's instrument of choice for the berceuse, lullaby-like cues for piano may be found in the aforementioned finale from *Jurassic Park*, as well as *Stepmom* (Chris Columbus, 1998, “Always and Always”), *The BFG* (Steven Spielberg, 2016, “Finale”), *The Fabelmans* (Steven Spielberg, 2022, “Reverie”) and throughout *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence* (Steven Spielberg, 2001, “Reading Stories” and “The Reunion” especially). Two of Williams's finest berceuses are played by the harp, an instrument otherwise rarely exposed in Hollywood scores in an extended or soloistic capacity. These showcases are the exquisite “Bed Time

Stories” from *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (Steven Spielberg, 1982), where the harp takes up the score’s Friendship Theme; and the pseudo-diegetic “Fluffy’s Harp Lullaby” from *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (“*Sorcerer’s Stone*” in the United States, Chris Columbus, 2001), in which the instrument converses freely with an incongruous contrabassoon. Explicitly texted lullabies are uncommon, though several pieces from *Home Alone* (Chris Columbus, 1990) and *Hook* (Steven Spielberg, 1991) qualify, most plainly the leitmotif (and eventually diegetic song) “When You’re Alone” from the latter. As sung by the child Maggie (Amber Scott), this simple and sentimental tune proves capable of bringing a tear to the eye of even the most grizzled of pirates.¹⁵

- 33 The third style topic that animates the celesta interlude is the music box. Invoked implicitly in “A Tree for My Bed” but explicitly in “Petticoat Lane,” it is a musical symbol with vivid connotations and an extremely strong historical association with that specific, tinkling instrument.¹⁶ The music box-as-topic is more than just a vessel for the celesta timbre, however.¹⁷ The topos bears a particular *textural* character as well: a high tessitura and limited range; a simple but steady and non-rubato stream of note durations, especially through an Alberti-bass-style accompaniment. Similarly decoupled from the celesta timbre-as-such are matters of harmony (a simple progression, emphasizing tonic and dominant oscillations), and rhythm and meter (a preference for simple triple or compound duple meters, an elevated degree of figurational repetition).
- 34 With those structural markers in place, the music box topos conjures a host of expressive qualities, most notably childhood, domesticity, and intimacy. Additional connotations of wintertime, Christmas, magic, flight, dance, and play also attend the music-box topos in certain situations. The music box can also represent metonymically the idea of the “toy,” or more specifically, a mechanical plaything, a man-made object capable of automated but unnatural or artificial human action—perhaps a simple act of sound and musical production, perhaps something more.
- 35 Examples of music box topos, both literal and abstracted abound in Williams’s oeuvre.¹⁸ **Table 1** offers a (non-exhaustive) gallery of uses and their subject matter. Starting in the late 1980s, most performances of celesta-based cues were rendered not on an actual celesta but a custom-designed synth sound created and played by keyboardist Randy Kerber ([Caschetto 2022](#)), thus effecting yet another remove from the “real” thing. Not surprisingly, the dramatic content of the scenes bearing these solos consistently revolves around those connotations mentioned before, with childhood in particular being virtually obligatory. While beyond the scope of this essay, a close study of these examples would reveal many subtle gradations of feeling and technique, and even an

15. Considering Williams’s berceuses in this way reveals a recurrent interest in depicting *night* and *sleep* in the composer’s output, and not just in film. Though beyond the scope of this essay, consultation of some of his concert works, particularly the concluding movements of several concerti (e.g. the *Horn Concerto*’s “Nocturne”) would doubtless reveal an even wider web of references and resonances.

16. No discussion of the celesta can omit reference to Tchaikovsky’s enormously influential “Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairies” from *The Nutcracker* (1892), which virtually established the instrument as an orchestral resource overnight (though Chausson had written for the instrument four years prior). Williams employs the instrument extensively and in almost every period of his long career. His familiarity with the Tchaikovsky is strong and in some cases forms an intentionally transparent point of musical reference (as in *Home Alone*). Less explicit but still manifest allusions can be heard in celesta writing by Holst (*The Planets*, Mercury and Neptune especially) and Bartók (*Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta*), as well as the opening solo from Elmer Bernstein’s score for *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Robert Muligan, 1962).

17. For an in-depth treatment of the cinematic music box and its associations with childhood, particularly in *Edward Scissorhands* (Tim Burton, 1990) and *Home Alone*, see Dubowsky (2016, 201–206).

18. The music box topic is affiliated with a considerably more idiolectical device in Williams’s oeuvre: what might be called the crystalline topic, which shares the glassy or bell-like timbres of the music box but presents

Film	Cue(s)	Subjects
<i>Heidi</i>	"The Sleeping Child"	children, domesticity, nostalgia, lullaby
<i>Jaws</i>	"Father and Son"	children, domesticity
<i>The Witches of Eastwick</i>	"The Children's Carousel"	children, magic
<i>Empire of the Sun</i>	"Toy Planes, Home, and Hearth"	children, domesticity, lullaby
<i>Hook</i>	"The Arrival of Tink"	children, lullaby, magic, night, winter
<i>Home Alone 1, 2</i>	"Main Title"	children, Christmas, lullaby, night, winter
<i>Home Alone 2</i>	"Turtle Doves"	children, Christmas, winter
<i>JFK</i>	"Garrison Family Theme"	children, domesticity
<i>Jurassic Park 2</i>	"The Island's Voice"	children
<i>The Patriot</i>	"Saying Goodbye"	children, domesticity
<i>Harry Potter 1</i>	"Hedwig's Theme"	children, lullaby, magic, night, winter
<i>Harry Potter 1</i>	"Cast A Christmas Spell"	children, Christmas, magic, winter
<i>Minority Report</i>	"Last Scene With Crow"	children, nostalgia
<i>Catch Me If You Can</i>	"Empty"	domesticity
<i>Harry Potter 2</i>	"Harry and Dumbledore"	children, magic
<i>Harry Potter 3</i>	"Secrets of the Castle"	children, lullaby, magic, night, winter
<i>Harry Potter 3</i>	"Honeydukes"	children, Christmas, magic, winter
<i>Revenge of the Sith</i>	"Finale"	children, domesticity
<i>The Force Awakens</i>	"End Credits" (Ending)	nostalgia
<i>The BFG</i>	"Dream Country"	children, lullaby, magic, night
<i>The Last Jedi</i>	"Finale"	children, lullaby, nostalgia
<i>The Fabelmans</i>	"Reflections"	domesticity, nostalgia
<i>The Dial of Destiny</i>	"To Morocco"	children, night, nostalgia

TABLE 1
Additional examples of music box topoi in Williams's filmography.

assortment of sub-topoi (especially in the *Potter* franchise). This kind of diversity within one topical umbrella is to be expected from a composer with such a longstanding affinity for, and opportunity to experiment with, the celesta timbre.¹⁹

36 Of course, the music-box topos is not unique to Williams's output; it is both well-established and, in recent years, well-theorized in film music in general.²⁰ Allison Wentz observes that the timbre and texture of a music box are loaded with associations, not just with childhood and nostalgia, but a strange sort of inhumanity. These associations can be conjured in passages that explicitly utilize a celesta timbre or one of its cognates (glockenspiel, toy piano, etc.), but also in passages that employ those

them in a non-melodic, more rhythmically amorphous and pointillistic setting, somewhat akin to ambient music. In harmonic terms, crystalline cues tend to be highly non-functional, often consisting of slowly moving pandiatonic field rather than any traditional directed progressions. The celesta is a likely component of crystalline soundscapes, as well as various synth tones and pads, bell tree, Rhodes piano, harp, and wordless chorus. Examples stretch across

textural features to suggest or “sublimate” a music-box topic without the actual bell-like timbre. She observes that “mechanical instruments function more as toys than as instruments; they serve as markers of the past rather than placeholders for an absent performer... [The music box] creates a specific kind of musical work, the kind that requires no performer, no performance, and has no fallibility. It is perfect music—music without any sort of humanity. The music box is a spectacle of mechanical innovation.” (Wente 2013)

37 The defining feature of the music box is thus the disconnect between its comforting, humane purpose and the robotic and error-prone mechanization of its output. “But if the music box breaks down,” a skeptic in the mold of Ian Malcolm might say, “the ballerinas don’t eat the tourists.” True, though in many cases music-box topics are recruited to produce just exactly this kind of threat. Stan Link (2010) argues that it is the total anempathy (in Michel Chion’s sense) of the instrument that renders it so apt for scenes of horror, especially those in movies involving children. There are indeed instances of such perverse music boxes in Williams’s filmography—*Empire of the Sun* (Steven Spielberg, 1987), *The Witches of Eastwick* (George Miller, 1987), and *A.I.* host distortions of the topic, while certain celesta passages in *Star Wars: Episodes V – The Empire Strikes Back* (Irvin Kershner, 1980) and *Episode VI – Return of the Jedi* (Richard Marquand, 1983) associated with the Emperor channel some of the spookier pages of Bartók. A most instructive instance is in “The Island’s Voice” from *The Lost World*, where a soon-to-be attacked young girl gambols on a beach to abstracted music box figures, floating high above a queasily dissonant orchestral bed. However, in the original *Jurassic Park*, the music-box topic is a near-complete counterexample to Link’s grotesquely uninterruptible music boxes. This is the opposite of anempathy—it is music that is pro-empathetic, even *ultra*-empathetic with respect to the words spoken and feelings expressed by the onscreen characters.

38 As the dialogue annotations in **Figures 2** and **4a–c** illustrate, the celesta part in both “Tree for My Bed” and “Petticoat Lane” closely follows the emotional beats of the screenplay. The affective congruency of score, dialogue, and image is borne out as much in moments of absence of this music box topic as its presence. Note, for instance, how the celesta drops out from “Petticoat Lane’s” timbral palette precisely when Hammond’s wistful reverie is dragged into the present by Sattler. Or how, at the end of the same cue, the celesta-defined PETTICOAT THEME does not complete itself perfectly. What sort of music box is this, we might ask, which does not continue mindlessly once spun up, but whose sonic cessation is in *split-second* accordance with the emotional affect of its surroundings?

the composer’s entire career, including from *Pete and Tillie* “Bed Room Scene,” *Family Plot* (“The Mondrian Shot”), *Superman* (“Fortress of Solitude”), *SpaceCamp* (“Friends Forever”), *Heartbeeps* (“The Love Scene”), *Stanley and Iris* (“Entering the Library”), *Always* (“Pete in Heaven”), *Far and Away* (“Inside The Mansion”), *Seven Years in Tibet* (“Reflections”), *Stepmom* (“One Snowy Night”), *A.I.* (“Perfume”), *Attack of the Clones* (“Yoda and the Younglings”), and *The Terminal* (“The Fountain Scene”). Within *Jurassic Park* itself, the two egg-hatching cues, “Hatching Baby Raptor” and “Eggs in the Forest,” exemplify this composer-specific topos.

19. A strong precedent for “Petticoat Lane” outside Williams’s output is “Hushabye Mountain,” composed by Robert and Richard Sherman, a beautiful minor-mode-music box tune sung by Dick Van Dyke, a rather Hammond-like figure, in *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* (Ken Hughes, 1968). Interestingly, that same song occurs in a horrific diegetic context in *War of the Worlds* (Steven Spielberg, 2005), as a song Rachel distracts herself with while her father Ray kills the crazed Ogilvy, against which athematic fragments churn in Williams’s dissonant underscore. Thanks to Tom Schneller for bringing “Hushabye” to my attention.

20. A perusal of any number of silent-film anthologies (e.g. Rapée’s *Motion Picture Moods*, 1924) will reveal that the music box was a secure topic even during the very inception of cinematic scoring practices.

- 39 Naturally, the film itself offers a neat “pro-empathetic” explanation for the sonic comings and goings of the music box. In the first case, the transition into the B section, the celesta disappears just as Hammond states “we’re overdependent on automation, I can see that now.” The timbre is thus rather elegantly mapped onto the scene’s subtext: a wind-up mechanism (music box, mechanized flea circus) must necessarily stop at some time, so it might as well be when the illusion of a working project it accompanies itself breaks down.
- 40 A less literal but equally emotionally sensitive justification can be offered for the truncated A section with which the cue concludes. The theme has been subtly transformed, cast in a new light. Sattler and Hammond are in a different psychic place than at the beginning of this interlude, and so too is the audience. It is thus appropriate that Williams’s theme should be presented thus: fragmented, tonally displaced, faintly chromaticized, a sad recollection. Doubly sad, in fact, as the closing musical sentence feels like a necessary but external imposition of closure, when the viewer and characters alike know well that the wounds opened and examined during the previous 28 measures are not yet—and may never be—sealed.

Hidden Carnivores

- 41 Having detailed various topical facets of the celesta interlude, it is worth returning to the issue of thematic versus athematic underscoring. As shown, “Petticoat Lane” operates outside the referential network defined by the two memorable ideas developed in the “Theme from *Jurassic Park*.” However, to say the cue is completely divorced from the motivic substance of the score as a whole is too hasty. A different, more subtle type of thematic relationship hides within the cue, only peeking out briefly, but to considerable dramatic effect.
- 42 *Jurassic Park* is a score thick with strange and gnarly chords, from its first polychordal measure to its final, haunted cluster sonority.²¹ Quite a few of these pitch simultaneities have, if not full-blown *leit*-harmonic status, then hints of recurrence and development over the score’s runtime. And more than a few such chordal recollections occur in “Petticoat Lane.” **Figure 7** displays two such echoes. The F-major over G $\flat$ /B $\flat$ polychord that pulses uncomfortably in measures 23–24 finds a direct precedent in the F-major⁽⁶⁾ over G $\flat$ /B $\flat$ sonority from “Goat Bait”—a chord that leaves the listener in suspense as to whether T-Rex will appear to eat its restrained living meal. Both “Petticoat” and “Goat” chords in turn are indirect relatives of the opening title’s wash of F $\sharp$ |Em⁷. A second harmonic interrelationship is less harshly dissonant: the recurring B $\flat$ m⁶/F chord

21. For further information on and analysis of *Jurassic Park*’s rich tonal menagerie, see the “Gallery of Chords” section of the author’s “John Williams’s *Jurassic Park*: A Thematic Catalogue.”

in “Petticoat” is essentially just a lightly-enriched minor tonic chord, and has a clear, indeed *at-pitch* precedent in the opening sonority for “Ailing Triceratops.” There, the chord serves a similar tonal and affective function, initially heard as Bbm tonic, then, retroactively, a minor sub-dominant of F major.

FIGURE 7
Chords in “Petticoat Lane” heard elsewhere in *Jurassic Park*.

- 43 In their inconspicuous way, these and other recurrent verticalities help interrelate many of *Jurassic Park*’s non-thematic cues. Their function is arguably more to provide an element of harmonic consistency across the score than to produce any strong dramatic or affective meaning. This is *not* the case, however, for the one patently *horizontal* motif that thus far has not featured in our discussion, and which proves decisive in “Petticoat Lane”: the CARNIVORE MOTIF. Also referred to as the “Danger” or “Raptor” motif, this four-note motto stalks throughout the *Jurassic Park* score, appearing far more often than either of the two “Main” themes and furnishing material for some of its scariest moments and biggest climaxes. **Figure 8** depicts its inaugural appearance, played with a marked degree “Otherness” by a shakuhachi, right after the aforementioned “Main Title” polychord.

FIGURE 8
Jurassic Park, CARNIVORE MOTIF in “Main Title” (mm. 5–6). Film (00:39), OST Track 1 (00:18).

- 44 For the most part, the CARNIVORE MOTIF's presence in "Petticoat Lane" is obscured. But during one moment, it does make a more overt appearance. Measures 15–18, described back in **Figure 4b** as a bridge into the more agitated B section, hold the key. As this seemingly nondescript music plays, Hammond finds himself reacting to Sattler's urge that he cannot "think" his way through his dilemma, only "feel it." We then see a stark change in his demeanor; no longer wistful or grandfatherly, he launches into a heated diatribe about control and creation. It is now clear: Hammond's hubris is inextricable from his childish view of the world, a reckless lack of maturity or self-insight being the ultimate force that endangered his guests. Against this realization, a quiet, elongated variant of that CARNIVORE MOTIF is heard, materializing from the remnants of the preempted Petticoat bagatelle. Williams thereby draws through music a connection between Hammond's recklessness and the carnage currently happening in the park.
- 45 Most iterations of the CARNIVORE MOTIF elsewhere in the *Jurassic Park* score are more assertive in their orchestration, more insistent in their articulation, often directly hailing the presence of a meat-eating dinosaur. In all cases, the motif has a cruelly curved contour, not so unlike a musical raptor claw. **Figure 9** offers a variety of analytical angles on this motif. Note that, in its standard form (here rendered as B-C-A $\flat$ -D), the motif is diatonically inadmissible. Those four pitches fit into no natural major or minor scale, and assimilate into a stable tonal setting only by the brute force of repetition or sustained pedal pitches. (In principle, the motif could emerge from the C harmonic minor scale, though no actual uses in *Jurassic Park* suggest such a context.) The motto is similarly difficult to squeeze into a commonly encountered chord, though Bdim^{7(♭9)} and D^{7(♭5)} can, with some finesse, host its pitch constituents.
- 46 Given its incompatibility within common scalar or functional routines, it is more appropriate to treat the CARNIVORE MOTIF as a pitch-class set—that is, a constellation of intervals subject to the kinds of manipulations one expects from free atonal music. Specifically, the pattern is a (0236) tetrachord, or Forte set [4-12]. Among the striking traits of this set is the fact that, within its tight bounds, it can project every interval class save the paradigmatically consonant perfect fourth/fifth. On occasion, Williams offers a slight variant, also described in **Figure 9**, that proceeds down by minor rather than major third between its second and third pitches. When stated with its canonical contour (i.e. B-C-A-E $\flat$), the result is a shrunken but strictly pitch-class-equivalent (0236) sonority.
- 47 Further contributing to the evocativeness of the CARNIVORE MOTIF are its various intra- and intertextual kin. These relatives are also depicted in **Figure 9**, along with their respective tonal implications. First is the

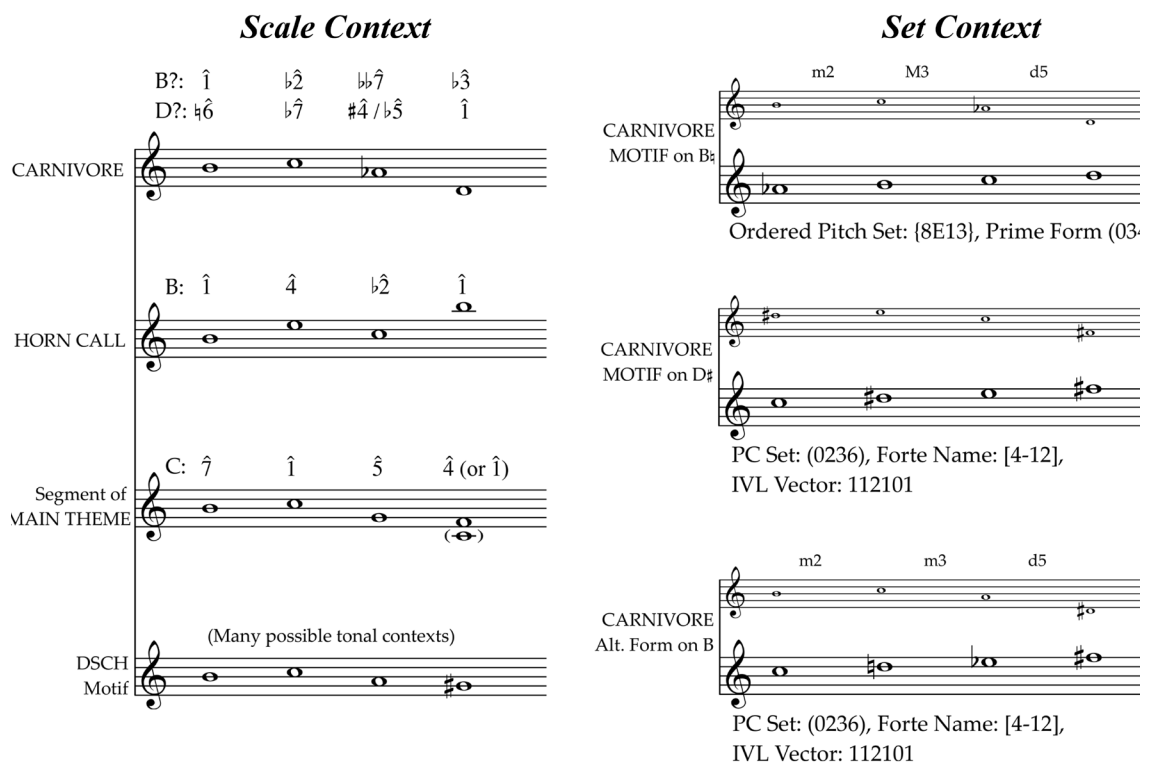


FIGURE 9

Jurassic Park, analytical angles on the CARNIVORE MOTIF.

horn call which opens the “Theme from Jurassic Park”—and, as we have seen, transitions from “Petticoat” into “My Friend, the Brachiosaur.” This tetrachord bears a passing—albeit diatonic—resemblance to the more chromatic CARNIVORE MOTIF. The same is true for the interior of the MAIN THEME itself. Admittedly, this B-C-G-F cell has a wildly different functional and phrase-formal setting, but at the same time an even more precisely matching up-down-down contour. And, outside of the realm of *Jurassic Park*, listeners familiar with the music of Shostakovich will hear an echo of that composer’s oft-recruited, comparably elastic musical signature (“DSCH”: D-E_b-C-B).²²

- 48 Despite its brevity (and a certain lack of singability), the CARNIVORE MOTIF is varied and developed thoroughly, insinuating itself into the score’s fabric to an extent extraordinary in John Williams’s output. A full accounting of the many guises of this particle is well beyond the scope of this essay, though a small gallery of instances will suffice to convey the ways in which this motivic talon sinks into the flesh of the score. **Figures 10a** and **10b** display the idea in two guises from the film’s climax. The first is an intensely dissonant five-voice “harmonization” of the motif. While the four chords that support this variant can be considered tertian in origin, they may also be accounted for on a more neutral intervallic basis, as

22. A considerably more obscure precedent may be found in Williams’s own oeuvre, in the cue “Appolini’s Decision” from *Monsignor*. Compare the CARNIVORE motif with the tetrachord that occurs throughout OST Track 8. It first appears as a simple diatonic idea in E major [B-C-A-F_#], but a minute into the cue, the motif takes on a more threatening guise when it is pitted against a C_# pedal.

two stacked minor sixths (e.g. A $\sharp$ 2+F $\sharp$ 3 and E4+C5) with an additional major seventh (A3) in the middle, creating a 5-28 set. **Figure 10b** stems from the final action cue “T-Rex Rescue,” during which T-Rex-*machina* appears out of nowhere to do battle with two raptors. At this moment, the CARNIVORE MOTIF achieves an apotheosis of sorts, appearing in triple counterpoint with itself, most prominently in the trumpets and at various levels of pitch identity and rhythmic displacement or distension in the horns and trombones.²³ Incredibly, this bravura passage was replaced in the final cut of the film with a clumsily tracked iteration of the ADVENTURE THEME, totally destroying the telic satisfaction coming from seeing the CARNIVORE MOTIF in its full actualized state.

23. The three last cues in *Jurassic Park* form a unit of over 300 measures of near-continuous transformation of the CARNIVORE MOTIF [“Into the Kitchen” (66 mm.), “March Past the Kitchen Utensils” (143 mm.) and “T-Rex Rescue” (125 mm.)], a span of concentrated “*thematiscarbeit*” rarely matched in Williams’s output. See Lehman “Thematic Catalogue” for additional information on this aggressively developed idea.

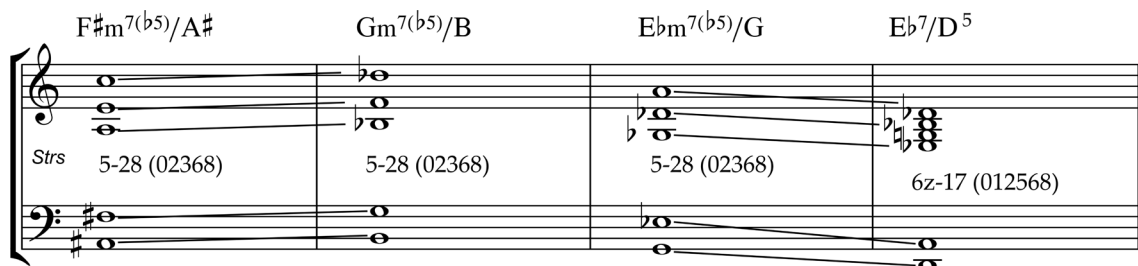


FIGURE 10A
Jurassic Park, CARNIVORE MOTIF in “March Past the Kitchen Utensils.”
Film (01:52:04), OST Track 15 (01:33).



FIGURE 10B
Jurassic Park, CARNIVORE MOTIF in triple canon in “T-Rex Attack.”
OST Track 15 (06:42).

- 49 Compared to the rip-roaring iterations that populate the above-cited action cues, the version of the CARNIVORE MOTIF that appears halfway through “Petticoat Lane” (mm. 15–18) is harmless and peaceable. At first it seems to bear just three distinct pitches of the motif’s four, its diminished fourth and fifths (an expected $D\flat_4$ - A_3 and A_3 - $E\flat_3$) softened into diatonic thirds and fifths (an actual $D\flat_4$ - $B\flat_3$ and $B\flat_3$ - $E\flat_3$). The result is a diatonic (0235) subset instead of the chromatic (0236) one. Nevertheless, the referent is undeniable once one is attuned to it, and the missing component is supplied in short order. Attending to the *destination* of the string line reveals the CARNIVORE MOTIF in its entirety. The pattern-completing pitch, $E\flat_4$, arrives in measure 20, where it assumes the role of anchor for the rest of the phrase, acting as the most registrally and melodically prominent component of the new $A^{(6)}/C\sharp$ sonority. Set-class 4-12 is thus achieved precisely, pitch-ordering and contour alike. With the listener distracted by a change of orchestral texture, the clever motif was hiding in plain earshot.
- 50 This concealed statement is not alone: the whole of “Petticoat Lane” is populated with carnivores. Indeed, what makes the cue such a remarkable example of Williams’s motivic ingenuity is the diversity of ways in which that four-note cell ramifies across its full duration. **Figure 11** reveals an entire menagerie of harmonic references under the cue’s surface. At the risk of overcrowding, the annotated score focuses on sets of cardinality four (with just a few, highly salient supersets)—and of those tetrachords only those that are reasonably audible, involving no set-theoretically promiscuous segmentations or contortions.
- 51 Both the tonally secure A_1 - A_3 sections and harmonically floating B_1 - B_2 sections of the cue abound in prominent melodic tetrachords. In the former, those four-note sets are integrated into a functional context, first B minor, then E minor. In the latter, they are allowed to agitate or even erase the feeling of a stable tonal center. Popping out of **Figure 11**’s analysis are several sonorities Williams is quite partial to. Note, for instance, the hexatonic 4-19 (0148) and 4-20 (0158) and octatonic 4-18’s (0147) interspersed through the cue.²⁴ Many amount to dissonantly perturbed consonant triads in one configuration or another. The set of prime relevance, however, is undoubtedly 4-12—the “genetic code” for the CARNIVORE MOTIF.
- 52 There are seven instances of 4-12, all eminently hearable as such, none requiring segmentational contrivance. A further three sets of larger cardinality (5-31, 5-4, and 6-19) are also of significance in the cue, inside which sits a 4-12 subset, again perfectly audible. Nowhere is the CARNIVORE MOTIF ever rendered exactly in *both* pitch content and contour,

24. Surprisingly absent from the cue is the 4-17 (0347) set, the “alpha tetrachord,” which tends to be ubiquitous in Williams’s scores, especially suspense and action cues.

but there are certainly some near-clones of the theme. Several spots are worth isolating:

- **Measure 7:** The melodic line here is a slight variant of the idea from measure 3. It hosts the CARNIVORE MOTIF in its proper pitch order (B-C-A-E $\flat$), but hides the accustomed melodic shape behind a pair of octave displacements. The first pitch, B $\flat$, is an octave lower than the norm, and the second, E $\flat$ 6, an octave too high.
- **Measures 31–32:** A similar play of registration as that in measure 7, plus an element of internal repetition, conceals an otherwise exact iteration of the motif, now in the accompaniment (B-C-A-[B-C]-D $\sharp$). Moments later, the melodic line, in its final gesture, plots the CARNIVORE MOTIF's pitches transposed to A perfectly, and in the right registral stratum, but now out of order (A $\sharp$ -A-C-F $\sharp$).
- **Measures 27–28:** The cello figure that bridges these two measures (E-F $\sharp$ -D $\sharp$ -C) is also outside 4-12's accustomed pitch order, but its contour and rhythm marks it as clearly derived from the CARNIVORE MOTIF. Furthermore, the manner in which this cello line is set apart, recitative-like, relative to the rest of the texture, makes it almost more a vocal utterance than a musical one. The camera lingers on Hammond's chastened face. Rendered speechless by Sattler's reproach, the cellos here now *are* his voice, his interiority. These formal and audiovisual factors collectively render this moment perhaps the most intentional, explicit, and poignant iteration of the CARNIVORE MOTIF in the cue.

- 53 Varied, transformed, and concealed, the CARNIVORE MOTIFS skulks secretively through “Petticoat Lane” like an unseen threat. The cue's dominant affect of nostalgic pathos is thereby inflected with something darker, more bloodthirsty. Sattler is right that Hammond never had control; musically speaking, the monsters are now running the show.

Cracking *Jurassic Park*'s musical genetic code?

- 54 The scenes that make up *Jurassic Park*'s celesta interlude are, for a massive blockbuster, surprisingly complex and reflexive. Williams's music, brimming with topics and echoing with motivic relations, supports the film's self-critical stance while contributing ambivalences all its own. At the risk of a certain undermining of its premises, this article will conclude with a self-reflexive turn of its own. We began with a call to reduce our analytical fixation on themes and instead attend more to non-thematic

The figure displays a musical score for "Petticoat Lane" from the film *Jurassic Park*. The score is written for piano and features several four-note sets highlighted in blue boxes. These sets are labeled with numbers and names, indicating their musical structure and context. The score is divided into measures, with measure numbers 15, 19, 24, and 29 marked. The key signature is E minor. The four-note sets are labeled as follows:

- 4-13 (measures 15-16)
- 4-12 (measures 17-18)
- 4-27 (measures 19-20)
- 4-18 (measures 21-22)
- 4-5 (measures 23-24)
- 4-19 (measures 25-26)
- 4-15 (measures 27-28)
- 6-19 (measures 29-30)
- 4-12 subset: (A-B-b-G-b-C) (measures 31-32)
- 4-20 (measures 33-34)
- 4-27 (measures 35-36)
- 4-4 (measures 37-38)
- 4-18 (measures 39-40)
- 4-12 (measures 41-42)
- 4-19 (measures 43-44)
- 4-20 (measures 45-46)
- 4-18 (measures 47-48)
- 4-29 (measures 49-50)
- 4-18 (measures 51-52)
- 4-12 (measures 53-54)
- 5-4 (measures 55-56)
- 4-12 subset: (A-B-b-G-b-C) (measures 57-58)
- 4-7 (measures 59-60)
- 4-3 [DSCH] (measures 61-62)
- 4-19 (measures 63-64)
- 4-12 (measures 65-66)
- 5-31 (measures 67-68)
- 4-12 subset: (F-G-b-E-b-A) (measures 69-70)
- 4-27 (measures 71-72)
- 4-8 (measures 73-74)
- 4-20 (measures 75-76)
- 4-19 (measures 77-78)
- 4-20 (measures 79-80)
- 4-12 (measures 81-82)
- 4-19 (measures 83-84)
- 4-20 (measures 85-86)

FIGURE 11
Jurassic Park, noteworthy four-note sets in "Petticoat Lane."

underscore. And we ended up seeing that a span of ostensibly non-thematic underscore is in actuality suffused with thematic work, albeit of a concealed and definitely not hummable nature. In the foregoing interpretation of “Petticoat Lane,” one might be forgiven for thinking that music analysis has almost become an act of code-breaking. Especially to readers unacquainted with set theory, **Figure 11** may appear like a conspiracy board. Such a bemused reaction is understandable, even if the findings of that diagram were offered with a genuine belief that they are meaningful, audible, and, if not provably intentional, then certainly the product of a rigorous and consistent compositional style. It is nevertheless worth pausing on the notion of the encoded, both within *Jurassic Park* and in film music analysis more generally. To do so in the context of this study is not a hermeneutic *non sequitur*: the film strongly thematizes the idea of coding and decoding, with references throughout to codes, mutations, recombinations, gap-filling, and sequencing. These notions all have suggestive correlates in film music analysis.

- 55 Screen musicologists familiar with Claudia Gorbman’s discipline-defining text, *Unheard Melodies*, may recall her discussion of “cinematic musical codes” (1987, 2–3, 12–13, *passim*). In essence, these are conventions that merge musical structures with culturally shared meanings. Regardless of the term (other authors call them tropes, topoi, musemes, clichés, or schemata), Gorbmanian codes enable diverse audiences to parse the informational density of the average film cue. However, after several decades of semiotically informed research in film musicology, there is now little mystery or intrigue behind how such cinematic musical codes work, at least not on a high level. What is of infinitely more interest is that musical material which does *not* clearly “encode” meaning, or which does so in a manner *non-generalizable* from listener to listener.
- 56 In the analysis offered of “Petticoat Lane,” I made a case for the subtle, maybe even covert presence of the CARNIVORE MOTIF, operating at the edges of audibility but contributing still to the ambivalent and self-critical content of the scene. To this end, set-analytical tools came in handy. With non-thematic underscore as an encrypted text and CARNIVORE MOTIF as its cipher, my analysis proffered a means of uncovering a sort of motivic coherence of the cue, one with interpretive significance and maybe more than a small suggestion of John Williams’s impressive craftsmanship.
- 57 Analysis, especially when backed with high-powered analytical machinery and motivated by a vigorous hermeneutic stance, is a creative act. It is also an assertion of control—control over a complex, multivalent, overflowing text. But, to channel Ellie Sattler, “you never had control! That’s the illusion!” Music analysis, when left to its own devices, tends to revert to an exuberant, sometimes heedless penchant for pattern hunting. But

film music is not a code to be broken, and not every element needs to be “thematic” in order for it to be effective.

- 58 There is a term in the biological sciences that entered the mainstream in the 1990s: junk DNA. Although the term has since receded in usage as our understanding of the genome has increased massively (Wells 2011), the basic concept is still largely understood and accepted. It refers to the vast swathes of an organism’s genome that are not in charge of coding proteins, whose function is regulatory, auxiliary, or perhaps non-existent given our current scientific knowledge base (Carey 2015). The most surprising result of our ever-growing understanding of genetic code is that so much of it does not seem to directly “code” anything at all.
- 59 Film theory has its own version of this term: Kristin Thompson’s (1986) notion of cinematic excess. Like the “junk” in “junk DNA,” “excess” comes with unfortunate negative connotations that have dimmed enthusiasm for its application in recent years, but its basic meaning is not a value-laden one. Cinematic excess simply encompasses all the countless elements of a filmic text that do not contribute to the construction or delivery of its unifying narrative; it is the stuff that, while present, is not strictly necessary for telling a movie’s story.
- 60 Music analysis tends to be totalizing. One expects that the composer *meant* everything, that each note serves a vital purpose, all is unified. Such is the basic ethos of organicist analysis of all stripes, whether the organic elements are keys, cadences, sets, or motifs, to say nothing of all manner of multimedia relationships. Film music theorists, perhaps overcompensating for the old but tenacious anxiety that screen scores may be naught but musical wallpaper—a sonic gap-filler—are especially prone to this reflexive attitude.
- 61 No one who takes film music as an art form seriously would call anything composed by John Williams “junk.” And, even denatured of its negative connotations, Thompsonian “excess” still seems too categorical to capture how semiotically dense even throwaway passages tend to be within Williams’s brand of intense and self-foregrounding musical storytelling. And yet, even the most apophenic listeners must admit that it cannot *all* be code, that his music must include sequences that serve a less vivid topical or thematic function than others. Sometimes, a B-C-A_b-E_b-type tetrachord is indeed a masterfully camouflaged CARNIVORE MOTIF, skulking in the bush. Sometimes, it is just another four-note pitch succession. There are, after all, ultimately only 28 distinctive tetrachordal species: with a score as packed with notes as the typical Williams soundtrack, certain configurations are bound to appear by accident. Moments of motivic “convergent evolution” may occur alongside instances of genuinely directed thematic manipulation and mutation.

62 There is assuredly plenty of non-coding musical material in “Petticoat Lane,” if the code in question is the CARNIVORE MOTIF. As for the noted prevalence of 4-12 tetrachords, or any other unifying thematic detail, some analytical humility is warranted. Just because some concatenation of notes can be isolated from the texture and ascribed motivic salience in a written analysis does not mean it will—or even can—be heard in such a way. To paraphrase Dr. Malcolm, “we film music analysts were so preoccupied with whether or not we could [draw thematic connections] that we didn’t stop to think if we should!”

63 Luckily, it is entirely possible to pursue a rigorous and profound sort of film-music analysis, one that respects the too often-discounted realm of non-thematic underscore, while doing so in a way that does not purport to turn every last microsecond on the soundtrack into some musical gene or another. One need only follow a few simple analytical dictums.

1. *Seek musical corroboration.* If a detail of musical design seems significant, look to other passages and other cues; finding it there will vastly support hearing said detail as significant, as something other than a happenstantial coincidence.

2. *Seek audiovisual corroboration.* Meaning in film emerges from the conjunction, correspondence, and sometimes contest of different constructive parameters. The most incredible of musical connections means little if no other filmic parameter—dialogue, sound, editing, cinematography—marks it for the filmgoer’s attention somehow. This is not to say those parameters must *signpost* the presence or *reinforce* the meaning of that musical connection; film musicologists know well that sometimes non-alignment is as semiotically productive as simple congruency.

3. *Understand a film composer’s idiolect*, as it is established over numerous scenes and scores. Take special heed of scores generically or chronologically close by. Sometimes a striking component of one soundtrack will turn out to be an idiolectical schema or mannerism that is consistently, perhaps unconsciously applied, across many. Never discount the pressure placed on the composer to emulate the film’s temporary (temp) track, even for the most accomplished figures like Williams.²⁵ (For what it is worth, self-repetition or temp-trackitis is *not* the case with the CARNIVORE MOTIF, which does appear largely *sui generis* in Williams’s output, though only a thorough knowledge of his oeuvre allows the making of such a claim.)

64 Note that none of these principles are about establishing or disproving author intentionality. Filmic meaning—which includes the existence and significance of thematic connections—is ultimately produced by the liste-

25. The most meaningful, if loose, resemblance outside of the *Jurassic Park* score is, as mentioned, the DSCHE motif. A handful of other elements of the *Jurassic Park* score do appear to have clear models in preexisting music. “Dennis Steals the Embryo” is self-evidently a gloss on Williams’s “The Conspirators” from *JFK* (Oliver Stone, 1991), and large swathes of the chaotic action music throughout *Jurassic Park* have precedent in the “Streets of Shanghai” from *Empire of the Sun*. The theme from “Ailing Triceratops” strongly suggests “The Death of Falstaff” from Patrick Doyle’s score for *Henry V* (Kenneth Branagh, 1989). And the high wind writing and rhythmically asymmetric ostinati in “T Rex Rescue” all derive ultimately from Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring*, the “Glorification of the Chosen One” especially.

ner/viewer, not the creator. To that end, a fourth dictum for responsible analysis is called for: *resist the cryptanalytic stance for its own sake*. Analysts of music for mainstream films ought to avoid the impulse to detect and reveal a “secret” embedded in their text.²⁶ In general, Hollywood scores do not operate on a logic of obscurity or connoisseur-aimed intricacy; their codes, in Gorbman’s sense, need to be well-established and immediately legible. Which is not to say enormously intricate and subtle compositional processes might not be at play; indeed, we expect them from a composer like Williams, while also granting that even he is capable of writing on autopilot from time to time. And if it should happen that the analyst detects the inklings of some ingenious cipher hiding under the musical surface, they ought to proceed in a cautiously self-critical fashion, as hopefully has been modeled here.

- 65 Ultimately, the best course of action for film music analysts may be to emulate a modern geneticist. Spend time looking to the less obviously meaningful material. Examine it with the same seriousness and sustained attention—but also skepticism—with which one would approach the big famous tunes. Dismiss non-thematic underscore as a film’s “junk” DNA at one’s peril. On closer inspection, it may not be so non-thematic after all. But even if neat motivic interrelations do not emerge from careful study, that excessive music will almost certainly play host to a variety of style topics and expressive genres, from which a satisfyingly rich interpretive tapestry may be spun. This balanced, interpretive approach—neither hyper-focusing on melodic themes, nor obsessively hunting for invisible connections—is how, in the words of John Hammond, we provide the audience of film music scholars and appreciators “something that wasn’t an illusion. Something real.” A music-analytical aim not devoid of merit.

26. With the lessons of post-modernism and identity-based criticism slowly but surely penetrating the academic field of music theory—and a healthy if sometimes overzealous skepticism towards models like Schenkerian and set-theory—members of the scholarly discipline of music theory are less likely to succumb to such analytical apophenia and totalization than thirty or forty years ago. Unfortunately, this measured approach has not thoroughly percolated into the non-academic music appreciation/commentary community, which, for all its amazing content seems to be as bad as ever, particularly where click-bait and sensationalism trumps measured analysis. (YouTube is a particularly bad offender here.) On this tricky subject, see O’Hara’s 2018 essay “Music Theory and the Epistemology of the Internet.”

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Day of Wrath: Structural and Semantic Features of the *Dies irae* in the Music of John Williams

« Jour de colère » : caractéristiques structurelles et sémantiques du *Dies irae* dans la musique de John Williams

Tom Schneller

Keywords: Williams (John), *Dies irae*, Star Wars, music analysis, topic theory

Mots clés : Williams (John), *Dies irae*, Star Wars, analyse musicale, narratologie musicale

ABSTRACT

The *Dies irae* is a pervasive trope in film music, yet few composers have subjected it to transformations as intricate and imaginative as those found in the work of John Williams. This article examines the syntactic and semantic features of seven distinct *Dies irae* variants that appear in a number of Williams scores. These variants operate as complex signifiers that evoke a constellation of overlapping ideas—apocalypse, guilt, and punishment—all of which resonate with the original source: Thomas of Celano’s medieval hymn “Day of Wrath,” a vision of divine judgment at the end of time. Williams’ sophisticated deployment of the *Dies irae* exemplifies his multidimensional engagement with deeply embedded cultural codes in the service of musicodramatic narrative.

RÉSUMÉ

Le *Dies irae* est un trope largement répandu dans la musique de film, mais peu de compositeurs l'ont soumis à des transformations aussi complexes et imaginatives que celles que l'on observe chez John Williams. Cet article analyse les caractéristiques syntaxiques et sémantiques de sept variantes distinctes du *Dies irae* présentes dans un ensemble de partitions de Williams. Ces variantes fonctionnent comme des signifiants riches, évoquant une constellation d'idées interconnectées – apocalypse, culpabilité, châtement – renvoyant toutes à leur source originelle : l'hymne médiéval « Jour de colère » de Thomas de Celano, vision du Jugement dernier et de la fin des temps. L'usage raffiné du *Dies irae* chez Williams témoigne de son rapport multidimensionnel à des codes culturels profondément enracinés, qu'il met au service d'un récit musicodramatique.

- 1 It's become one of the most iconic moments in *Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope* (George Lucas, 1977). Luke Skywalker returns to his farm on Tatooine to discover that imperial stormtroopers have burned down his home and killed his aunt and uncle. This calamity propels the film into its second act and marks the beginning of Luke's initiation into the ways of the Force. The music that accompanies this pivotal juncture climaxes with an ominous repeated four-note motif in the horns that captures the depth of Luke's anger and despair (**Figure 1; Clip 1**).



FIGURE 1
Star Wars: A New Hope, *Dies irae* in “Return to the Homestead,” personal transcription.

- 2 As several commentators have noted, John Williams alludes here to the first four notes of the most famous musical symbol of doom and perdition in the western musical tradition: the Gregorian chant *Dies irae*, or “Day of Wrath” (Ludwig 2025, 212–220; Lerner 2004, 104; Golding 2019, 126; Trocmé-Latter 2022, 42). Since its inclusion in the Requiem mass during the late Middle Ages, this apocalyptic hymn has been associated with death and the Last Judgment. As one of only four Gregorian sequences

to survive the liturgical purges of the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century, its connection with mortality and the apocalypse was ingrained in the consciousness of European Catholics for many generations. In the early nineteenth century, Berlioz parodied the *Dies irae* in the last movement of the *Symphonie fantastique* (1830) to evoke a grotesque burial during a demonic orgy. Since then, the *Dies irae* has enjoyed a vigorous afterlife as a musical symbol of the macabre, morbid, and diabolical in works of Liszt, Rachmaninov, Mahler, Shostakovich, Crumb, and many others—including Williams’s composition teacher Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, who used the *Dies irae* in his *24 Caprichos de Goya for Guitar*, Op. 195 (1961; [Clip 2](#)), a set of programmatic miniatures inspired by the etchings of Francisco Goya.¹

3 In film music, the *Dies irae* has likewise had a long tradition as a musical symbol of perdition—as documented by musicologist Alex Ludwig, who maintains an ever-expanding inventory of *Dies irae* quotes in films from the silent period to the present ([Ludwig n.d.](#); see also [Schubert 1998, 207–229](#) and [Trocmé-Latter 2022, 41–44](#)). With fourteen scores, John Williams occupies a prominent place on Ludwig’s list.² The pervasive use of the *Dies irae* as a melodic gesture in the music of Williams has become a matter of common knowledge in the film music community,³ and has spawned multiple online discussions and *YouTube* videos. The principal focus of scholarly attention has been on his use of the *Dies irae* in the *Star Wars* series and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (Steven Spielberg, 1977) ([Lehman 2023, 28](#); [Golding 2019, 126–128](#); [Schneller 2014, 104–108](#); [Lerner 2004, 104](#); [Larson 1985, 298](#)). What has been largely absent in the commentary so far is a systematic account of how Williams adapts the *Dies irae* as a melodic structure across a number of films, and why—beyond its generic association with death—it might be deployed in a variety of dramatic contexts.

4 In many films, the *Dies irae* represents a “foreign body” within the score—a self-conscious quotation that points outside the diegesis to previous films, operas, concert works, and liturgical music in which it has appeared as a harbinger of doom. Consider, for example, Hugo Friedhofer’s “Desperate Journey” from *Between Heaven and Hell* (Richard Fleischer, 1956) or the main titles from Jerry Goldsmith’s *Mephisto Waltz* (Paul Wendkos, 1971) and Wendy Carlos’ *The Shining* (Stanley Kubrick, 1980). A potential problem with quotation is that it draws attention to itself as a preexisting musical object and thus risks distracting spectators from full immersion in the world of the film by reminding them of other films or pieces of music in which it has appeared. “A quotation is an intrusion,” as Raymond Monelle puts it ([2006, 166](#)). Perhaps for this reason, Williams generally eschews literal quotation of the *Dies irae* in favor of alluding to it subliminally through fragmentation, paraphrase, or reconfiguration of

1. Movement XII (“No hubo remedio”) is a passacaglia based on the *Dies irae*. For more information on the *Dies irae* in concert music, see [Gregory 1953](#) and [Boyd 1968](#).

2. As of January 2026, there are at least three scores missing from the list: *Story of a Woman* (Leonardo Bercovici, 1968/released 1970), *Rosewood* (John Singleton, 1997) and *Munich* (Steven Spielberg, 2005).

3. See, for example the online discussions at the John Williams Fan Network such as “The *Dies irae* Thread” ([2007](#)).

its melodic structure. The first four to six notes of the theme provide raw material from which he crafts new melodic units that can function as autonomous leitmotifs while still preserving a recognizable connection to the original point of reference—a procedure that allows him to seamlessly integrate the *Dies irae* into the fabric of his own music without sacrificing its culturally pre-encoded semantic charge. By remaining just below the threshold of outright quotation, he can activate the cluster of ominous associations connected to the *Dies irae* in the spectator, even if the source of these associations does not rise to the level of conscious recognition.

5 The *Dies irae* in the music of Williams is thus best interpreted as a topical referent rather than a quote, and in that sense it functions like other musical topics in his music that have been the subject of recent scholarly attention (e.g., marches, fugues, and action scherzi).⁴ Instead of being literally copied, the semantic payload of particular historical models is invoked through skillful allusion to their essential features. Film music has always relied on topics: conventional, semantically charged musical signs that can efficiently convey a wide spectrum of affective and conceptual information (e.g., the “femme fatale” topic with silky strings and sultry saxophone).⁵ In theory, this reliance on prior knowledge of culturally encoded meanings extrinsic to the filmic narrative differentiates topics from leitmotifs, which relate intrinsically to the narrative.⁶ But this distinction is blurred in practice, since most leitmotifs in film music are infused with topical significance. As Matthew Bribitzer-Stull emphasizes, “themes are mutable musical individuals that may embrace generalized topical stereotypes. Associative themes are at their most powerful when they invoke topical resonance [...] to cement a piece-specific meaning” (Bribitzer-Stull 2015, 115). By the same token, the Williams *Dies irae* retains its status as an indexical topic that subliminally “points to other repertory as a symbol of death and destruction in [the] western musical canon” (Everett 2009, 53) while simultaneously functioning as a distinctive leitmotif that relates in specific ways to the diegesis of the films in which it appears.

6 In this article, I will argue that the “topical resonance” of the *Dies irae* in the music of John Williams is anchored primarily in the text of the original Gregorian hymn rather than its macabre reincarnations in Romantic music. As a musical symbol associated with the concepts of guilt and punishment as well as death, the Williams *Dies irae* throws into relief not merely the morbid but, more importantly, the *moral* dimensions of the filmic narrative—an approach typical of the composer’s encyclopedic knowledge of, and sensitivity to, the deeper semantic implications of particular musical gestures. In the case of the *Dies irae*, this process involves a set of transformations of the source melody that appear repeatedly in

4. See Joakim Tillman’s discussion of the “Villain’s March” in Audissino 2018 (229–251) and Frank Lehman’s analysis of Williams’s action scherzi in Buhler and Durrand 2021 (116–148). The “Williams fugato” was the subject of two as of yet unpublished conference presentations, the first by Frank Lehman at the March 2019 Society for American Music conference in New Orleans (“Tank Canons and Shark Cage Fugues: Neo-Baroque Topics and the ‘Learned Style’ in John Williams’ Film Music”) and the second by Tom Schneller at the May 2019 Music and the Moving Image Conference in New York (“The Williams Fugato”).

5. For a detailed discussion of topic theory as a tool in film music analysis, see Plebuch 2013 (77–92), Chattah 2024 (chapter 7 and Appendix VI) and Obluda 2021 (chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6).

6. “While leitmotifs acquire expressive meaning within the context of a given work, topics are conventionalized musical signs that carry coded meaning shared by a musical community” (Everett 2015, 27); “Whereas a leitmotif’s signified remains exclusively within a film’s storyworld, a topic’s signified resides outside a film’s storyworld, in the collective subconscious shaped by soundtracks to multiple films” (Chattah 2024, 114, footnote 1).

his body of work, as I will illustrate by examining ten scores across a variety of genres including legal thrillers, science fiction, and war films.

The Williams *Dies irae*: structure

- 7 Before delving into a semantic analysis of the Williams *Dies irae*, let us consider its syntactic aspects. Like most composers who allude to the *Dies irae*, Williams restricts himself to the first phrase of the original chant. Within that phrase, he draws on three particular motivic segments that I have labelled x, y, and z (**Figure 2**; **Clip 3**). Motif x consists of the first four notes of the *Dies irae*; motif y utilizes the first six notes; and motif z consists of a pair of descending thirds derived from notes 3 to 6 of the *Dies irae*.

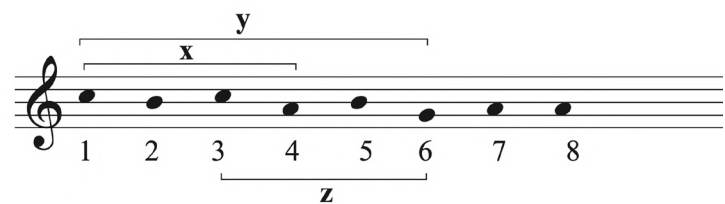


FIGURE 2
Motifs derived from first phrase of *Dies irae*.

- 8 Williams uses these three motivic derivatives separately or in combination to create at least seven distinct variants or “types” of the chant melody.⁷ Type 1 consists of motif x—that is, the first four notes of the *Dies irae*. This is by far the most commonly used manifestation of the chant in Williams’s work (**Figure 3b**; **Clip 4**). Type 1 can be extended through sequential transposition, as in *Close Encounters*, or through repetition and transposition, as in *Story of a Woman* (Leonardo Bercovici, 1970) (**Figures 3c and d**). Note that it is common for Williams to substitute a lower pitch for the last note of the pattern, as in *Black Sunday* (John Frankenheimer, 1977, **Figure 3e**).
- 9 Type 2 consists of the first six notes of the *Dies irae*. Instead of the modal subtonic of the original, Williams typically raises the seventh scale degree, as in *Empire of the Sun* (1987)—a harmonic inflection that allows the motif to be smoothly integrated into octatonic or harmonic minor pitch fields (**Figure 4b**; **Clip 5**). Other pitches can also be inflected chromatically, as in *War of the Worlds* (2005), in which the outline of the *Dies irae*, in accommodation to the predominantly atonal harmonic idiom of the score, is compressed into the intervallic space of a chromatic cluster (**Figure 4c**).

7. There may be additional variants—this is not intended as an exhaustive list.



FIGURE 3

Dies irae Type 1 (4-note schema consisting of motif x).
To facilitate comparison, all themes in figures 3–9 have been transposed to A Minor.

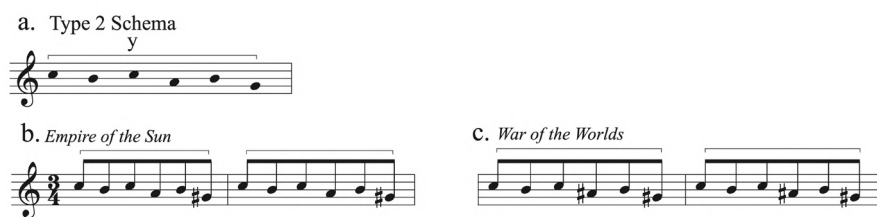


FIGURE 4

Dies irae Type 2 (6-note schema consisting of motif y).

- 10 Type 3 combines motif x and the descending thirds of motif z, transposed up a step to start on scale degree 4 instead of 3. This variant appears, for example, in “The Journey Through the Ice” from *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (Steven Spielberg, 2001, **Figure 5b**; **Clip 6**). Type 3 can be varied through interpolation of repeated notes, as in *Star Wars: Episode II – Attack of the Clones* (George Lucas, 2002, **Figure 5c**) or extended through repetition of segment x, as in *Jurassic Park* (Steven Spielberg, 1993, **Figure 5d**). A more complex variant of Type 3 appears in *Sleepers* (Barry Levinson, 1996, **Figure 5e**).

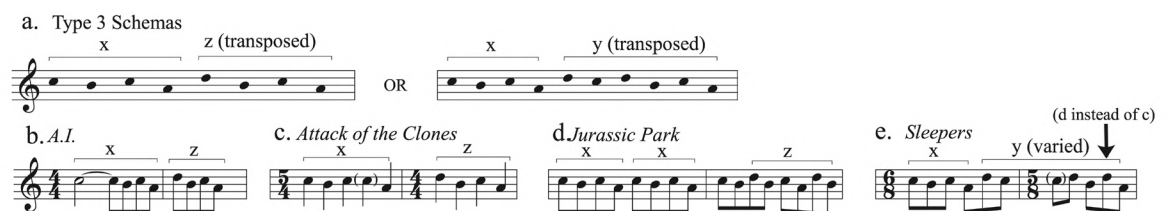


FIGURE 5

Dies irae Type 3 (motif x + motif z or y of *Dies irae* transposed to start on scale degree 4).

- 11 Type 4 starts on scale degree 5 and descends to the tonic by way of one or two statements of either x or y. This variant appears in *War of the Worlds* and *Munich*; here, both segments of the phrase present motif x, starting on scale degree 5, then transposed down a third. In the second segment, the schema is embellished through the repetition and interpolation of single pitches (**Figures 6b and c; Clip 7**). A variant of the schema can be observed in “Anakin’s Betrayal” from *Star Wars: Episode III – Revenge of the Sith* (George Lucas, 2005), which makes its way down to the tonic by way of motif y (**Figure 6d**).

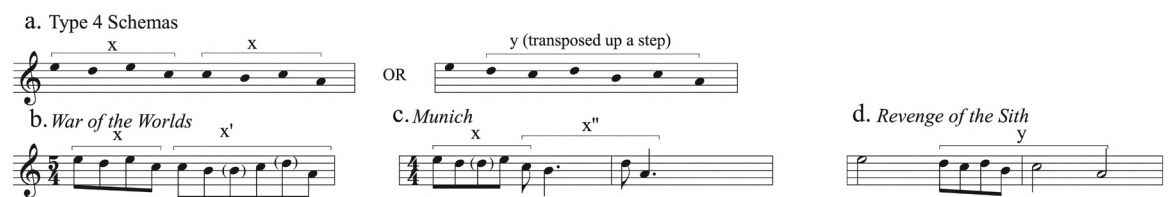


FIGURE 6

Dies irae Type 4 (starts on scale degree 5, descends to tonic by way of x or y).

- 12 Types 5 through 7 can be heard as distant, but nonetheless audible, derivatives of the *Dies irae* (provided, of course, that the musical and dramatic context justifies such a reading). Type 5 consists of the inversion of the four-note head motif x (**Figure 7a; Clip 8**). This can be extended and varied through repetition of the first three pitches and ascending stepwise transposition of the last pitch, as is the case in the “Burning Homestead” cue from *Star Wars: A New Hope* (**Figure 7b**), in which the inversion of motif x serves as a build-up to a climax based on its original form (see **Figures 1 and 18**).

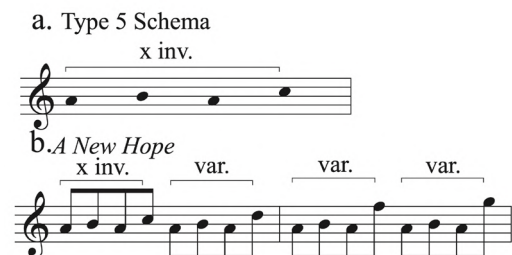


FIGURE 7

Dies irae Type 5 (inversion of motif x).

- 13 Type 6 consists of the retrograde of motif x. This particular pattern has important antecedents in horror scores such as Herrmann’s *Psycho* (1960, **Figure 8d; Clip 9**) or the “Ave Satani” from Jerry Goldsmith’s *The Omen* (Richard Donner, 1976), in which the backward *Dies irae* serves as a

musical analogue of the upside-down cross of a Black Mass (**Figure 8e**). In Williams's score for *Black Sunday*, which was released the year after Goldsmith's *Omen* score won the Oscar and is clearly influenced by Goldsmith, the retrograde of the *Dies irae* is incorporated into the motif for another diabolical figure—the terrorist Dahlia (**Figure 8b**). Williams made particularly effective use of the *Dies irae* retrograde in what Frank Lehman has dubbed the “Sith Seduction” motif from *Revenge of the Sith* (**Figure 8c**, [Lehman 2023](#)).

a. Type 6 Schema
x retr.

b. *Black Sunday*
x retr.

c. *Revenge of the Sith*
x retr. x retr. x retr.

d. *Psycho* (Herrmann)

e. *The Omen* (Goldsmith)

FIGURE 8
Dies irae Type 6 (retrograde of motif x).

- 14 Finally, Type 7 presents a reordering of the adjacent thirds of motif z so they form ascending rather than descending thirds.⁸ This variant of the *Dies irae* is employed in *The Witches of Eastwick* (1987), where it is associated with the devil (**Figure 9b**; [Clip 10](#)). Like Type 6, Type 7 has antecedents in horror film scoring, particularly in Bernard Herrmann's music for *Sisters* (1972, **Figure 9c**), which combines motif z in the top line with Type 7 in the counterpoint.
- 15 Williams deploys these variants of the *Dies irae*'s opening phrase in two principal ways: as a self-contained unit which can either stand separately as an independent motif or be deployed as accompanimental figuration to a principal theme; or as a semantically marked segment embedded within a continuous stream of otherwise non-motivic eighth notes.

8. The permuted *Dies irae* motif z also appears in the climactic “exploding head” scene from *The Fury* (Brian De Palma, 1978), as an F-A $\flat$ -G-B $\flat$ ostinato in the horns. Otherwise, Type 7 is rare in Williams's music, and is the only *Dies irae* variant that I do not discuss in the subsequent analyses.

Semantic aspects of the Williams *Dies irae*

- 16 The determination of whether a melodic line resembling the first phrase of the *Dies irae* should be regarded as a meaningful allusion is dependent on whether or not such a reading can be justified by the dramatic context. It is not convincing to automatically label every occurrence of the patterns in

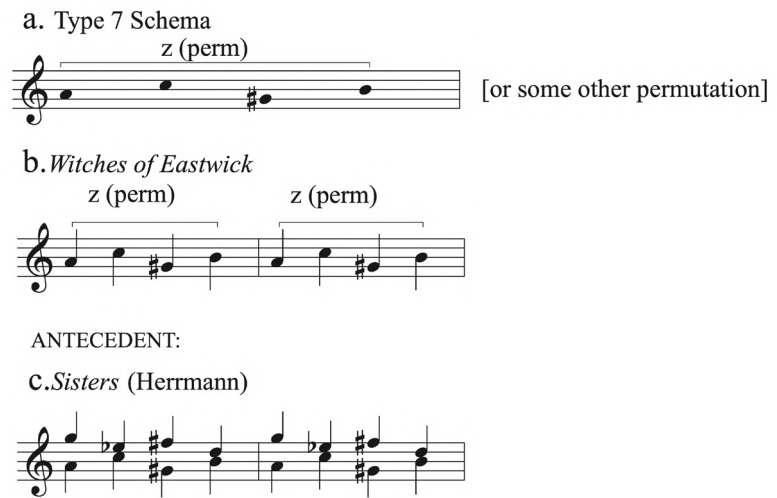


FIGURE 9
Dies irae Type 7 (permutation of motif z).

Figure 2 as an instance of the *Dies irae*, since the phrase and its derivatives constitute attractive melodic shapes that need not function symbolically. In the “Flying Sequence” from *Superman*, for instance, Williams uses a *Dies irae*-like melodic gesture as a mellifluous counterpoint to the B section of the sweeping love theme (**Figure 10a**; **Clip 11**). Only through an act of analytic contortionism could one interpret this accompanimental figure, which occurs in an exuberantly romantic scene, as a reference to the *Dies irae* (might the counterpoint subtly foreshadow Lois Lane’s subsequent temporary demise in the aftershock of the earthquake caused by the atomic missile detonated by Lex Luthor in an attempt to unleash nuclear Armageddon? Probably not).

- 17 Now consider “The Mountain” from *Close Encounters* (**Figure 10b**), which uses a very similar melodic gesture, again as a counterpoint to a principal theme. In this case, hearing the counterpoint as an allusion to the *Dies irae* makes perfect sense, considering that it is based on a motif foregrounded throughout the score as the musical signifier of a potential impending apocalypse (for a detailed analysis of the semantic implications of the *Dies irae* in *Close Encounters*, see [Schneller 2014](#)).
- 18 To plausibly interpret a *Dies irae*-like motif as an allusion we would generally expect it to occur within a context congruent with the various symbolic meanings accrued by the *Dies irae* over centuries of use in liturgical, concert, stage, and film music.⁹ These meanings change depending on whether we consider the original plainchant or the plethora of nineteenth and twentieth century works in which it is quoted. As Daniel Trocmé-Latter notes, in instrumental works of the Romantic era the “hortatory elements of the ‘*Dies irae*’ text are almost entirely

9. An important exception would be the use of the *Dies irae* to create a deliberate incongruence between music and film. Imagine, for example, an innocuous everyday scene such as school children in a classroom about to take a test. If the composer were to dramatically quote the *Dies irae* when the teacher pulls out the test papers, the effect would likely be perceived as a comical exaggeration. Even in this context, however, “getting the joke” depends on an understanding of the cultural codes embedded within the gesture (in this case, doom). The situation may be mundane, but it still involves mild peril—the *Dies irae* creates an incongruence not because it is entirely meaningless in this context but because the context is so trivial that a musical invocation of the apocalypse would be read as hyperbole (one of the oldest tricks of humor). For a detailed discussion of comical incongruence in film music, see [Schneller 2023 \(65–84\)](#) and [Chattah 2024 \(125–143\)](#).

a. Superman, "The Flying Sequence"



b. Close Encounters, "The Mountain"

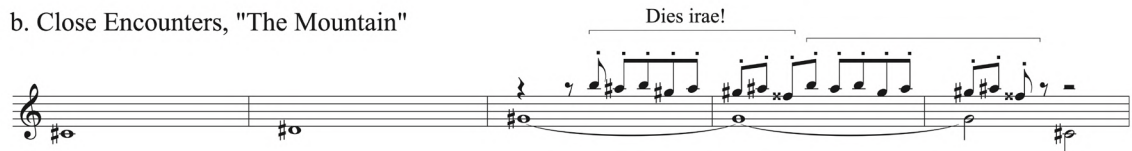


FIGURE 10

Comparison of *Dies irae*-like melodic patterns in *Superman* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.

lost, replaced instead by a ghoulish or terrifying prospect of a secularized imagining of what awaits us after death" (2019, 40). In the same vein, most film composers resort to the *Dies irae* simply as a convenient musical shorthand for "death in a simplistic—sometimes abstract—and usually secular sense" (Trocmé-Latter 2019, 41). Williams, by contrast, seems to consistently associate the *Dies irae* not just with death but also with guilt and punishment—concepts that evoke the fearsome imagery of its liturgical origin. To understand the significance of the *Dies irae* in the music of Williams, then, we must return to its source: the text of the Gregorian hymn.

- 19 The words of the *Dies irae*, usually attributed to the thirteenth century Italian monk Thomas of Celano, conjure a vision of the apocalypse as a "Day of wrath and doom impending" at the dawn of which the dead rise from their tombs to answer for their sins (stanza IV):

Death is struck, and nature quaking,
All creation is awaking,
To its Judge an answer making.

- 20 The resurrection of the dead inaugurates a cosmic courtroom drama over which God presides as a stern judge prepared to punish every transgression (stanza VI):

When the Judge his seat attaineth,
And each hidden deed arraigneth,
Nothing unavenged remaineth.

- 21 Central to the original meaning of the *Dies irae* is the idea of guilt (stanza XII):

Guilty, now I pour my moaning
All my shame with anguish owning
Spare, O God, Thy suppliant groaning!^a

a. 1849 translation by William Josiah Irons, published in the 1912 English missal. Available online at [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Dies_Irae_\(Irons,_1912\)](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Dies_Irae_(Irons,_1912)).

- 22 To listeners familiar with this text, the melodic line of the *Dies irae* – even in purely instrumental settings—has the potential to suggest at least three interconnected concepts: DEATH, GUILT, and PUNISHMENT (**Figure 11**). Each of these general concepts is instantiated by specific manifestations. DEATH encompasses both individual and collective demise; GUILT is exemplified by moral transgressions including adultery, rape, murder, black magic, and hubris; while PUNISHMENT can range from the emotional torment of private remorse to extrajudicial revenge, state-sanctioned legal retribution, the deprivations of war, and apocalypse. To what extent the meaning of a piece of film music that appears to allude to the *Dies irae* can be plausibly associated with any of these terms depends, again, on the context provided by the specific dramatic situation it accompanies.

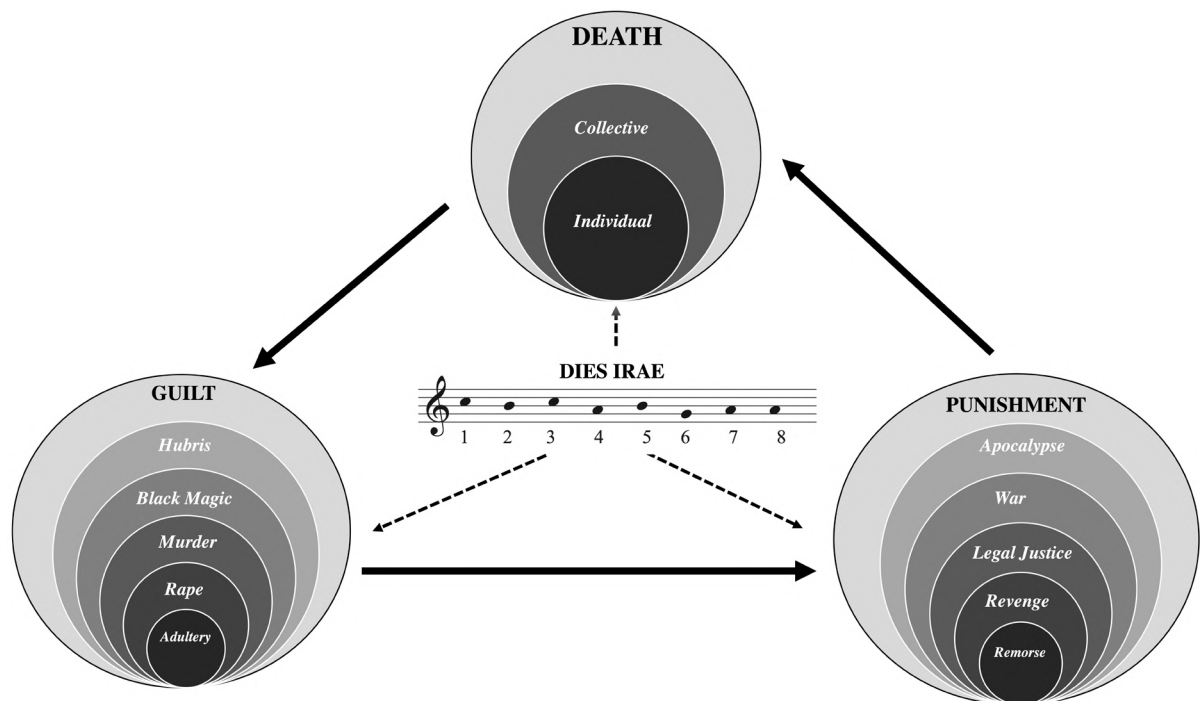


FIGURE 11
Concepts associated with the *Dies irae*.

- 23 In the following analyses, I will situate John Williams's invocation of the *Dies irae* within the conceptual triangle depicted in **Figure 11**. As we will see, Williams tends to invoke the *Dies irae* in films that explore the causal link between GUILT, PUNISHMENT, and DEATH. The

resulting conceptual overlap causes the *Dies irae* to resonate with all three domains in ways that amplify the fundamental ethical dilemma at the heart of each of the films in which it is used, regardless of whether this dilemma unfolds on the individual level of interpersonal relationships (as in *Presumed Innocent*, Alan J. Pakula, 1990), or whether it involves collective catastrophes of a global or intergalactic scope (as in *War of the Worlds* and *Revenge of the Sith*). Williams's frequent invocations of the *Dies irae*—one of the few historic musical memes that is widely recognized in our increasingly atomized musical culture—add a universalizing, mythical dimension to the narratives they accompany.

“When the Judge his seat attaineth”: the *Dies irae* as a signifier of guilt and revenge in legal thrillers

Presumed Innocent (1990)

- 24 Considering that the text of the *Dies irae* describes a metaphysical trial, it is fitting that Williams alludes to the chant melody in *Presumed Innocent* and *Sleepers*, two legal thrillers in which the nexus of GUILT and PUNISHMENT is reflected in a secular microcosm. *Presumed Innocent* explores the tension between legal culpability and private guilt; it demonstrates how the unexpected consequences of our actions can spin out of control, with potentially devastating consequences. The film begins with the image of an empty courtroom. In a voiceover, we hear the main character, prosecutor Rusty Sabitch, reflect on the process by which guilt and innocence are determined within the framework of the legal system:

I'm a prosecutor. I'm part of the business of accusing, judging, and punishing. I explore the evidence of a crime and determine who is charged, who is brought to this room to be tried before his peers. I present my evidence to the jury and they deliberate upon it. They must determine what really happened. If they cannot, we will not know whether the accused deserves to be freed or should be punished. If they cannot find the truth, what is our hope of justice?

- 25 The central irony of the film hinges on the fact that Rusty Sabitch, charged with punishing the transgressions of others, turns out to be fallible himself and becomes entangled in the mechanisms of the law he strives to enforce. The transgression that sets the plot in motion is Rusty's adulterous affair with his colleague Carolyn. When his emotionally instable wife Barbara discovers that he has been unfaithful, she hatches a plot to punish both her husband and her rival by murdering Carolyn and arranging the evidence to point to Rusty as the perpetrator. Rusty

is arrested, but narrowly escapes conviction. Not until after his acquittal does he discover that Carolyn's killer was his own wife, driven by jealousy to insanity and murder. He is left tormented by remorse for the catastrophic consequences of his infidelity. The film concludes as it began, with an image of an empty courtroom, over which we hear Rusty's voice describing his existence as a kind of purgatory:

I am a prosecutor. I have spent my life in the assignment of blame. With all deliberation and intent, I reached for Carolyn. I cannot pretend it was an accident. I reached for Carolyn and set off that insane mix of rage and lunacy that led one human being to kill another. There was a crime. There was a victim. And there is punishment.

- 26 Crime, victim, punishment—all three are suggested in the *Dies irae* Type 1 ostinato pattern which accompanies the main theme of the film, a melancholy cantilena that pervades the score and is first heard in the opening credits (**Figure 12**; **Clip 12**). The placement of the *Dies irae* in the bass constitutes the foundation of the counterpoint between the tormented melodic line (with its reiterated, anguished tritone appoggiatura) and thus metaphorically expresses an obsession rooted in guilt.

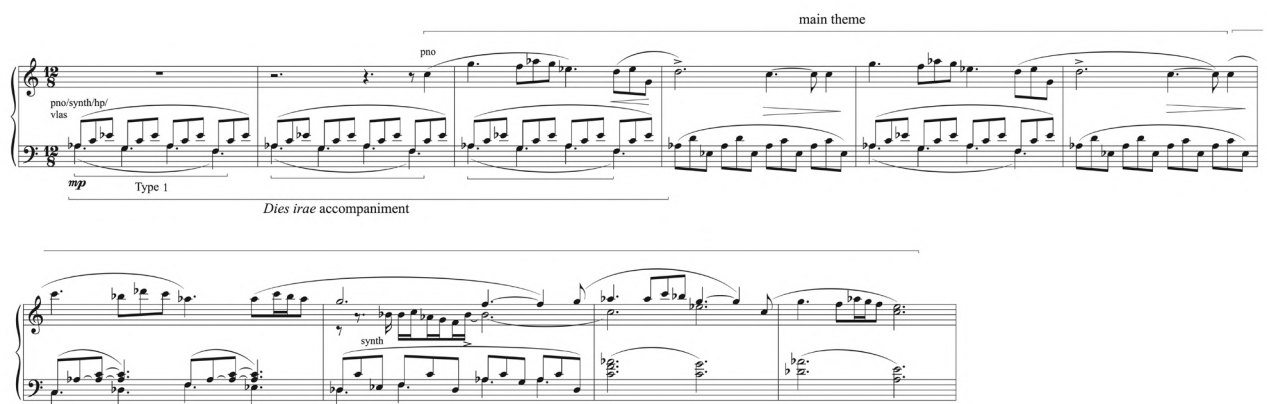


FIGURE 12

Presumed Innocent, "Main Title," personal transcription.

- 27 Williams uses the *Dies irae* to underscore the causal link between two key junctures of the narrative, beginning with Carolyn's seduction of Rusty. Having lured Rusty into her office, Carolyn unbuttons her blouse. Williams punctuates this gesture, which marks the fateful moment their relationship crosses the boundary from flirtation to adultery, with a sensuous but sinister statement of motif x—thereby linking the *Dies irae* with the forbidden sexuality of the "original sin" that sets the plot in motion (**Figure 13**; **Clip 13**). As we will see in the case of *Attack of the Clones* and *Jurassic Park*, this is not the only situation involving the crossing of literal and figurative boundaries that Williams punctuates with a *Dies irae*.

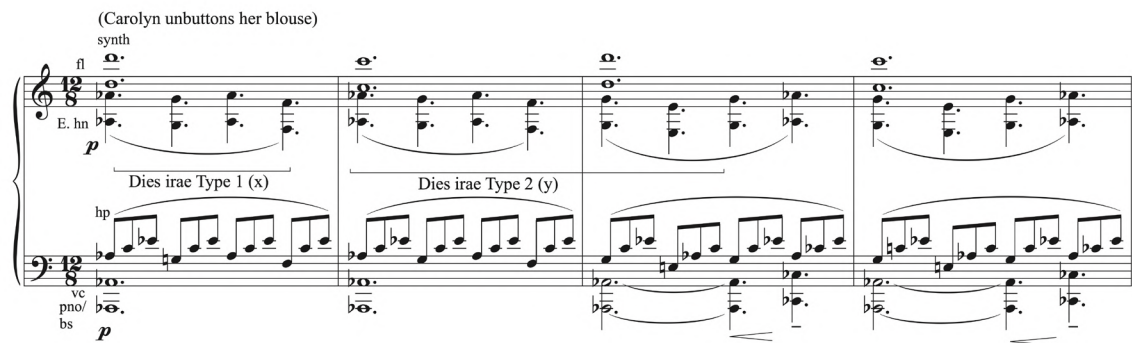


FIGURE 13
Presumed Innocent, “Love Scene,” personal transcription.

28 As Rusty succumbs to temptation, he has no idea that his transgression is the first step in a chain of events that will culminate in Carolyn’s death and his own arrest for murder. But the music, like a Greek chorus, prophesies doom—a prophecy that is fulfilled when months later, Rusty is hauled in handcuffs to a police car, once again to the somber accompaniment of the *Dies irae*¹⁰ (Figure 14; Clip 14). The motivic parallelism between the two scenes connects cause and effect, Rusty’s original sin and his eventual fall from grace. Williams’s choice of the *Dies irae* as a key motif in *Presumed Innocent* resonates simultaneously with Carolyn’s death, Rusty’s guilt, and his punishment for a crime he did not commit but for which he feels responsible. With characteristic elegance and sophistication, the composer distills the essential elements of the plot into a four-note ostinato.¹¹

10. Note the striking similarity of Williams’s setting of the *Dies irae* in “On the Advice of Counsel” to Rachmaninov’s *Études-Tableaux*, Op. 39 No. 2 in A Minor.



FIGURE 14
Presumed Innocent, “On the Advice of Counsel” (original version—first 6 measures not used in film), personal transcription.

***Sleepers* (1996)**

- 29 In *Sleepers*, another courtroom drama that explores the unintended but progressively more devastating consequences of an initial transgression, the *Dies irae* is associated specifically with the concept of revenge. Set in New York City, the film centers on four boys who steal a hot-dog cart as a prank. After the prank goes disastrously wrong, they are sentenced to juvenile prison, where they are subjected to violence and sexual abuse at the hands of sadistic prison guards. After their release, the boys are left psychologically scarred. Twenty years later the opportunity presents itself to take revenge, and the four friends pursue both legal and illegal means of punishing their former tormentors. Their obsessive quest for payback culminates in the vigilante murder of two of the guards and the arrest of another.
- 30 “Revenge. Sweet lasting revenge [...] Now it’s time for all of us to get a taste,” observes Michael (the intellectual among them, whose favorite book is Alexandre Dumas’ revenge thriller *The Count of Monte Cristo*). Williams expresses the desire for retribution that motivates Michael and his friends through the “Vengeance” motif, a restless, circular, metrically unbalanced ostinato figure based on a Type 3 *Dies irae* (**Figure 15a; Clip 15**) which accompanies the planning and execution of the complex scheme devised by Michael to hunt down their enemies. The culmination of the “Vengeance” motif occurs in a cue titled “Revenge for Rizzo” in which the former guard Henry Addison is shot by gangsters in the marshes surrounding LaGuardia Airport. As bullets riddle Addison’s body, the relentless, *Dies irae*-saturated ostinato chillingly invokes the line “Nothing unavenged remaineth” from stanza VI of the medieval hymn.
- 31 The way Williams derives “Vengeance” from the *Dies irae* is characteristic of his often complex approach to motivic transformation¹²—as illustrated in **Figure 15b**, the motif is based on segments x and y of the *Dies irae* (b1), with segment y transposed up a step (b2) and subjected to variation through the repetition and substitution of pitches (b3). Not only is the motif internally repetitive, it appears invariably as a repeating loop. This emphasis on incessant repetition (unusual for Williams, who tends to avoid prolonged stasis) encapsulates the experience of trauma that lies at the heart of the film. As Slavoj Žižek notes, “there is an inherent link between the notions of trauma and repetition [...] a trauma is by definition something one is not able to remember, i.e. to recollect by way of making it part of one’s symbolic narrative; as such, it repeats itself indefinitely, returning to haunt the subject” (**Žižek [2001] 2003, 36–37**).

11. It is worth noting that 22 years before *Presumed Innocent*, Williams had already used the *Dies irae* as a representation of the guilt tormenting an unfaithful spouse in his score for *Story of a Woman* (1968, directed by Leonardo Bercovici). In this romantic drama, concert pianist Karin abandons her husband and child for her emotionally instable former lover Bruno. The affair ends, predictably, in tragedy, heartbreak, and remorse. As in *Presumed Innocent*, Williams uses motif x of the *Dies irae* as a contrapuntal accompaniment to the love theme that depicts Bruno and Karin’s doomed affair—a subtle indication of a “sinful” relationship burdened, from the start, by guilt and death (in the beginning of the film, Bruno cheats on his wife with Karin; after Karin leaves him when she finds out he is married, Bruno kills his wife in a car accident while they quarrel about his affair; years later, Karin cheats on her husband with Bruno, who commits suicide when she decides to leave him to return to her husband).

12. An example of this approach is his *Violin Concerto* from 1976, in which the intervals of the opening theme are transmuted into a multiplicity of ingenious thematic derivations (see **Schneller 2018**).

a. "Vengeance" *Dies irae* Type 3

hrpd/
celeste/
Fender

b. Derivation of "Revenge motif" from *Dies irae* motifs x and y

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

FIGURE 15
Sleepers, vengeance motif,
personal transcription.

“See fulfilled the prophet’s warning”: foreshadowing in *Star Wars: A New Hope* (1977)

- 32 A particularly complex example of the Williams *Dies irae* as a signifier of death and retribution occurs in *Star Wars: A New Hope*. The composer’s original but unrealized plan involved a sophisticated strategy of motivic foreshadowing that was intended to begin with the iconic binary sunset scene. Uncle Owen has prohibited Luke from leaving home, thereby thwarting Luke’s ambitions of becoming a space pilot. Frustrated and disappointed, the young man steps outside to watch the twin suns of his home planet Tatooine set over the desert. He longingly gazes at the celestial bodies, which represent to him all the allure of the distant galaxies he aspires to explore. At this stage, Luke can only dream about adventure; trapped by familial expectations, he lacks the resolve to defy his uncle’s expectations.
- 33 Williams original cue for this scene, which was rejected by George Lucas, was constructed around a Type 1 *Dies irae* accompaniment (**Figure 16**; **Clip 16**). This motivic choice foreshadows not only the imminent massacre of Luke’s family, but also the ensuing desire for retribution that sets Luke on the path to fulfilling his destiny as a Jedi knight: a destiny that will culminate in the destruction of the death star and the ultimate collapse of Darth Vader’s power. The use of the *Dies irae* in the original

version thus imbues the scene with a darker tone than the revision, which features a lyrical statement of the Force theme.

The image displays a personal transcription of the original unused version of the "Binary Sunset" scene from *Star Wars: A New Hope*. The score is written for a large ensemble, including woodwinds, brass, strings, and percussion. The top system features a woodwind section (flute, clarinet, piano/cello) playing a melodic line marked *p* (piano), and a brass section (baritone/soprano horn, trumpet) playing a rhythmic pattern marked *p*. The bottom system features a string section playing a rhythmic pattern marked *mp* (mezzo-piano). The score is divided into two systems, with the second system continuing the musical themes. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

FIGURE 16
Star Wars: A New Hope, original unused version of “Binary Sunset,” personal transcription.

- 34 The next day, Luke visits the mysterious desert hermit Obi Wan-Kenobi. Obi Wan implores the young man to join him on the quest to free Princess Leia from the clutches of Darth Vader but Luke refuses, citing the need to help his uncle gather the harvest on their farm. Luke’s “refusal of the call,” as Joseph Campbell terms this stage of the archetypal hero’s journey (Campbell [1949] 2008, 49), is punctuated musically by another reference to the *Dies irae*—a second foreshadowing of impending calamity (Figure 17; Clip 17).
- 35 Let’s turn now from these ominous musical premonitions to the catastrophe they prophecy: Luke’s discovery that in his absence imperial stormtroopers have burned down the farm and killed his aunt and uncle. This traumatic juncture brutally untethers Luke from the domestic and familial responsibilities that have encumbered him until now. Loss

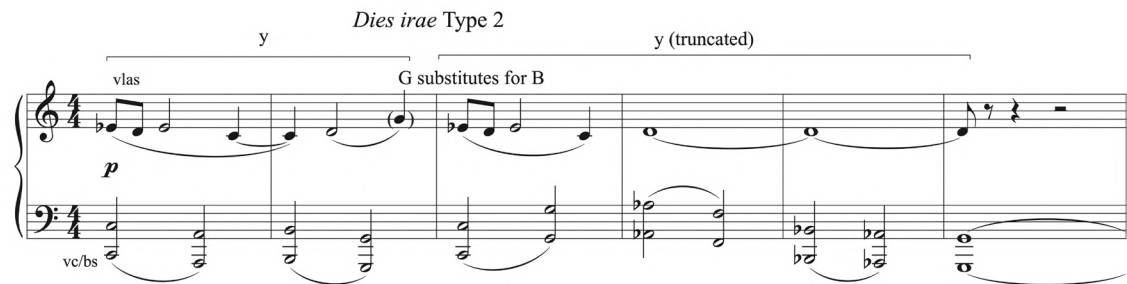


FIGURE 17

Star Wars: A New Hope, “Tales of a Jedi Knight/Learn about the Force,” personal transcription.

liberates him; the desire to join the struggle against those who murdered his family provides Luke with the motivation to stop dreaming and start acting.¹³ In the screenplay, Lucas explicitly articulates Luke’s emotions: “hate replaces fear and a new resolve comes over him,” a point emphasized in the music by the climactic statement of a Type 1 *Dies irae* in the horns that accompanies his paroxysm of “hate” and “resolve” (Figure 18b, last system; Clip 18). This crucial moment is carefully prepared by the preceding section of the cue, which first develops a propulsive four-note motif based on the inverted *Dies irae* (Type 5, Figure 18a) that is then contrapuntally interwoven with a searing statement of the Force theme (Figure 18b, first system).¹⁴ The thematic combination points the way to Luke’s future, in which joining the Jedi will give him the powers he needs to avenge the death of Uncle Owen and Aunt Beru. As Dan Golding puts it,

[The *Dies irae*] serves as a musical sign both of death and of providence, set against Williams’ major spiritual melody of the series in “the force theme.” There is a sense that the world of *Star Wars* shifts on the playing of this music; it is the moment when the story becomes about Skywalker. (Golding 2019, 126)

“Doomed to flames of woe unbounded”: revenge, hubris, and transformation in the *Star Wars* prequels and sequels

Attack of the Clones (2002)

36 While Luke eventually learns from Obi-Wan and Yoda to master his anger, his father Anakin succumbs to the dark side. His excessive pride and need for control mark him as an anti-hero in the tradition of Greek tragedy, and as a mortal sinner in the Christian framework invoked by the *Dies irae*.¹⁵ Pride belongs to the conceptual domain of GUILT. It is

13. This plot twist again follows an archetypal pattern familiar from the Hero’s Journey. As Valerie Estelle Frankel notes, “The young hero often loses his or her parents. This forces him to go forward without the protection of mom or dad...The death can also motivate the hero’s revenge...with his adoptive parents killed by the Empire, Luke makes up his mind. He commits to traveling with Ben and becoming a Jedi” (Frankel 2021, 64). That Lucas intended the audience to understand vengeance as a motivating factor in Luke’s decision to become a Jedi apprentice is apparent in the fact that he modelled the “Burning Homestead” scene, shot-by-shot, on the iconic scene from John Ford’s *The Searchers* (1956) in which Ethan Edwards returns to find his farm burned and his family massacred by Comanches—a catastrophe which sparks the quest for revenge that fuels Ethan’s actions for the remainder of the film. By so obviously referencing a pivotal juncture from one of the most famous revenge movies in cinema history, Lucas is inviting the viewer to connect Luke and Ethan—even though their trajectories diverge subsequently. The influence of *The Searchers* on *Star Wars* is so extensive that Doug Brode refers to the film as “*The Searchers* in Space” (Brode 2012, 7).

a. "Burning Homestead," ms. 13-18

b. "Burning Homestead," ms. 34-44

FIGURE 18

Star Wars: A New Hope, "Burning Homestead," personal transcription.

a sin for which Anakin will literally burn in *Revenge of the Sith*—"doomed to flames of woe unbounded," as stanza XVI of the *Dies irae* puts it.

- 37 Anakin's corruption begins in *Attack of the Clones*. "The thought of not being with you [...] I can't breathe," he confesses to Padmé as the two sit by the fireplace in her palace on Naboo—an early indication of his boundless urge not just to protect, but to possess and control, those he loves. As he expresses his passion in terms that are obsessive in their intensity ("I'm haunted by the kiss that you should never have given me. My heart is beating... hoping that kiss will not become a scar. You are in my very soul, tormenting me..."), a restless string line based on motif x of the *Dies irae* stirs in the orchestra. It is sequentially transposed upward before settling on the pattern F-E-F-D-G-D in the viola, echoed by the flute and horn—a fragmentary Type 3 *Dies irae* (F-E-F-D-G-[E-F]-D). Like "Binary Sunset," these subtle hints at the *Dies irae* will turn out to be prophetic: Anakin's eventual downfall is rooted in his love for Padmé and his willingness to do anything—even join the Dark Side—to avoid losing her (Figure 19; Clip 19).

- 38 After his mother is abducted and mortally wounded by Tusken Raiders on Tatooine, Anakin slaughters an entire village in a blind fury of revenge. As he confides to Padmé shortly after the massacre,

14. At first glance, the eighth note pattern in the top staff of Figure 18 may seem remote from the *Dies irae*. One might argue that even though the first four eighth notes of the example are an inversion of the first four notes of the *Dies irae*, the intervallic structure of the pattern is subsequently varied as it ascends in register, and its connection to the *Dies irae* is not immediately obvious. True; but I would argue that in the specific context of this cue, it is hard not to read the eighth note pattern as an "upside-down" *Dies irae*, considering that it serves as a build-up to the climax, which is based on a "right side-up" version of the motif. The fact that the main structural junctures of the cue begin with an exact inversion of the *Dies irae* (at ms. 13, 17, and 34) that is developed and finally "flipped over" to its original, easily recognizable form



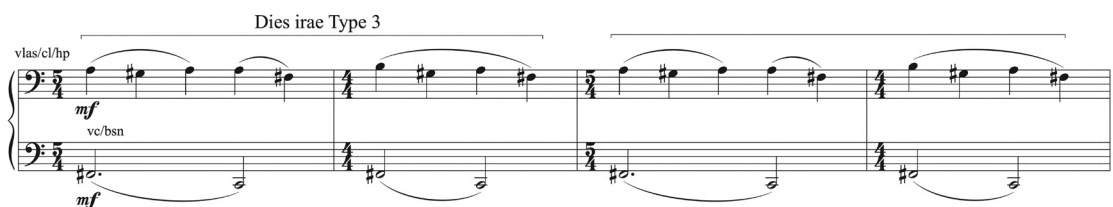
FIGURE 19
Attack of the Clones, evolution from motif x to fragmentary Type 3 *Dies irae* in “Anakin and Padmé,” personal transcription.

I killed them all. They’re dead, every single one of them... Not just the men. The women and children too. They’re like animals, and I slaughtered them like animals.

- 39 Tormented by his failure to save his mother, Anakin vows to Padmé that he will overcome death itself: “I will be the most powerful Jedi ever [...] I will even learn to stop people from dying.” His bloody vengeance and arrogant refusal to accept the limits of mortality marks the beginning of his turn to the dark side. This juncture in the narrative is accompanied by a fully-fledged Type 3 *Dies irae* ostinato (Figure 20a; Clip 20), and marks the completion of the motivic crystallization that took place during the fireplace confession on Naboo (Figure 20b). Williams’s use of the *Dies irae* as an ostinato that circles obsessively through most of the cue establishes an obviously relevant intertextual link with the “Vengeance” motif from *Sleepers* (Figure 15).¹⁶ Note the diabolical tritone in the bass that signals the “dark side” of the Force.

at the climax makes it unlikely that the intervallic mirroring is coincidental. If the cue did not culminate in such a blatant *Dies irae* quote, I would not consider the preceding eighth note pattern as a derivation—again, context is everything. I am not suggesting that Williams intends the listener to identify the connection between the eighth note figure and the *Dies irae*; rather, these purely musical subtleties (which in a piece of concert music would be taken for granted) are characteristic of Williams’s sophisticated approach to film scoring, which is often on the same level as his “art” music and thus contains esoteric structural relationships beyond the readily audible.

a. “Anakin Changes”, ostinato



b. Motivic evolution within and across cues

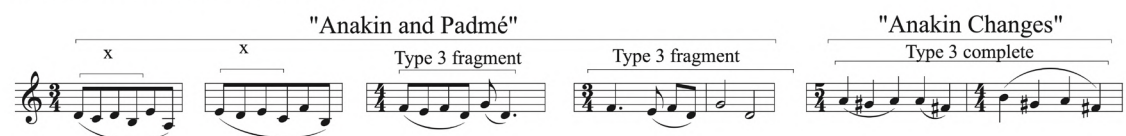


FIGURE 20
Attack of the Clones, complete Type 3 *Dies irae* in “Anakin Changes,” personal transcription.

Revenge of the Sith (2005)

- 40 Having introduced a motivic fragment derived from the *Dies irae* in *Attack of the Clones*, Williams subjects it in *Revenge of the Sith* to another process of transformation that culminates in a climactic musical point of arrival: “Lament” (**Figure 21; Clip 21**), a requiem for the Republic that interweaves three different types of Williams *Dies irae* (1, 3, and 4). This apotheosis of the *Dies irae*, which fuses a number of relevant semantic associations (revenge, death, grief, apocalypse) accompanies an extended montage of clone troopers assassinating Jedi generals across the galaxy at the command of Palpatine (the infamous “Order 66”).
- 41 The overt deployment of the *Dies irae* in “Lament” is, again, subtly anticipated earlier in the film by the “Sith Seduction” motif, an orchestral shiver based on a Type 6 *Dies irae* (the retrograde of its first four notes). Introduced twenty minutes before the Order 66 montage, the “Sith Seduction” motif underscores Anakin’s discovery that Palpatine is a Dark Lord of the Sith (**Figure 22a; Clip 22**). In the ensuing confrontation, Palpatine cunningly manipulates Anakin by using the young Jedi’s rage and confusion as a gateway into the dark side of the Force (“I can feel your anger. It makes you stronger, gives you focus”). As Anakin falls under the spell of evil, the backward *Dies irae* of the “Sith Seduction” motif solidifies into the angular bass line that underpins his murder of the Separatist leaders on Mustafar (**Figure 22b**).¹⁷ This association of the *Dies irae* with the demonic evil of the Dark Side taps into another deep semantic tributary: the ghoulish and gothic aspects that were first exploited by Romantic composers such as Berlioz and Liszt, and continue to reverberate in countless film scores (including the “Ave Satani” from Goldsmith’s *The Omen*, which, as mentioned above, is also based on a *Dies irae* retrograde).

15. According to St. Gregory, “the root of all evil is pride, of which it is said, as Scripture bears witness, ‘Pride is the beginning of all sin’” (Karris 1999, 238).

16. The superimposition of the *Dies irae* in multiple rhythmic layers (quarter vs eighths/quarter vs sixteenths/metric vs syncopated, etc.) also recalls the polyrhythmic layering of the motif in Rachmaninov’s *Isle of the Dead* (10 measures after rehearsal letter 22).

17. We can trace a direct line from the reversed *Dies irae* that accompanies the terrorism of the Sith to the reversed *Dies irae* that characterizes the Black September terrorist Dahlia in John Frankenheimer’s political thriller *Black Sunday* (see **Figure 8b**).

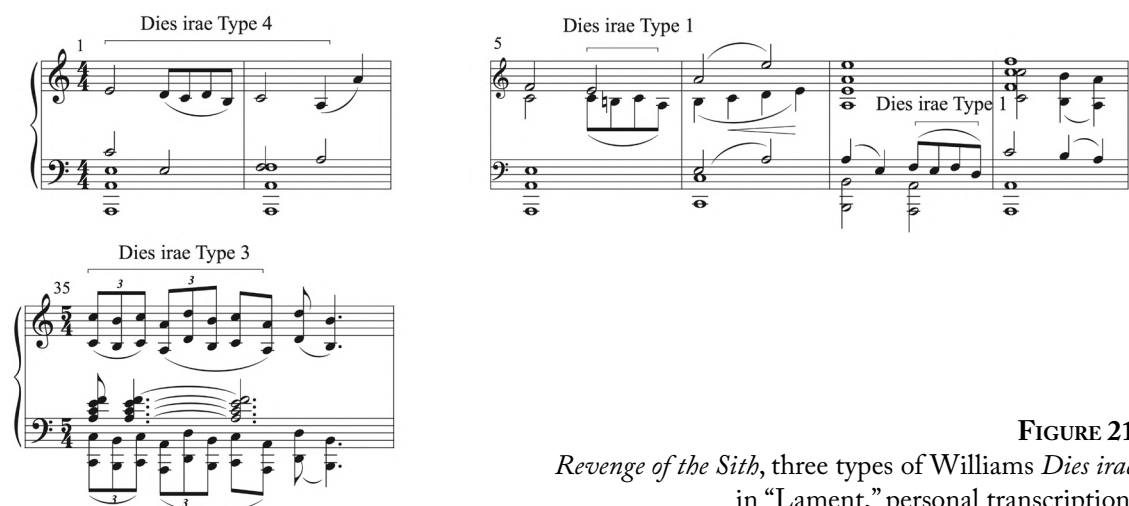
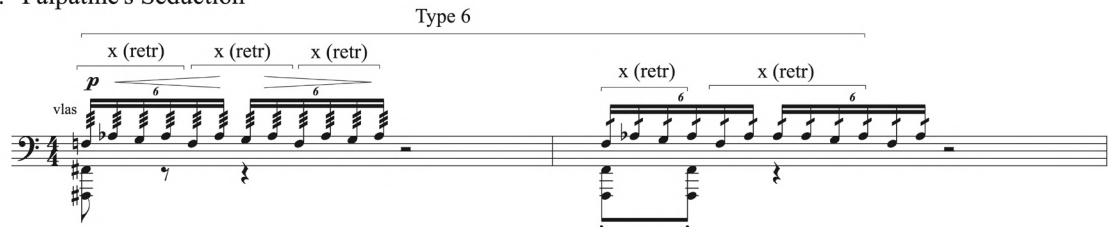


FIGURE 21
Revenge of the Sith, three types of Williams *Dies irae*
in “Lament,” personal transcription.

a. "Palpatine's Seduction"



b. "Anakin's Dark Deeds"

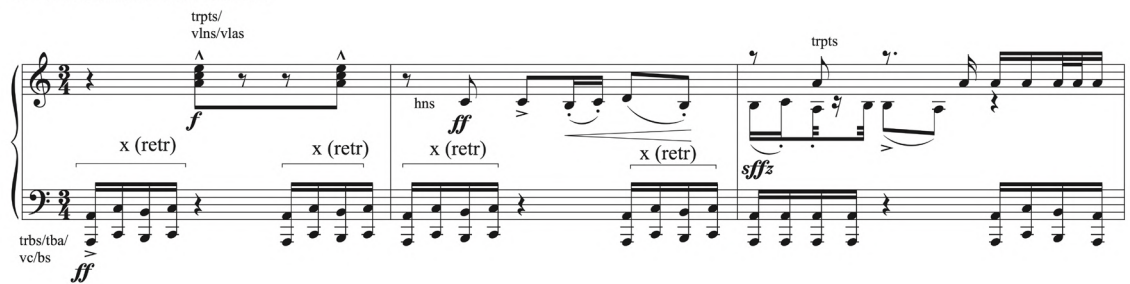


FIGURE 22

Revenge of the Sith, "Sith Seduction" in "Palpatine's Seduction" and bass line derivative in "Anakin's Dark Deeds," personal transcription.

- 42 The *Dies irae* that underpins Palpatine's cunning manipulations and the triumph of his evil plan to overthrow the Jedi also insinuates itself into the musical DNA of his granddaughter Rey (Figure 23; Clip 23). But in her music, it appears transmuted into a luminous chimes motif that reflects her noble character and the disavowal of her Sith heritage: a semantic inversion which indicates that through Rey, the destruction of the Jedi wrought by Palpatine will be avenged, that the Sith will, in effect, be beaten with their own weapons.

Dies irae Type 2
(y)



FIGURE 23

Star Wars: Episode VII – The Force Awakens (J.J. Abrams, 2015), "Rey's Theme," personal transcription.

- 43 In this sense, Rey, the granddaughter of Palpatine/Sidious, is a reincarnation of Luke, the son of Anakin/Vader: both are scions of an evil stock who renounce, and ultimately defeat, the dark side. The link between Luke and Rey is made explicit by the recycling of "Burning Homestead" from

A New Hope during the climax of *The Force Awakens*. As Rey draws her light saber to confront Kylo Ren in the forest duel, Williams recapitulates the concluding section of “Burning Homestead” (**Figure 18**). The result, as Dan Golding notes, is a complex mirror-within-a mirror nesting of referential meaning:

[T]he direct reuse of the “Burning Homestead” cue, including the “Dies irae” quotation, reveals multiple levels of meaning making through repetition... Here, we can see at least three forms of citation going on: a citation of the “embrace of the call” heroic narrative moment between generations of Star Wars heroes, as Luke and Rey accept their place in the larger world; a citation of the Williams composition that is repeated across both scenes; and a citation of this specific “Dies irae” invocation, and also the centuries-old tradition of the “Dies irae” along with it. (Golding 2019, 127)

- 44 Williams’s variations on the *Dies irae* in the Star Wars series are extraordinary in their structural and expressive range. Whether through straightforward statements of its first four notes or through sequential expansion, inversion, or retrograde, the venerable trope enriches the meaning of a wide range of dramatic situations – from the individual level of Luke and Anakin’s desire for revenge to the intergalactic tragedy of Order 66. The latter use of the motif—as a signifier of collective catastrophe—is, of course, closest to the original apocalyptic meaning of the medieval hymn, and it is in this semantic domain that Williams has created some of his most indelible adaptations of the *Dies irae*.

“Heaven and earth in ashes ending”: the *Dies irae* as a signifier of Apocalypse in *Empire of the Sun*, *War of the Worlds*, *Jurassic Park*, and *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*

- 45 Williams’s music for films dealing with an actual or potential apocalypse can be divided into two categories: “invasion narratives” in which a ruthless enemy destroys civilization (the Japanese in *Empire of the Sun*, the Martians in *War of the Worlds*) and “Frankenstein narratives” in which humanity risks self-extinction through the creation of artificial beings that compete for survival (resurrected dinosaurs in *Jurassic Park*, sentient robots in *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*). In all of these films, the *Dies irae* assumes a universal significance that invites the viewer to reflect on the fate of our species as a whole.

***Empire of the Sun* (1987)**

- 46 *Empire of the Sun*, set in Shanghai during the Japanese invasion of China in World War II, lays bare the fragile boundary that separates civilization from chaos. Jim, a spoiled, upper middle class British schoolboy, grows up in a luxurious villa and lives a pampered life. His privileged existence is exemplified by an early scene in which he rummages through the fridge (lavishly stocked with meats and sweets) for a late-night snack, to the consternation of his Chinese servant. “You have to do what I say,” Jim insists as he orders the servant to give him butter biscuits—a command that “expresses colonialism [and] the ethos of his society,” as screenwriter Tom Stoppard notes ([Stalcup 2013, 256](#)). Spielberg establishes a sharp contrast between the sheltered life of the European community in the Shanghai International Settlement and the harsh reality outside its walled compounds, with its beggars, seething crowds of impoverished Chinese, and the escalating threat posed by Japanese troops.
- 47 When war breaks out, Jim’s idyllic existence is turned upside down. During the chaotic evacuation of the city, he is separated from his parents. Eventually, he makes his way back to his home in hopes of reuniting with them, but the house is deserted. In an echo of the earlier kitchen scene, Jim pokes around in the fridge, but now finds only rotten, moldering remains (*sic transit gloria mundi*). In his mother’s destroyed bedroom, he discovers the imprints of her bare feet and hands, mingled with those of boots, in the talcum powder spilling from her dresser: signs of a violent struggle in which she was attacked, and—for all Jim knows—killed by Japanese soldiers. He rushes to the window and opens it, the wind erasing the last traces of his mother’s agony in a poignant image of ephemerality. As Jim descends the stairs, he encounters the servant in the process of absconding with furniture. When he confronts her, she slaps him – an act of reprisal for his earlier insolence that encapsulates the reversal of Jim’s fortune from pampered princeling to scorned street urchin. In the next scenes, we see Jim riding his bike through the abandoned house and wandering about the desolate garden as autumn leaves drift into the drained swimming pool. In these haunting images, Jim is depicted as the last survivor of an apocalypse, roaming the crumbling ruins of a dead civilization.
- 48 The end of Jim’s sheltered life and the collapse of the established order is symbolized by the servant’s slap—a charged gesture which, in a more general sense, represents punishment for the sins of colonialism. His subsequent odyssey through the wastelands of war and prison camp is a kind of purgatory in which he is purged of indolence, arrogance, and inherited privilege. In this context, Williams’s invocation of the *Dies irae*

in the cues that accompany Jim's return to his deserted home ("Alone at Home," "The Empty Swimming Pool") is rich in symbolic meaning.

49 The music for this sequence (**Figure 24; Clip 24**) is an example of what could be called the Apocalypse trope¹⁸ in Williams's work—an eerie texture of two or more chromatically meandering melodic lines which entwine in dissonant polyphony, usually scored for strings in a high register and reminiscent both of the "Twisted Counterpoint" topic in horror film music (as exemplified by Bernard Herrmann's "The Madhouse" from *Psycho*, **Clip 25**)¹⁹ and of certain works by Shostakovich (14th Symphony, first movement) and Khachaturian (the Adagio from the *Gayane* Suite No. 3 that was used in *2001: A Space Odyssey*).²⁰ As in the pieces by Shostakovich and Khachaturian, the motivic fabric of "Alone at Home" and "The Empty Swimming Pool" is permeated by references to the first phrase of the *Dies irae* (similar examples appear in *War of the Worlds* and *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*). In all of these cases, the "*Dies irae*" and "Twisted Counterpoint" topics are fused and thus absorbed into the larger Apocalypse trope.

50 The way Williams unveils the *Dies irae* in "Alone at Home" exemplifies a structural method characteristic of the composer. The hushed dynamics, high tessitura, and absence of low frequencies in "Alone at Home" create a sense of glazed fragility that suggests a state of shock. As Jim ascends the stairs from the kitchen and enters his mother's bedroom, the *Dies irae* emerges from the steady stream of eighth notes through the gradual, almost imperceptible, concatenation of its constituent pitches. At the beginning of the cue, Williams only hints at the *Dies irae* by stating the first 3 notes; in measure 10, he adds the fourth note; in measure 13, he adds the fifth note; it takes until measure 19 before the six-note phrase of motif *y* in D minor comes into focus as Jim approaches his mother's dresser. The first phrase of the *Dies irae* has now almost fully emerged and is stated again in measure 28, as Jim realizes what the footprints in the powder signify. This process of teleological genesis, by which an extended melodic idea crystallizes gradually from shorter motivic fragments²¹, is applied here to the local level of an individual cue, but it is also frequently used by Williams to provide structural coherence to the large-scale architecture of a score (for an in-depth discussion of teleological genesis in *E.T.* and *Close Encounters*, see [Schneller 2014](#)).

War of the Worlds (2005)

51 There is a parallel scene in another harrowing "invasion narrative" directed by Steven Spielberg. In *Empire of the Sun*, a boy gazes at the aftermath of violence in a bedroom destroyed by Japanese soldiers; in *War of the Worlds*,

18. According to Robert Hatten, a trope results from the combination of contrasting musical topics; it "is sparked from the collision or fusion of two already established meanings" ([Hatten \[2004\] 2017, 15](#)).

19. Other examples of the "Twisted Counterpoint" topic in horror/psychological thriller scores occur in Ennio Morricone's "The Norwegian Camp" from *The Thing* (John Carpenter, 1982, **Clip 26**), Howard Shore's "The Fingernails" from *The Fly* (David Cronenberg, 1986, **Clip 27**), Christopher Young's "Rat Slice Quartet" from *Hellraiser* (Clive Barker, 1987, **Clip 28**), and Alan Silvestri's "Ouija Board" from *What Lies Beneath* (Robert Zemeckis, 2000, **Clip 29**). In addition to *Psycho*, the likely source of this particular texture in film music is Bartók's *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*, which features prominently in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980) and was repeatedly mined as a quarry of the uncanny by Jerry Goldsmith.

20. The Adagio from *Gayane* was also invoked by James Horner in his score for *Aliens* (James Cameron, 1986, **Clip 30**)—which was probably temp-tracked with the Adagio. In both *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Aliens*, the desolate two-part string counterpoint accompanies scenes of spaceships travelling through the vast emptiness—an interesting intertextual link to the sequence in the abandoned house in *Empire of the Sun*, in which Jim's total isolation is captured by a similar texture.

21. See [Hepokoski \(1993, 26\)](#) and [Darcy \(2001\)](#) for a discussion of teleological genesis in the music of Sibelius and Mahler.

The musical score is presented in three systems. The first system (measures 1-8) features Violins I and II. Violin I has a melodic line with slurs and ties, while Violin II has a more rhythmic line with triplets. The second system (measures 9-16) continues the Violin parts, with Violin II featuring a triplet marked '4 (x)' and a quintuplet marked '5'. The third system (measures 17-25) introduces a 'vlas.' part and a 'choir' part. The 'vlas.' part has sextuplets marked '6 (y variant)' and '6 (y)'. The 'choir' part is marked 'pp' and features a melodic line. The score concludes with a 'Telos' marking and a final measure in 4/4 time.

FIGURE 24
Empire of the Sun, teleological genesis in “Alone at Home,” personal transcription.

it is a girl who gazes at a river filled with the bodies of people murdered by alien invaders. Both are visions of apocalyptic horror that mark the traumatic immolation of childhood innocence in the fires of war: a connection made explicit by the musical accompaniment, which in both cases is based on the first six notes of the *Dies irae* (Figure 25; Clip 31). In *War of the Worlds*, the gradual proliferation of voices from a single line to dense 4-part polyrhythmic counterpoint mirrors the proliferation of the bodies floating by in the water: first one, then another, finally dozens.

52 The *Dies irae* is a particularly apt point of reference for the river scene in *War of the Worlds*. Its imagery recalls the Black Death in 1348, when the Rhône River in Avignon was clogged with the corpses of plague victims—a disaster widely believed to have been caused by an angry God



FIGURE 25

War of the Worlds, “Bodies in the River,” personal transcription.

to punish the world for its sins (Kennedy 2023, 92–93). In *War of the Worlds*, it is the aliens who appear God-like in their omniscient powers of observation, their superior intelligence, and their overwhelming might, as the opening voice-over indicates:

No one would have believed in the early years of the twenty-first century, that our world was being watched by intelligences greater than our own. That as men busied themselves about their various concerns, they observed and studied, like the way a man with a microscope might scrutinize the creatures that swarm and multiply in a drop of water. With infinite complacency men went to and fro about the globe, confident of our empire over this world. Yet, across the gulf of space, intellects, vast and cool and unsympathetic, regarded our planet with envious eyes, and slowly and surely, drew their plans against us.

- 53 The key phrase here is “infinite complacency,” which suggests a decadent civilization focused on trivial matters. Both *Empire of the Sun* and *War of the Worlds* center on flawed protagonists who reflect the vices of their respective societies and are subjected, through the brutal intervention of an external enemy, to a traumatic but ultimately therapeutic process of existential reassessment. As a stand-in for humanity, Ray, the (anti-)hero of *War of the Worlds*, is initially portrayed as negligent, irresponsible, and self-absorbed. Estranged from his divorced ex-wife and kids, he is an unsympathetic figure, a deadbeat dad who compensates for his lacking authority with bluster. The invasion by hostile alien forces provides a trial by fire which he survives by proving himself as a father who can protect his daughter in the face of peril; like Jim in *Empire of the Sun*, he undergoes a process of maturation. In both films, the arduous moral journey

of the protagonists is rewarded through the ultimate defeat of the enemy (the bomb over Nagasaki, the microbes that kill the Martians) and their reunion with family (Jim with his parents, Ray with his son and ex-wife).

- 54 As in *Empire of the Sun*, Williams subjects the *Dies irae* to teleological genesis, but here the process plays out across multiple cues. A detailed analysis of the motivic evolution is beyond the scope of this article, so a summary of its principal stages will have to suffice. Following its spectacular first presentation as a chromatically compressed Type 2 in the river scene (**Figure 25**), the *Dies irae* resurfaces prominently in “Woods Walk,” which accompanies Ray and his children as they join a stream of refugees wandering across the desolate countryside. In this cue, Williams introduces two versions of motif x as well as an ascending link (**Figure 26; Clip 32**)—three motivic cells that, reordered and expanded through sequential transposition and development, will find their definitive expression in the “Epilogue” that accompanies the end credits.

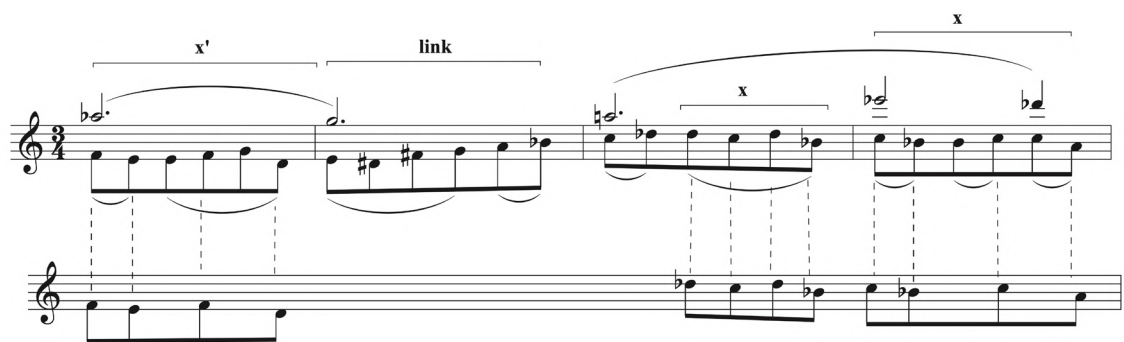


FIGURE 26
War of the Worlds, “Woods Walk,” personal transcription.

- 55 In addition to moments of horror and desolation, the *Dies irae* marks pivotal points of separation and reunion. We hear it when Ray’s son Robbie leaves his father and sister to join the army (**Figure 27; Clip 33**), and again when Ray returns Rachel to her mother and reunites with Robbie.



FIGURE 27
War of the Worlds, “Robbie Joins the Fight,” personal transcription.

- 56 The reunion scene begins as Ray carries Rachel through an autumnal Boston street. As they approach the family home, a solo horn intones an elegiac melody that combines motifs x and x' from "Woods Walk" into a Type 4 *Dies irae* which serves as the antecedent of a somber but serene period in the Dorian mode (**Figure 28**; [Clip 34](#)). The emergence of this extended theme in a score which until now has been almost entirely textural presents a major structural moment, as does the harmonic transition to diatonicism from the dense chromatic dissonance that dominates the rest of the score. The fact that the reunion theme's bittersweet lyricism springs from the same motivic source as the music for the horrors of the river scene and the desolation of the refugees in "Woods Walk" poignantly expresses Ray's character arc. Suffering has taught Ray to be a better person; only through confronting death and deprivation is he able to progress from deadbeat dad to paternal protector. By weaving the *Dies irae* into the music for the climactic reunion, Williams points to the root cause of Ray's personal transformation, while simultaneously acknowledging the collective catastrophe that has befallen humankind.

THEME

ANTECEDENT

CONSEQUENT

solo horn

Type 4 Dies irae

x

x'

x''

mp

VARIED RESTATEMENT

piano

FIGURE 28

War of the Worlds, "Boston Street Finale," personal transcription.

- 57 The theme that emerges in the reunion scene fuses the principal motivic strands of the *Dies irae* into a cohesive melodic statement and thus marks a significant point of arrival—but it is not quite the end of the process. As in his score for *Close Encounters*, where the apotheosis of the "Communication motif" unfolds over the closing credits (see [Schneller 2014, 121](#)), Williams reserves the actual telos of the *Dies irae* in *War of the Worlds* for the end title ("Epilogue"). The music unfolds in the harmonic twilight zone of octatonic/hexatonic/harmonic minor pitch fields that is a characteristic of the Apocalypse trope in Williams. Melodically, the "Epilogue" presents a mournful rumination on the end of the world in which the first phrase of the theme presented in "Boston Street Finale" (a

Type 4 *Dies irae*) is subjected to an extended development that culminates in an impassioned climax—the telos of the score as a whole (**Figure 29; Clip 35**). We can trace a clear line of motivic evolution from “Woods Walk,” which provides the three principal motivic building blocks of the “Epilogue” via “Boston Street Finale”, which synthesizes x and x’ into the opening phrase of a new theme, to the climax of the “Epilogue” in which all of these elements are brought to ultimate fruition.

The figure displays a musical score for the 'Epilogue' of 'War of the Worlds'. It consists of four staves, labeled A1, A2, A3, and A4. Each staff contains a sequence of musical notes and rests, with various annotations above and below the notes. Labels 'x', 'x'', 'link', and 'x'' are placed above specific musical phrases, indicating their relationship to the 'Woods Walk' theme. Dynamics such as *p* (piano), *mf* (mezzo-forte), *f* (forte), and *ff* (fortissimo) are indicated at different points in the score. Staff A3 includes an 'ext.' (extended) section. The score concludes with a 'Climax (Telos)' section on staff A4, marked with *ff*.

FIGURE 29
War of the Worlds, “Epilogue” (principal melodic line only), personal transcription.

Jurassic Park (1993)

- 58 If the “Invasion narratives” of *Empire of the Sun* and *War of the Worlds* present an external enemy who destroys civilization from the outside, the “Frankenstein narratives” of *Jurassic Park* and *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* involve an internal threat that results from scientific and technological innovations gone rogue. Like Anakin, who attempts to conquer death by embracing the black magic of the Sith, John Hammond in *Jurassic Park* challenges the limits of mortality by turning to the technological wizardry of genetic engineering to resurrect long-extinct creatures. Hammond’s original sin is hubris: tampering with evolution through the manipulation of dinosaur DNA violates the natural and temporal order. Early in the film, the irresponsibility of this transgression is articulated by Dr. Malcolm:

[T]he lack of humility before nature that's being displayed here [...] staggers me [...]. Don't you see the danger, John, inherent in what you're doing here? Genetic power is the most awesome force the planet's ever seen, but you wield it like a kid that's found his dad's gun.

- 59 Malcolm is proven right when the resurrected dinosaurs break through the fences of the park and become an uncontrollable force of destruction. The broken fence is thus the key visual metaphor of *Jurassic Park*. It captures Hammond's central moral transgression—the violation of ethical boundaries in the pursuit of profit and technology. Fences embody the concept of boundaries that ought to be preserved and respected—the boundaries between humankind and nature, technology and evolution, the living present and the extinct past. Hammond's breaching of these boundaries through genetic engineering is mirrored in its punishment: the T-Rex ripping through the fence that separates the domain of humans from that of dinosaurs.
- 60 The symbolic significance of fences in *Jurassic Park* may explain why Williams chose the *Dies irae* as the basis for a musical motif that, as Mike Matessino has noted, is linked specifically with the visual motif of the electric fence (2022). We first hear the “fence motif” after Dr. Sattler discovers the breached fence through which the T-Rex escaped a few hours earlier (**Figure 30a**; **Clip 36**). The motif appears again as Dr. Grant and the children, who have been trapped in the dinosaur enclosure, scale the fence to get out (**Figure 30b**). The musical symmetry of the two scenes points to their inverted parallelism: the first scene shows the aftermath of a dinosaur breaching the fence to enter the human domain. In the second, it is humans who breach the fence to leave the dinosaur domain. Each scene involves the traversal of a literal and figurative boundary that should never have been crossed, a point made explicit in the music through Williams's invocation of the *Dies irae*.²²

22. Note the link with *Presumed Innocent*, in which the *Dies irae* that accompanies an act of adulterous love likewise demarcates the crossing of an ethical boundary.

A.I. Artificial Intelligence (2001)

- 61 As in *Jurassic Park*, the nexus of hubris and apocalypse is central to *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*. The film begins with an apocalyptic image: the roiling waters of the rising ocean that, due to human-induced climate change, has swallowed most of the planet—an obvious reference to the Book of Genesis, in which God punishes the sins of humanity with a flood. In *A.I.*, man's original sin is, once again, hubris. Hubris manifests itself in the destruction of the planet through industrial technology; hubris motivates Professor Hobby who, like Victor Frankenstein, challenges God by creating artificial life; and it is hubris that causes medical science to cheat mortality by preserving through cryonic suspension those who

a. "The Falling Car"

Dies irae Type 3

ext. x" (permutation) etc.

mf

mf

b. "High Wire Stunts"

Dies irae Type 3

etc.

x" (permutation)

mp

mf

FIGURE 30

Jurassic Park, "Fence" motif, personal transcription.

would otherwise have died (note, again, the link with Anakin). The refusal to live in harmony with nature and accept the limits it imposes on us brings about a global apocalypse. As a result, our species is doomed to extinction and leaves a world inhabited only by robots.

62 This eschatological trajectory is reflected in the symmetry between the opening of Act I and Act III. The visual structure of both sequences is identical: in Act I, the camera follows a moving vehicle through a forest. We see a glimpse of the passengers, a man and a woman. They arrive at their destination, a medical facility in which they visit a cryogenically frozen human boy in a capsule. At the beginning of Act III, the camera follows a moving aircraft through a frozen wasteland; we see a glimpse of the passengers, highly evolved robots; they arrive at their destination, an excavation site where they unearth a frozen robot boy in an amphibicopter. This visual rhyme throws into relief the evolutionary transformation from human to robot, orga to mecha, that unfolds over the course of the film (Figure 31).

63 The visual symmetry is emphasized by the music for the two scenes, which incorporates motifs x and z of the *Dies irae*. The first cue, a ruminative elegy for strings that presents yet another manifestation of the Apocalypse trope, is shot through with subtle allusions to the *Dies irae* that

Beginning of Act I: Orga



Beginning of Act III: Mecha

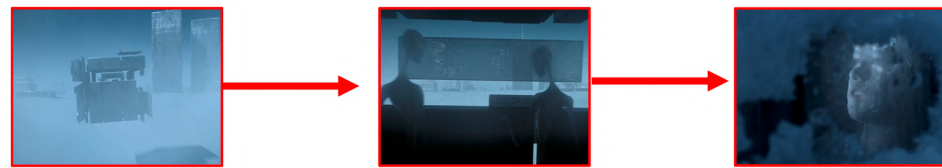


FIGURE 31

Comparison of visual structure, Acts I and III, *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (2001).

will only come to fruition in Act III (**Figure 32; Clip 37**).²³ The music enters near the end of the preceding scene, in which Professor Hobby ponders the obligations humans have to their mechanical children by comparing robots to Adam and humans to God (yet another instance of the arrogance that will ultimately destroy humanity). The references to the *Dies irae* in the music that follows serve as an ominous, prophetic commentary on Hobby's hubris: as humans have replaced God, the music seems to suggest, so one day robots will replace humans.²⁴

- 64 The music for the parallel scene at the beginning of Act III is constructed from similar elements, namely, motifs x and z of the *Dies irae*, but now the monochromatic timbre of string orchestra is replaced by the monochromatic timbre of a cappella chorus (**Figure 33; Clip 38**). The wordless, unaccompanied human voice is, of course, a hauntingly ironic choice of timbre for a post-apocalyptic world in which nothing remains of humanity but a few crumbling skyscrapers and two frozen robots. In this requiem for our now extinct species, the fire and ashes of the Day of Wrath have cooled into an icy serenity.

Conclusion

- 65 “As creatures we don’t know if we have a future,” Williams remarked in a 1997 interview, “but we certainly share a great past. We remember it, in language and in pre-language, and that’s where music lives—it’s to this area in our souls that it can speak” (Byrd 1997). The composer’s keen

23. Note the similarity to the Adagio from Khachaturian’s *Gayane*, which is even more explicit in *A.I.* than in *Empire of the Sun* (see **Figure 24** and footnote 21) or *War of the Worlds* (**Figure 25**). The inter-textual connection between this music in *A.I.* and the scenes from 2001 and *Aliens* in which the Adagio is used (or paraphrased) is obvious: all three films are set in a dystopian future in which humans are isolated and dominated by technology and artificial intelligence; in all three, the ruminative two-part counterpoint accompanies images of people frozen in cryogenic sleep. The difference between Horner and Williams in their respective allusions to Khachaturian is telling: while Horner paraphrases the Adagio so closely that the boundary between allusion and quotation is blurred, Williams absorbs only its most salient stylistic elements to create an otherwise original piece of music.

24. The saturation of the non-diegetic musical fabric with the motivic DNA of the *Dies irae* extends to the diegetic

sensitivity to the semantic resonances of the musical past is evident not only in his many imaginative variations on the first phrase of the *Dies irae*, but also in its deployment as a musical commentary that highlights the moral crux of the narrative. As we have seen, in Williams's oeuvre the *Dies irae* functions as a signifier of the distinct but overlapping concepts GUILT, PUNISHMENT, and DEATH. In *Presumed Innocent*, the *Dies irae* functions principally on an individual psychological level as a signifier of guilt, while in *Sleepers*, it is associated with an obsessive quest for revenge. In the *Star Wars* series, the *Dies irae* assumes a variety of meanings ranging from the foreshadowing of imminent doom to revenge, hubris, black magic, and grief, while in *Empire of the Sun*, *War of the Worlds*, *Jurassic Park*, and *A.I.*, it is associated principally with the concept of apocalypse. In all of these scores, the *Dies irae* is carefully integrated into the overall motivic design, and in some cases subjected to a sophisticated process of teleological genesis on both the local and the large-scale level. Much, of course, remains to be said about the Williams *Dies irae*—in particular, its structural and semantic connections to the work of Rachmaninov and

domain of the opening sequence. As Monica (the mother) attaches a speaker to the cryogenic pod of her hibernating child Martin, Williams's music merges into the famous waltz melody from Act I of Tchaikovsky's *Sleeping Beauty*, which begins with the pitches B $\flat$ -A-B $\flat$ -G (motif x of the *Dies irae*). The musical reference to the fairy tale not only reflects Martin's predicament ("asleep" in a translucent box), but also foreshadows robot boy David's centuries-long hibernation in an amphibicopter.

The musical score is a personal transcription of the 'A.I. Artificial Intelligence, 'Cryogenics,' scene. It is written for violin/viola (vlas/vc) and piano (piano). The score is divided into measures 5, 9, 12, and 16. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The time signature is 3/4. The score includes dynamic markings such as *mf*, *mp*, and *dim.* The score features the 'Dies irae' motif z (retrograde) and motif x. The score is a personal transcription of the 'A.I. Artificial Intelligence, 'Cryogenics,' scene.

FIGURE 32
A.I. Artificial Intelligence, "Cryogenics," personal transcription.

Choir

p

molto legato

Dies irae Type 3

Dies irae Type 3

Dies irae Type 3

Dies irae Type 3

Dies irae Type 3

FIGURE 33

A.I. Artificial Intelligence, “Journey Through the Ice,” personal transcription.

Goldsmith, its use as a red herring in *Close Encounters* and *Home Alone*, and its key importance in several other scores, including *Story of a Woman* and *Black Sunday*. But I hope the examples I have discussed in this article suffice to demonstrate that the Williams *Dies irae* is a prominent and semantically rich pattern in the complex tapestry of musical topics from which John Williams’s film music is woven.

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Appendix

Filmography of Williams scores that refer to the *Dies irae*

This appendix is not intended as a complete list.

- *Star Wars: Episode VII – The Force Awakens*, J. J. Abrams, 2015
- *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*, Steven Spielberg, 2008
- *Munich*, Steven Spielberg, 2005
- *Star Wars: Episode III – Revenge of the Sith*, George Lucas, 2005
- *War of the Worlds*, Steven Spielberg, 2005
- *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Chris Columbus, 2002
- *Star Wars: Episode II – Attack of the Clones*, George Lucas, 2002
- *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*, Steven Spielberg, 2001
- *Rosewood*, John Singleton, 1997

- *Amistad*, Steven Spielberg, 1997
- *Sleepers*, Barry Levinson, 1996
- *Nixon*, Oliver Stone, 1995
- *Jurassic Park*, Steven Spielberg, 1993
- *Home Alone*, Chris Columbus, 1990
- *Presumed Innocent*, Alan J. Pakula, 1990
- *Empire of the Sun*, Steven Spielberg, 1987
- *The Witches of Eastwick*, George Miller, 1987
- *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, Steven Spielberg, 1977
- *Star Wars*, George Lucas, 1977
- *Black Sunday*, John Frankenheimer, 1977
- *Story of a Woman*, Leonardo Bercovici, 1968 (released 1970)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tom Schneller is a film music scholar whose research centers on Hollywood music, in particular the work of Bernard Herrmann and John Williams. He has published articles and reviews in numerous scholarly journals and contributed chapters to several edited volumes on film music, including *John Williams: Music for Films, Television, and the Concert Stage* (Brepols, 2018). Schneller has taught music history, theory, and composition at Ithaca College, Cornell University, and the Eastman School of Music. He holds a D.M.A. from Cornell University, where he studied composition with Steven Stucky and musicology with David Rosen.

L'écriture soliste dans la musique de film de John Williams

Soloist Writing in John Williams's Film Music

Jérôme Rossi

Mots clés : musique de film, analyse musicale, concerto, Williams (John), soliste

Keywords: film music, music analysis, concerto, Williams (John), soloist

RÉSUMÉ

Adepte de l'écriture concertante dans sa musique de concert avec une douzaine de concertos pour de nombreux instruments, John Williams y a eu aussi recours dans huit films : *Sugarland Express* (Steven Spielberg, 1974) pour harmonica, *Né un 4 juillet* (Oliver Stone, 1989) pour trompette, *La Liste de Schindler* (Steven Spielberg, 1993) pour violon, *Sept ans au Tibet* (Jean-Jacques Annaud, 1997) pour violoncelle, *Ma meilleure ennemie* (Chris Columbus, 1998) pour guitare, *Arrête-moi si tu peux* (Steven Spielberg, 2002) pour saxophone alto, *Le Terminal* (Steven Spielberg, 2004) pour clarinette et *Mémoires d'une geisha* (Rob Marshall, 2005) pour violon et violoncelle. Les formes d'écriture solistes de John Williams sont diversifiées et peuvent être classées en trois modèles bien différenciés au niveau de la séquence musicale : *cantabile*, concertant et improvisateur. Tout en montrant l'extraordinaire inventivité mélodique de John Williams, cette étude illustre la capacité du compositeur à absorber plusieurs modèles stylistiques – chanson, concerto de soliste, improvisation de jazz – en les mettant au service du propos narratif (évocation de la solitude ou conflit avec la société), renouvelant ses approches au gré des propositions cinématographiques et des genres dans lesquelles elles s'inscrivent.

ABSTRACT

Familiar of *concertante* writing in his concert music with a dozen concertos for numerous instruments, John Williams also used it in eight films: *Sugarland Express* (Steven Spielberg, 1974) for harmonica, *Born on the Fourth of July* (Oliver Stone, 1989) for trumpet, *Schindler's List* (Steven Spielberg, 1993) for violin, *Seven Years In Tibet* (Jean-Jacques Annaud, 1997) for cello, *Stepmom* (Chris Columbus, 1998) for guitar, *Catch Me If You Can* (Steven Spielberg, 2002) for alto saxophone, *The Terminal* (Steven Spielberg, 2004) for clarinet, and *Memoirs of a Geisha* (Rob Marshall, 2005) for violin and cello. John Williams's soloist writing styles are diverse and can be classified into three distinct models in terms of musical sequence: *cantabile*, *concertante*, and improvisational. While demonstrating John Williams's extraordinary melodic inventiveness, this study illustrates the composer's ability to absorb several stylistic models—song, solo concerto, jazz improvisation—and put them at the service of the narrative (evoking loneliness or conflict with society), renewing his approaches according to the cinematic proposals and genres in which they are embedded.

- 1 L'écriture pour soliste et orchestre est très présente dans l'œuvre de concert de John Williams, comme en témoignent ses dix-huit œuvres – en comptant les concertos et les genres qui lui sont assimilés (JohnWilliams.org) – pour ce dispositif. Dans ses musiques de films, Williams ne s'est pas non plus privé du recours à des solistes, les choisissant parmi les plus grands interprètes de son époque – le violoniste Itzhak Perlman¹, le violoncelliste Yo-Yo Ma, le guitariste Christopher Parkening² – ou dans l'orchestre qu'il a dirigé pendant quatorze ans (1980-1993), le Boston Pops Orchestra – la clarinetiste Emily Bernstein et le trompettiste Tim Robinson. Les huit œuvres retenues ici privilégient un instrument en lui confiant au moins deux thèmes différents et en en reconnaissant l'importance par la citation du nom de l'interprète soit sur la pochette de la bande originale, soit dans les crédits du film. Ces deux conditions permettent d'éliminer un nombre important de partitions dans lesquelles le compositeur utilise des timbres solistes³, tout en conservant celles pour lesquelles une attention a été expressément accordée à un instrument en particulier. Le corpus se compose ainsi de *Sugarland Express* (Steven Spielberg, 1974), *Né un 4 juillet* (Oliver Stone, 1989), *La Liste de Schindler* (Steven Spielberg, 1993), *Sept ans au Tibet* (Jean-Jacques Annaud, 1997), *Ma meilleure ennemie* (Chris Columbus, 1998), *Arrête-moi si tu peux* (Steven Spielberg, 2002), *Le Terminal* (Steven Spielberg, 2004) et *Mémoires d'une geisha* (Rob Marshall, 2005).

1. Une collaboration indirecte entre John Williams et Itzhak Perlman a eu lieu précocement dans la carrière de John Williams avec *Les Sorcières d'Eastwick* (George Miller, 1987), lorsque Jack Nicholson joue du violon (41:45) : c'est bien le violon de Perlman que l'on entend, tel qu'indiqué au générique de fin.

2. En 2012, soit une quinzaine d'années après l'avoir fait jouer dans *Ma meilleure ennemie* (Chris Columbus, 1998), John Williams écrit la pièce *Rounds for Guitar Solo* pour Christopher Parkening ("with Great Admiration for Christopher Parkening and the Parkening International Guitar Competition").

3. Par exemple, je ne conserve pas *JFK* (Oliver Stone, 1991) pour lequel le trompettiste Tim Morrison est bien cité dans le générique de fin, mais dont les interventions solistes restent liées au même thème principal. De manière générale, John

Film	Instrument soliste
<i>Sugarland Express</i> (S. Spielberg, 1974)	Harmonica, Toots Thielemans
<i>Né un 4 juillet</i> (O. Stone, 1989)	Trompette, Tim Morrison
<i>La Liste de Schindler</i> (S. Spielberg, 1993)	Violon, Itzhak Perlman
<i>Sept ans au Tibet</i> (J.-J. Annaud, 1997)	Violoncelle, Yo-Yo Ma
<i>Ma meilleure ennemie</i> (C. Columbus, 1998)	Guitare, Christopher Parkening
<i>Arrête-moi si tu peux</i> (S. Spielberg, 2002)	Saxophone alto, Dan Higgins
<i>Le Terminal</i> (S. Spielberg, 2004)	Clarinette, Emily Bernstein
<i>Mémoires d'une geisha</i> (R. Marshall, 2005)	Violon, Itzhak Perlman Violoncelle, Yo-Yo Ma

TABLEAU 1
Présences de solistes dans les musiques de film de John Williams.

- 2 Dans chacun de ces films, l'instrument soliste est utilisé narrativement pour représenter un individu face à la société, soit qu'il l'affronte, soit qu'il s'en retranche. Commentant les principaux concertos du répertoire, du *Concerto pour deux violons* de Bach au *Concerto pour alto* de Walton, Sir Donald Tovey concluait son étude en constatant l'attraction universelle de ce type de dispositif et sa signification principale :

Rien dans la vie et l'histoire de l'homme n'est plus passionnant, plus ancien et universel, que l'antagonisme entre l'individu et la foule ; un antagonisme qui est familier à tous les degrés, de l'opposition franche à la réconciliation harmonieuse, avec tous les contrastes et mélanges d'émotions, et qui n'a pas été moins important dans les œuvres d'art que dans la vie⁴. (Tovey 1989, 6-7)

- 3 Après avoir présenté les différents contextes proposés par les films accueillant un instrumentiste soliste et constaté que l'emploi de ce dernier ressort principalement des *sèmes* de la lutte et de la solitude, je m'attacherai à montrer que l'écriture soliste de John Williams n'en est pas moins fortement diversifiée et que l'on peut la classer en trois types : le soliste *cantabile*, le soliste concertant et le soliste improvisateur. Ces trois types d'écriture soliste se distinguent selon la présence musicale continue ou discontinue du soliste, le type de matériau qui lui est confié (thématique, contrechant, formulaire) et sa relation avec l'orchestre.
- 4 Si ces trois modèles caractérisent le type d'écriture soliste mis en place au sein d'un *cue* (niveau 1), ils ne présagent pas du traitement de l'instrument soliste sur l'ensemble d'une bande originale (niveau 2) que j'examinerai dans une dernière partie. L'analyse strictement musicale sera menée à partir des bandes originales, ces matériaux reflétant plus fidèlement les intentions musicales du compositeur. Ce phénomène est particulièrement prégnant dans un film comme *Sept ans au Tibet*, pour lequel une compa-

Williams utilise très souvent des instruments en solo (intervention ponctuelle d'un timbre dominant l'orchestre) sans pour autant développer une écriture soliste.

4. « Nothing in human life and history is much more thrilling or of more ancient and universal experience than the antithesis of the individual and the crowd; an antithesis which is familiar in every degree, from flat opposition to harmonious reconciliation, and with every contrast and blending of emotion, and which has been of no less universal prominence in works of art than in life » (sauf mention contraire, les traductions sont de l'auteur).

	Soliste <i>cantabile</i>	Soliste concertant	Soliste improvisateur
Modèle-type	Air d'opéra, chanson	Mouvement de concerto	Interprétation de jazz en big band
Présence du soliste	Continue	Discontinue	Quasi continue
Matériaux	Un ou deux thèmes	Nombreux thèmes et/ou motifs ; cadence de concerto	Nombreux motifs et formules idiomatiques pour des simili-improvisations
Relation avec l'orchestre	Domination par le monopole mélodique	Dialogue thématique ; contrechants	Détachement ponctuel

TABLEAU 2
Modèles d'écritures solistes.

raison entre la bande originale et la *musictrack*⁵ montre que de nombreux *cues* composés par Williams n'ont pas été utilisés ou n'ont été repris que partiellement avec des coupes⁶. Je m'appuierai également sur les suites instrumentales issues des musiques de films lorsqu'elles existent, Williams montrant une réelle préoccupation quant à l'existence de ses musiques de film en dehors de leur contexte filmique originel.

5. La *musictrack* désigne la musique effectivement utilisée dans le film (Rossi 2021, 50).

6. John Williams est intervenu sur le premier montage du film. Ce sont sans doute les coupes ultérieures qui ont conduit le réalisateur et son équipe à remodeler considérablement la musique initialement composée (Annaud 2008, 15).

Soliste et narrativité

- 5 Dans tous les films considérés ici, Williams met en œuvre une stratégie musicale narrative que je propose d'appeler le « timbre-personnage », les interventions récurrentes des instruments solistes permettant de circonscrire principalement deux types de significations : la lutte d'un personnage avec la société et sa solitude.

Timbre-personnage

- 6 Dans la musique de film, et plus particulièrement dans la tradition hollywoodienne⁷, il est fréquent qu'un thème soit attaché à un personnage ; en dépit de variations plus ou moins prononcées, les contours mélodico-rythmiques de ce thème restent reconnaissables par-delà ses variations et la diversité des instruments qui le prennent en charge. Dans la majorité des cas, les différences sont peu accusées et se résument essentiellement à des changements de timbres, soit des « déclinaisons douces » (Litwin 1992, 55). Le procédé du timbre-personnage diffère quelque peu de cette stratégie thématique, en faisant reposer l'identité musicale d'un personnage

7. Selon Max Steiner, « chaque personnage doit avoir un thème » (« Each character must have a theme », Steiner 1935).

non plus sur un thème mais sur un timbre⁸. Ce procédé du « timbre-personnage » permet d'introduire plus de complexité en évoquant plusieurs facettes d'un personnage à travers plusieurs thèmes, ceux-ci s'avérant finalement liés par une même sonorité.

- 7 Ce type d'incarnation d'un personnage par un instrument n'est pas propre à la musique de film. Il se rattache historiquement à une tradition riche et déjà ancienne dans les périodes baroque et classique : il s'agit des airs avec instruments obligés (ou *obligato*), tels qu'on en trouve dans les cantates et passions de Johann Sebastian Bach – solos de trompette dans la cantate BWV 51 de Bach, *Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen* – ou les opéras de Mozart – parties de clarinette obligée dans les airs de *La clemenza di Tito*. Dans la musique instrumentale, Berlioz utilise cette technique dans *Harold en Italie*, symphonie dans laquelle l'alto constitue une sorte d'alter ego du compositeur : « J'imaginais d'écrire pour l'orchestre une suite de scènes, auxquelles l'alto solo se trouverait mêlé comme un personnage plus ou moins actif conservant toujours son caractère propre » (Berlioz 1870). L'association d'un personnage avec un instrument deviendra courante dans le genre du poème symphonique : voir, par exemple, *Schéhérazade* de Rimski-Korsakov (flûte) ou *Don Quichotte* de Richard Strauss (violoncelle).
- 8 Afin de renforcer l'identité entre l'instrument et le personnage, Williams s'appuie sémiotiquement sur des référents culturels. L'harmonica des thèmes de *Sugarland Express* renvoie à la musique *country* et plus généralement à la campagne américaine que les personnages sillonnent ; la trompette de *Né un 4 juillet* évoque le contexte militaire et politique des États-Unis, dans l'héritage des œuvres patriotiques d'Aaron Copland⁹. Même si le modèle de Williams semble bien être les *Zigeunerweisen pour violon et orchestre* (1878) de Pablo de Sarasate, le violon de *La Liste de Schindler* peut être interprété comme une référence aux ensembles de musique klezmer, traditionnellement jouée par les Juifs ashkénazes. L'instrument, que l'on aperçoit diégétiquement dans le film à l'occasion d'une fête dans le baraquement de la direction du camp (figure 1), n'est pas, contrairement aux autres cas évoqués ici, affecté à un personnage en particulier mais se fait l'écho de la voix collective des Juifs polonais, Williams ayant cherché à refléter « les aspects les plus tendres et les plus nostalgiques de la vie juive en ces jours tourmentés¹⁰. » (Williams 1993, 2)
- 9 Dans *Sept ans au Tibet*, le timbre du violoncelle sert de passerelle entre l'Occident et l'Orient, les glissandi lui permettant de sonner comme une vièle asiatique (de type *erhu*). Cette proximité du *erhu* avec le violoncelle est aussi exploitée dans *Mémoires d'une geisha*¹¹ dont l'action se déroule au Japon ; le recours au violon peut être compris comme une extension du registre du violoncelle.

8. Ennio Morricone joue avec ce procédé dans *Le Bon, la Brute et le Truand* (Sergio Leone, 1966) en attribuant un timbre différent à chacun des trois protagonistes tout en conservant toujours le même motif.

9. Ce sera aussi le cas pour *Nixon* (Oliver Stone, 1995), *Amistad* (Steven Spielberg, 1997), *Il faut sauver le soldat Ryan* (Steven Spielberg, 1998) et *The Patriot : le chemin de la liberté* (Roland Emmerich, 2000).

10. « The film's ennobling story, set in the midst of the great tragedy of the Holocaust, offered an opportunity to create not only dramatic music, but also themes that reflected the more tender and nostalgic aspects of Jewish life during these turbulent days. »

11. On remarque d'ailleurs des similitudes entre les deux partitions, qu'il s'agisse du thème 3 de *Sept ans au Tibet* et du « thème de Sayuri », ou des motifs de cordes (motif de transition 2 dans *Sept ans au Tibet* et le motif x de « Chiyo's Prayer » des *Mémoires* – voir l'exemple 41).



FIGURE 1
La Liste de Schindler, fête dans le baraquement de la direction du camp (01:52:13).
© Universal Pictures / Amblin Entertainment

- 10 Pour *Arrête-moi si tu peux*, Williams a choisi le saxophone pour coller à l'époque du film : « Le film se déroule dans les années 1960, aujourd'hui empreintes de nostalgie, et il m'a semblé que je pourrais évoquer l'atmosphère de cette époque en écrivant une sorte de souvenir impressionniste du mouvement de jazz progressif qui était alors si populaire. Le saxophone alto semblait être l'instrument idéal pour cette expression [...]»¹². » (Williams 2003, 2) Les trois *cues* principaux, dont les thèmes sont la plupart du temps confiés au saxophone, y décrivent trois facettes du jeune Frank Abagnale : sa vie survoltée avec le FBI à ses trousses pour le premier thème, ses relations compliquées avec sa famille pour le second, son imagination sans borne pour explorer de nouvelles combines avec le troisième. Les liens de la musique d'*Arrête-moi si tu peux* avec la narration sont clairement posés dans la préface à l'édition « signature » :

Dans « Closing in », nous avons une musique qui se rapporte au travail de détective souvent humoristique qui se déroule dans l'histoire, suivie de « Reflections », qui fait référence aux relations fragiles dans la famille brisée d'Abagnale. Enfin, dans « Joy Ride », nous avons la musique qui accompagne les folles envolées fantaisistes de Frank, qui l'emmènent aux quatre coins du monde avant que la loi ne l'arrête définitivement¹³. (Williams 2003, 2)

12. « The film is set in the now nostalgically tinged 1960's, and so it seemed to me that I might evoke the atmosphere of that time by writing a sort of impressionistic memoir of the progressive jazz movement that was then so popular. The alto saxophone seemed the ideal vehicle for this expression [...] »

13. « In "Closing in", we have music that relates to the often humorous sleuthing which took place in the story, followed by "Reflections", which refers to the fragile relationships in Abagnale's broken family. Finally, in "Joy Ride", we have the music that accompanied Frank's wild flights of fantasy that took him all around the world before the law finally reign him in. »

- 11 La clarinette dans *Le Terminal* fait, elle, signe vers les pays de l'Europe de l'Est, tant par la rapidité d'exécution du thème que par le jeu en doublure

avec l'accordéon à certains endroits. Pour Williams : « Musicalement, c'est une opportunité de créer une musique pour Viktor qui a une texture ethnique. J'ai choisi de mettre en avant la clarinette qui est un instrument très utilisé dans les pays de l'Est¹⁴. » La personnification de Viktor par le timbre de la clarinette est précisée par le réalisateur dans le livret de la bande originale :

Le thème de Viktor est interprété par la clarinettiste Emily Bernstein, qui donne à Viktor une voix claire et profondément émouvante tout au long de son voyage dans l'enceinte du terminal d'un aéroport international, alors qu'il attend le visa qui pourrait enfin lui permettre d'accéder à New York et au rêve américain¹⁵. (Spielberg 2004)

- 12 Le lien du timbre guitaristique de *Ma meilleure ennemie* à son signifié est plus lâche, mais semble pouvoir être imputé à la chaleur et l'intimité du son de l'instrument qui, comme je le postule plus bas, représente la complicité entre les deux femmes Jackie et Isabel, une complicité qui aboutit à une passation sereine du flambeau de la parentalité, la seconde poursuivant la tâche de la première, atteinte par un cancer.
- 13 Enfin, dans *Mémoires d'une geisha*, l'idée d'affecter un instrument différent aux deux protagonistes principaux du film a été proposée très tôt par Williams au réalisateur qui s'en est montré enchanté :

John a créé une idée conceptuelle magnifique pour le film : le violoncelle représente Sayuri, c'est sa voix dans le film. Ce qui est étonnant, c'est que nous avons Yo-yo Ma qui joue son thème, donc vous avez Yo-yo Ma qui joue Sayuri et ensuite le Président est représenté par le violon et le violon est joué par Itzhak Perlman. Je me souviens que John Williams est venu me voir pour me parler de Yo-yo Ma et d'Itzhak Perlman jouant les solos et m'a demandé : « Qu'en pensez-vous ? »¹⁶

Face à la société : lutte et solitude

- 14 Depuis l'époque classique, le concerto est traditionnellement associé aux relations qui opposent l'individu avec la société. Lossef y voit un conflit :

Les dualités et les oppositions inhérentes au concerto pour piano virtuose en font le genre le plus approprié pour explorer la lutte de la subjectivité contre le monde extérieur, puisque la rencontre entre le soliste solitaire et l'orchestre est, à plus d'un titre, représentative d'un conflit : entre l'individu isolé et élitiste et le groupe, entre une seule partie instrumentale qui constitue pourtant la « moitié » de la musique et la très grande collection de couleurs et de timbres qui en constituent collectivement le complément¹⁷. (Lossef 2001, 125)

- 15 Si, pour Charles Rosen, l'apport de Mozart est décisif dans les stratégies musicales visant à dramatiser la confrontation – ou, si l'on préfère,

14. « Musically, it's an opportunity to create music for Victor that has an ethnic texture. I've featured the clarinet which is in the medium of so many groups of Eastern Europa. » (John Williams, cité dans [MaestroSanaboti 2011](#)).

15. « Viktor's theme is performed by clarinetist, Emily Berstein, who gives Viktor a clear and profoundly moving voice throughout his journey within the confines of an international terminal while he waits for the visa that could finally get him New York City and the American dream. »

16. « There is a beautiful conceptual idea that John created for the film and that is the cello is Sayuri; it's her voice in the film. What's amazing is that we have Yo-Yo Ma play her theme so you have Yo-Yo Ma playing Sayuri and then the Chairman is represented by the violin and the violin is played by Isach Perlmann. I do remember John Williams coming to me saying these things about Yo-Yo Ma and Isaac Perlman playing the solos and says "what do you think?" » (John Williams, cité dans [Loki1982axala 2010](#))

17. « The dualities and oppositions inherent in the virtuoso piano concerto makes it the most suitable genre in which to explore the struggle of subjectivity against the external world, since the encounter between lone soloist and orchestra is in more than one sense representative of conflict: between the single, elite individual and the group, and between a single instrumental part which yet constitutes "half" of the music against the very large collection of colours and timbres which collectively form its complement. »

la dialectique – entre le soliste/individu et l'orchestre/société – « À tout point de vue, Mozart assimile plus qu'on n'avait fait auparavant, le soliste de ses concertos à un personnage d'opéra, et renforce par-là les qualités dramatiques du genre. » (Rosen 1978, 246) –, on trouve cette conception dès les origines du genre dans le concerto grosso :

Dans un concerto grosso, le soliste s'exprime entre les énoncés de la ritournelle. Ce soliste est presque toujours un exhibitionniste virtuose, dont l'individualisme s'inscrit au sein de la collectivité d'un ensemble plus vaste. Il est l'agent actif de la pièce – il est le premier responsable du dynamisme, de la déstabilisation, de l'effort vers la réalisation de chaque but successif (que le grand groupe salue et ponctue d'une ritournelle). La convention elle-même vient donc accompagnée d'un cahier des charges. Étant donné la grande importance accordée aux cadences dans le style du XVIII^e siècle, nous savons déjà avant toute pièce particulière (1) que le groupe représentera la stabilité et le soliste la mobilité individuelle ; (2) que les deux forces fonctionneront de manière dialectique – le soliste apportant le mouvement, le désir et le bruit, le groupe reconnaissant et s'appropriant les accomplissements du soliste ; (3) que, quelles que soient les tensions d'opposition entre les deux au cours de la pièce, la tonalité et la ritournelle du groupe auront le dernier mot – contenant ou absorbant ainsi les excès du soliste ; et (4) que l'expression individuelle et l'harmonie sociale seront finalement démontrées comme étant compatibles¹⁸. (McClary 1987, 24)

18. « In a concerto grosso, the soloist enters between statements of the ritornello. This soloist is almost invariably a virtuosic exhibitionist, the individualism of which flaunts the collectivity of a larger ensemble. It is the active agent in the piece—it is primarily responsible for dynamic motion, for destabilization, the striving toward an achievement of each successive goal (with the large group greets and punctuates with a ritornello). The convention itself, then, comes with an agenda attached. Given the high value placed on closure in eighteenth-century style, we already know prior to any particular piece (1) that the group will represent stability and the soloist, individual mobility; (2) that the two forces will operate dialectically—with the soloist providing movement, desire, and noise, the group acknowledging and appropriating the soloist's achievements; (3) that regardless of the oppositional tensions between the two in the course of the piece, the tonic key area and the group ritornello will have the last word—thus containing or absorbing the excesses of the soloist ; and (4) that individual expression and social harmony will finally be demonstrated to be compatible. »

Dans son analyse du premier mouvement du cinquième *Concerto brandebourgeois* de Bach, Susan McClary montre la portée idéologique de la prise de parole du clavecin qui suspend l'autorité traditionnelle représentée par l'orchestre et les solistes autorisés (violon et flûte).

- 16 Dans l'espoir de récupérer leur fils, Lou Jean et Clovis Polin (*Sugarland Express*), défient la police américaine tout au long de leur voyage. Alors que les sonorités folks du thème principal (thème 1, **exemple 1**) renvoient à l'idée de liberté et à la campagne américaine, la forte polarité autour de la tonique *mi* bémol de ce thème et ses notes répétées constituent des indices sur les personnalités des deux héros, obsédés par un seul but : récupérer leur enfant. Quant au second thème, avec son rythme trépidant (thème 2), il est l'illustration de leur cavale effrénée, alors même que l'étau va se refermer progressivement sur eux.
- 17 Dans *Né un 4 juillet*, Ron Kovic rejette progressivement la guerre du Vietnam jusqu'à devenir le porte-drapeau des pacifistes, contre sa famille et la majorité de l'opinion américaine. Le thème principal, que l'on entend dès le début du film, est associé au destin tragique du personnage. Né le jour de la fête nationale américaine, Ron s'engage parmi les Marines pour aller combattre au Vietnam. Il reviendra de la guerre, meurtri dans sa tête – il a tué à bout portant un de ses camarades – et dans sa chair – il est hémiparalysé. Ce thème (thème 1, **exemple 2**), toujours confié à la trompette dans le film, consiste en une série d'élans brisés qui finissent par se stabiliser – après une descente d'une octave –, à l'image du destin de Ron. Il connaît un grand nombre d'occurrences mais nulle part le lien avec son signifié n'est aussi clair que lorsqu'on entend son incipit joué par

♩ = 50

Guitare

Harmonica

EXEMPLE 1
Sugarland Express, « Main Title », thème 1.

Maestoso ♩ = 30

Tp.

mf

EXEMPLE 2
Né un 4 juillet, « Prologue », thème 1, m. 1-7.

bribes sur une texture dominée par l'atonalité (40:35) alors que la caméra adopte le point de vue subjectif de Ron, tête en bas, porté par un soldat.

- 18 La trompette est également l'instrument privilégié du troisième thème¹⁹ (thème 3, **exemple 3**), au caractère mélodique généreux, qui représente le thème de la famille, de laquelle Ron finira par s'éloigner : il est entendu

19. L'incrémentation des thèmes se fonde sur leur ordre d'apparition dans les bandes originales.

une première fois dans le *cue* « The Early Days, Massapequa, 1957 » lors de l'enfance de Ron (07:32) – l'énonciation du thème à la trompette est précédée d'une citation du même thème au hautbois (06:01), allusion directe à la pureté de l'enfance –, une seconde lors du retour de Ron (*cue* « Born on a Fourth of July »), désormais paraplégique, dans sa famille (56:32). Il est entendu une troisième lorsqu'il décide de regagner son pays après son séjour mexicain (*cue* « Homecoming », 01:52:03).



EXEMPLE 3

Né un 4 juillet, « End Credits », thème 3, m. 52-82.

- 19 La peur de la misère – qui a frappé son père –, conduit Frank Abagnale dans *Arrête-moi si tu peux* à défier le FBI ; profondément seul car tout son entourage est surveillé, il est condamné à vivre comme une proie traquée, et son thème, avec ses triolets de doubles croches sur un intervalle de tierce mineure entrecoupés de silences, évoque bien l'enfermement et la fébrilité du personnage (thème 1, **exemple 4**). La situation n'est pas sans rappeler *Sugarland Express*, même si la fin vient apporter un heureux dénouement.



EXEMPLE 4

Arrête-moi si tu peux, « Main Title », thème 1, m. 9-12.

- 20 Arrivé sur le sol américain alors que son pays, une république balkanique imaginaire appelée Krakosie, est plongé dans une guerre civile à la suite d'un coup d'état, Viktor (*Le Terminal*) devient un apatride en butte avec la direction de l'aéroport de New York qui ne sait comment faire pour s'en débarrasser. Le thème principal (thème 1, **exemple 5**) est d'un abord joyeux car il exprime la force vitale du personnage, jamais à court d'idée

pour essayer de survivre dans ce milieu administratif et froid ; toutefois, la tonalité mineure et l'insistance sur le triton *mi* bémol – *la* (motif x, **exemple 6**) exprime son mal-être et l'inconfort de sa situation.



EXEMPLE 5

Le Terminal, « Viktor's Tale », thème principal, m. 3-19.



EXEMPLE 6

Le Terminal, « Viktor's Tale », motif x, m. 23-24.

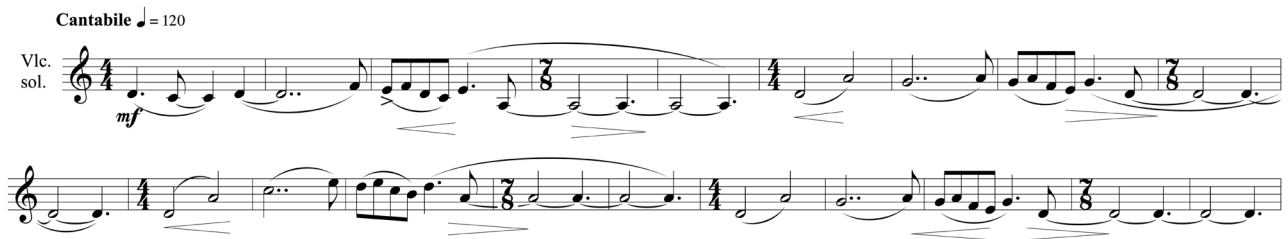
- 21 Dans *La Liste de Schindler*, l'instrument soliste, dont on a dit qu'il représentait le peuple juif, est le symbole de la résistance à l'oppression nazie, intervenant autant pendant les moments les plus sombres – la déportation au ghetto de Cracovie (« Jewish Town (Krakow Ghetto – Winter '41) », **exemple 15**) ou l'arrivée à Auschwitz (« Auschwitz-Birkenau ») –, que pendant les deux épilogues successifs – quand Schindler regrette de n'avoir pas sauvé plus de vies (« I Could Have Done More ») et, lors du retour à l'époque contemporaine, lorsque les Juifs lui rendent hommage (« Theme from Schindler's List », **exemple 20**).
- 22 À côté de cet aspect combatif de l'individu contre la société, une signification complémentaire peut être dégagée, celle de la solitude. Déjà Berlioz, toujours dans *Harold en Italie*, concevait moins son instrument soliste sur le mode d'une confrontation avec l'orchestre que sur celui de l'association : « Je voulus faire de l'alto, en le plaçant au milieu des poétiques souvenirs que m'avaient laissés mes pérégrinations dans les Abruzzes, une sorte de rêveur mélancolique dans le genre du Childe-Harold de Byron. De là le titre de la symphonie : *Harold en Italie*. » (Berlioz 1870) Ce glissement sémantique se traduit musicalement par un positionnement

moins avantageux pour l'instrument soliste, comme l'explique Berlioz lui-même dans sa relation avec le commanditaire de l'œuvre, le violoniste virtuose Niccolò Paganini :

Le premier morceau était à peine écrit que Paganini voulut le voir. À l'aspect des pauses que compte l'alto dans l'allegro : « Ce n'est pas cela ! s'écria-t-il, je me tais trop longtemps là-dedans ; il faut que je joue toujours. » « Je l'avais bien dit, répondis-je. C'est un concerto d'alto que vous voulez, et vous seul, en ce cas, pourrez bien écrire pour vous ». Paganini ne répliqua point, il parut désappointé et me quitta sans me parler davantage de mon esquisse symphonique. [...] Reconnaisant alors que mon plan de composition ne pouvait lui convenir, je m'appliquai à l'exécuter dans une autre intention et sans plus m'inquiéter de faire briller l'alto principal. (Berlioz 1870)

- 23 Ainsi Berlioz inaugure-t-il une nouvelle manière d'envisager narrativement les relations entre le soliste et l'orchestre, moins fondée sur une confrontation entre l'individu et son environnement, que sur l'expression d'une individualité sur un mode plus intime que conflictuel. Cette idée est clairement exprimée chez Williams à propos du violoncelle solo de *Mémoires d'une geisha* pour laquelle il déclare que l'instrument soliste « décrit la solitude de la petite fille et son isolement vis-à-vis des jeunes de son âge²⁰ » (Magic Sounds and Music 2006). Il s'agit alors moins de s'inscrire contre la société – même si la fillette, puis jeune femme, devra tout de même affronter sa rivale Hatsumomo (Gong Lee) – que d'en apprendre les codes, le prix à payer étant la solitude puisque sa place l'empêche de déclarer son amour au « Président » (ainsi appelé car il est président d'une entreprise d'électricité). Le violoncelle de Sayuri et le violon du Président, comme l'alto d'Harold, ne représentent pas des individus en lutte contre leur environnement, mais plutôt des acteurs qui préservent leur individualité et leur liberté d'action au sein de celui-ci.
- 24 En mode dorien, le thème de Sayuri est constitué de deux phrases de dix mesures, les deuxièmes moitiés de chacune étant identiques (thème 1, **exemple 7**). Le caractère est allant – la jeune fille est intelligente et ambitieuse – mais aussi nimbé de mélancolie, avec une courbe mélodique qui, après une brève quête du registre médium aigu, revient à son point de départ.
- 25 Sayuri étant le nom de la geisha, Williams a prévu une sorte de « proto-thème » pour représenter la jeune fille qu'elle était, Chiyo. Williams réinvestit les quatre premières notes du thème 1 et la polarisation autour de la note *ré* ; le rythme, la métrique et les nuances sont simplifiés pour correspondre à l'idée d'un individu en devenir (thème 2, **exemple 8**). Il s'agit ici d'un thème unique au sens où ce matériau thématique n'apparaît que dans un seul *cue* (Rossi 2021, 530).

20. « Rob was excited about the idea a cello particularly since soloist instrument would possibly describe solitude of this little girl and her isolation from her age group. »



EXEMPLE 7
Mémoires d'une geisha, « Sayuri's Theme », thème 1.



EXEMPLE 8
Mémoires d'une geisha, « The Journey to the Hanamachi », thème 2 (02:42-03:16).

- 26 Le thème du Président est un thème à l'allure plus mondaine en forme de valse (thème, **exemple 9**).



EXEMPLE 9
Mémoires d'une geisha, « The Chairman's Waltz », thème 3.

- 27 Le parcours du personnage de Heinrich Harrer dans *Sept ans au Tibet* est moins celui d'un combat contre la société que le récit d'un long voyage où le personnage se retrouve face à lui-même. Assez antipathique au début du film – il finira par apprendre que sa femme, lassée de son égoïsme, s'est trouvé un autre mari pour élever leur fils –, il évolue progressivement vers une plus grande humanité au gré de deux amitiés qu'il parvient à nouer : l'une avec son compagnon de voyage Peter Aufshnaiter (David Thewlis), l'autre avec le Dalai-Lama (divers acteurs). Pas moins de cinq thèmes sont joués au violoncelle, depuis la passion pour l'alpinisme avec

deux thèmes lyriques et flamboyants (thèmes 1 et 2, **exemples 10 et 11**), jusqu'à la découverte du Tibet avec un thème folklorisan en mode dorien (thème 3, **exemple 12**), en passant par ses problèmes relationnels représentés par un thème poignant, avec une broderie à la seconde mineure en incipit et une insistance sur l'intervalle harmonique de triton au début de la seconde mesure (thème 4 développé dans le *cue* « Leaving Ingrid », **exemple 13**). Un cinquième thème le connecte à son fils à la toute fin du film (thème 5, **exemple 14**) ; situé à l'extrême fin du métrage, ce thème exprime l'idée du renouveau à travers son matériau inédit.



EXEMPLE 10
Sept ans au Tibet, « 15M3 End Credits », thème 1, m. 1-9.

EXEMPLE 11
Sept ans au Tibet, « 15M3 End Credits », thème 2, m. 35-40.

- 28 Le cas de *Ma meilleure ennemie* est plus compliqué à interpréter car la guitare est finalement assez peu présente tout au long du film. Elle apparaît pour la première fois pour un « thème unique » dans le *cue* « Taking Pictures » (01:30:37) lorsqu'Isabel prend des photos de Jackie (Susan Sarandon) et de ses enfants. Son intervention dans le retour du thème 1, à

la courbe mélodique erratique, dans le *cue* « Jackie and Isabel » (01:43:51), confirme son association avec l'idée d'une amitié qui se noue, alors que Jackie apprend qu'elle ne guérira pas de son cancer. La dernière intervention *in extenso* de la guitare sur le générique de fin s'enchaîne avec la chanson « Ain't No Mountain High Enough », une chanson que partageaient les deux femmes avec les enfants²¹ et qui fait elle-même suite à une photo figée – le dernier plan du film – où on les voit toutes deux côte à côte. Il s'agit bien ici du thème de Jackie, en lutte contre un cancer dont on sait très vite qu'il aura raison d'elle.

21. La chanson est chantée par Isabel et les enfants dans la voiture (50:17-51:00), puis par Jackie et ses enfants dans la maison (01:11:43-01:14:33).

Andante - Peacefully but moving along

VI. 1

EXEMPLE 12

Sept ans au Tibet, « 15M3 End Credits », thème 3, m. 58-75.

Adagio ♩ = 40

Cuivres

mf

EXEMPLE 13

Sept ans au Tibet, « 15M3 End Credits », thème 4, m. 84-87.

Slowly and with serenity ♩ = 62

Vlc. sol.

mp

EXEMPLE 14

Sept ans au Tibet, thème 5, m. 15-21.

Le soliste *cantabile*

- 29 Par « soliste *cantabile* », je fais référence tant aux arias d'opéras qu'aux chansons pop : l'instrumentiste, tel un chanteur sans parole, a le monopole d'une mélodie qui n'entre pas en interaction avec les instruments l'accompagnant²² (la mélodie peut admettre des contrechants mais ceux-ci ne prennent jamais le dessus). Ce type d'écriture soliste ne s'oppose pas à la forme du concerto : de nombreux mouvements lents de concertos baroques présentent des lignes mélodiques très chantantes et ornementées, à la manière d'un air italien (par exemple dans le *Concerto pour clavecin en fa mineur* de Bach). On peut observer, au passage, que John Williams n'a jamais choisi le piano dans un rôle de soliste dans notre corpus, au bénéfice d'instruments tendant naturellement à être plus « vocaux » (violon, violoncelle, clarinette, harmonica, trompette).
- 30 Quatre types de formes peuvent être distinguées en fonction de la structure mélodique : forme répétitive, thème et variations, forme ternaire ABA ou ABA' et forme *durchkomponiert*.

22. La présence d'une mélodie dominante et ininterrompue n'implique pas forcément qu'elle ressorte uniquement du « singing style » de Leonard Ratner (dont les caractéristiques sont : la veine lyrique, le tempo modéré, des valeurs de notes plutôt lentes, un ambitus restreint). Voir Sarah Day-O'Connell (2014, 238-258).

Forme répétitive

- 31 Le *cue* « Prologue » de *Né un 4 juillet* (**exemple 2**) est un thème de soliste *cantabile* selon une forme répétitive. L'accompagnement du thème par une simple pédale de tonique aux cordes graves met particulièrement en valeur le timbre chantant de la trompette, dans une atmosphère à la fois tragique et solennelle.
- 32 Le second thème de *Sugarland Express*, construit par répétition d'un même motif, appartient lui aussi, quoique dans un genre plus proche de la transe (aspect renforcé par les bruits de souffle du soliste Thielemans), à la catégorie de l'écriture soliste *cantabile* répétitive. Accompagné par une percussion, l'harmonica y a recours à la technique du soufflé/inspiré et à un jeu blues (voir par exemple les *cues* « Freedom » ou « Bathroom Break »).

Thème et variations

- 33 La forme du thème et variations est conviée à trois reprises dans *Mémoires d'une geisha*. Chanté d'un bout à l'autre par le violon, le troisième thème de ce film (**exemple 9**) constitue le matériau du *cue* « The Chairman Waltz », écrit selon le principe du thème et variations avec deux variations suivies d'une courte coda.

- 34 Ce même « thème 3 » fait l'objet d'une autre série de variations dans « The Garden Meeting », tandis que la coda y donne à entendre le thème 1 (01:50), seul moment où ces deux thèmes sont entendus dans un même *cue*, décrivant d'un point de vue narratif l'union – au moins spirituelle – de Sayuri et du « Président ».
- 35 Sur un thème unique, le *cue* « Going to School », est un autre thème et variations en déclinaison douce ; dans l'avant-dernière variation, le violoncelle fait entendre un contrechant au thème joué au koto.

Forme ternaire : ABA ou ABA'

- 36 Le « Main Title » de *Sugarland Express* offre un bel exemple de « soliste *cantabile* » avec une ballade folk dans laquelle la partie d'harmonica de Thielemans s'apparente à une voix, soutenue par la guitare. La forme est de type lied ABA avec une partie centrale ornementée. La présence mélodique est continue et l'accompagnement s'en tient à son rôle (**exemple 1**).
- 37 Dans *La Liste de Schindler*, le *cue* « Jewish Town (Krakow Ghetto - Winter '41) » commence par l'énoncé d'un premier thème plaintif (« thème unique 1 » ou « Th. U1 », **exemple 15**) sans accompagnement avant que l'orchestre discrètement le rejoigne sur un second énoncé (**tableau 3**). Dans la seconde partie B, l'orchestre est chargé d'une vigoureuse partie rythmique qui n'est pas sans rappeler la « Danse des chevaliers » de *Roméo et Juliette* de Prokofiev ; le violon y est doté d'un nouveau thème unique (« Th. U2 », **exemple 16**). Dans le tableau 3, le rôle d'accompagnateur de l'orchestre y est signifié par les parenthèses qui entourent son indication de type : (Orch.) ; les cases grisées indiquent la présence du soliste tout au long du *cue*.

A		B	A
	00:38	01:15	03:45
Th. U1	Th. U1	Th. U2	Th. U1
Vln	Vln (Orch.)		
<i>la</i>	<i>ré</i>		

TABLEAU 3
La Liste de Schindler, « Jewish Town (Krakow Ghetto – Winter '41) », structure.

- 38 Le *cue* « Jackie et Isabel » de *Ma meilleure ennemie* (**exemple 17**) correspond également à une écriture *cantabile* structurée par une forme ABA' sur le thème 1 (**tableau 4**).

Andante ♩ = 60

VI.
sol.

mp reflectively

EXEMPLE 15

Three Themes from Schindler's List, « Jewish Town (Krakow Ghetto – Winter '41) », Th. U1, m. 1-9.

A tempo ♩ = 84

VI.
sol.

mf nostalgically

EXEMPLE 16

Three Themes from Schindler's List, « Jewish Town (Krakow Ghetto – Winter '41) »,
Th. U2, m. 19-28.

Introduction	A	B	A	Coda
	00:12	00:46	01:09	02:03
	Th. U	Commentaire Th. U	Th. U	
Orch.	Guit. (orch.)			Orch.
MI				

TABEAU 4

« Jackie and Isabel », structure.

♩ = 100

Guit.

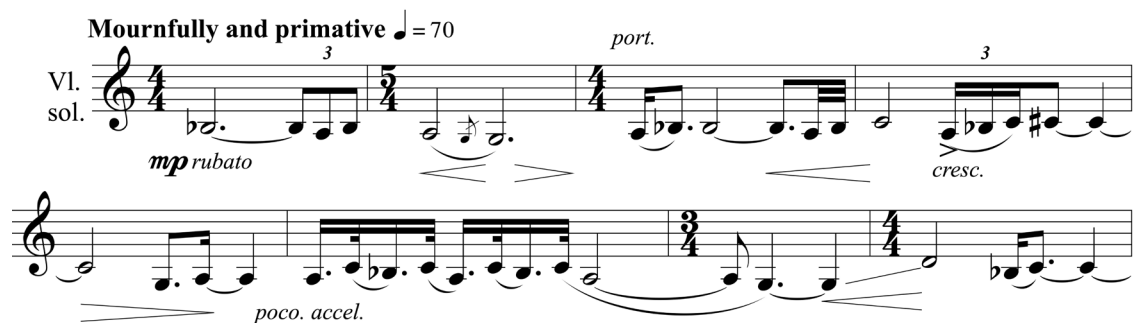
mf

EXEMPLE 17

Ma meilleure ennemie, « Jackie and Isabel », Th. U.

Durchkomponiert

- 39 Le *cue* « Homecoming », de *Né un 4 juillet*, consiste en une longue mélodie développant le troisième thème du film (**exemple 3**) sur une rythmique pop avant que le premier thème ne vienne conclure le morceau.
- 40 Le *cue* « Auschwitz-Birkenau », encore appelé « The Shower Scene » dans la partition originale, est une lamentation au violon soliste à partir d'un motif initial de cinq notes construit sur un intervalle de tierce mineure descendante (**exemple 18**). L'orchestre, limité à deux clarinettes, harpe, timbales et cordes, entre à la troisième mesure ; il s'épaissit progressivement jusqu'à proposer une longue ligne ascendante aux altos à partir de la trentième mesure. Le *cue* culmine sur la reprise du motif initial aux violons 1 (m. 37) pendant onze mesures de silence au violon solo. Cette reprise ne remet toutefois pas en cause une écriture soliste de type *cantabile* en raison de sa brièveté (11 mesures sur 51).



EXEMPLE 18
Three Themes from Schindler's List, « Auschwitz-Birkenau », m. 1-8.

- 41 Non-accompagné, le violoncelle solo du *cue* « Premonitions » de *Sept ans au Tibet* fait appel aux techniques de jeux les plus variées (**exemple 19**). D'un point de vue thématique, on peut reconnaître l'incipit de cette méditation qui n'est autre que le début du « thème 3 » (**exemple 12**). Quelques instruments se joignent ponctuellement au soliste : des percussions (gongs, woodblock, baguettes), un motif de trois notes répétées aux violoncelles pendant six mesures, le thème 3 (en *do*) au célesta (sept mesures avant la fin).
- 42 Joué également uniquement au violoncelle solo, le *cue* « A Dream Discarded » des *Mémoires d'une geisha* fait écho aux « Premonitions » de *Sept ans au Tibet*. Le morceau y développe le thème 1 en *si* dorien, en l'enrichissant de longs glissandi et d'appoggiatures. Toujours dans *Mémoires d'une geisha*, « A New Name... A New Life... » est une autre méditation qui ressort également de la catégorie *durchkomponiert*.



EXEMPLE 19

Sept ans au Tibet, « Premonitions²³ ».

Le soliste concertant

43 Le mot de « concerto » possède une double étymologie latine, selon qu'on le fait dériver du verbe *concertare* qui signifie « lutter, combattre » ou du verbe *conserere* qui veut dire « épouser, unir ». Les critiques se sont d'ailleurs souvent polarisés autour de l'un ou l'autre de ces sens. Alors que les discours du XIX^e siècle insistent sur la notion de rivalité entre l'orchestre et le soliste et considèrent parfois la virtuosité de ce dernier avec un certain mépris (Triest 1997, 370), les critiques du XX^e siècle mettent plutôt l'accent sur l'aspect symphonique de l'ensemble. Georges Enescu décrit ainsi le *Concerto pour violon* de Beethoven comme « une grande symphonie. Le violon a une voix principale, mais ce n'est qu'une des nombreuses voix orchestrales qui composent l'ensemble²⁴. » (Stowell 1998, 60) Contrairement au type *cantabile*, l'écriture concertante fait intervenir un soliste dont les interventions sont conçues en alternance avec l'orchestre dont il se distingue par son expressivité propre et avec lequel il entretient une relation de dialogue.

44 À l'intérieur d'une forme AABC, le *cue* éponyme de *Né un 4 juillet* respecte une alternance entre orchestre et soliste ; de plus la trompette énonce une longue mélodie qui peut être considérée comme une version du thème 3 (Th. 3') précédemment exposé par les violons (tableau 5). Dans ce morceau entendu au générique de fin, Williams juxtapose les différents thèmes du film (le troisième thème apparaissait dans le *cue* « Early Days ») sans vraiment qu'ils se répondent, comme le montre la systématisation du changement de tonalité à chaque nouveau thème.

23. La partition (non éditée) indique le titre : « The Child of Tibet ».

24. « [...] a great symphony. The violin has a leading voice, but it is merely one of the many orchestral voices which make up the whole. »

Introduction	A	A	B	C
	00:11	02:30	03:38	04:17
	Th. 3	Th. 3'	Th. 4	Th. 1
Orch.		Trp. (Orch.)	Orch.	Trp. (Orch.)
LA		SOL	RE	ré

TABLEAU 5

Né un 4 juillet, « Born on a Fourth of July », structure.

45 Le *cue* « Theme from Schindler's List » fait la transition entre l'écriture *cantabile* précédemment étudiée et l'écriture concertante. Comme on peut le voir dans le tableau (**tableau 6**), le violon est très présent (importance des cases en gris foncé), ce qui pourrait le placer dans la catégorie *cantabile* ; toutefois, la présence d'une case en gris clair signale que le violon ne porte plus la mélodie mais procure un contrechant (**exemple 21**) à la partie mélodique (ce contrechant est marqué entre crochets) jouée par un trio de bois (flûte, clarinette, cor anglais), ce qui incline en faveur d'une interprétation de type « concertante ».

Introduction	A	A	B		A'	Coda
	00:15	01:09	02:04	02:21	02:41	03:33
Motif x	Th. 1		Th. 2		Th. 1	
Cor anglais (Orch.)	Vln [Cor angl.] (Orch.)	[Cor angl.] (Orch.)	Fl./Cor angl./ Clar. b. [Vln] (Orch.)	Vln [Fl.] (Orch.)	Vln [Cor angl.] (Orch.)	Vln (Orch.)
<i>ré</i>			<i>la</i>			

TABLEAU 6
La Liste de Schindler, « Theme from Schindler's List », structure.

Lento ♩ = 52

Vl. solo

mp espr.

EXEMPLE 20
Three Pieces from Schindler's List, « Theme from Schindler's List », thème 1, m. 6-15.

Poco movt. ♩ = 60

Vl. solo

Fl. CA Clb.

mp

x

x'

EXEMPLE 21
Three Pieces from Schindler's List, « Theme from Schindler's List », thème 2 (contenant le motif x) et contrechant de violon, m. 26-29.

- 46 La courte durée de la plupart des *cues* de *Mémoires d'une geisha*, empêche Williams de proposer des formes concertantes développées. D'une durée de 01:31, le thème 1 de « Sayuri's Theme » (**exemple 7**) est d'abord joué au violoncelle avant de passer à la flûte (à partir de 00:48), le violoncelle le jouant alors en canon sur la moitié de sa longueur. Ce principe de canon est réinvesti et développé à une échelle légèrement plus longue dans « Becoming a Geisha » et « Confluence ». Le *cue* « The Journey to the Hanamachi » est construit selon une forme ternaire ABA' avec introduction (**tableau 7**). Le thème 1 est joué à l'orchestre en partie A ; le second thème est pris en charge par le violoncelle accompagné par l'orchestre en B. La dernière partie A' consiste en une reprise du thème 1 à l'orchestre, d'abord contrepunté par le violoncelle puis doublé par le violoncelle. L'introduction n'a pas de lien thématique avec ce qui la suit : elle se compose d'un instrumentarium renvoyant au Japon (indiqué [Japon] dans le tableau) comprenant shakuhachi, flûte shinobu, gong et tambours taïkos.

Introduction	A	B	A'	
	02:01	02:42	03:16	03:35
			Th. 1	
[Japon]	Orch.	Vlc. (Orch.)	Orch. [Vlc.]	Vlc. (Orch.)
~	ré			

TABLEAU 7
Mémoires d'une geisha, « The Journey to the Hanamachi », structure.

- 47 Le *cue* final « Sayuri's Theme and End Credit » reprend cette même thématique en donnant plus d'importance à la partie A' (**tableau 8**). Il n'y a plus de contrechant mais le grand intérêt de ce morceau réside dans la coprésence du violon et du violoncelle en solistes : à 02:55, le violon reprend le thème 1 joué précédemment au violoncelle dans la même tonalité. Williams ne cherche toutefois pas ici à rentrer dans une rhétorique propre au double concerto²⁵ et les timbres des deux instruments se côtoient sans se mélanger.

25. Voir les exemples de doubles concertos chez Vivaldi, Brahms, Delius ou Glass.

Introduction	A		B	A'				
	00:08	00:50	01:37	01:55	02:26	02:55	03:24	03:55
	Th. 1		Th. 2	Th. 1				
Japon	Orch.	Vlc. (Orch.)	Orch.	Orch.	Vlc. (Orch.)	Vln (Orch.)	Vlc. (Orch.)	Orch.
ré	fa		do	fa			do	

TABLEAU 8
Mémoires d'une geisha, « Sayuri's Theme and End Credit », structure.

48 Construite sur une forme ABCA'C', le *cue* « Remembrances » de *La Liste de Schindler* relève plus clairement d'une écriture concertante (**tableau 9**). Si la partie A est dominée par l'omniprésence du soliste (thème 3, **exemple 22**), la partie B est en revanche construite sur des alternances et des contrechants : exposition d'un nouveau thème par l'orchestre (thème 4, **exemple 23**), avec sa reprise au violon accompagné par l'orchestre, un dialogue en interaction avec un contrechant au violon. Les deux parties C sont également conçues en complémentarité : l'orchestre énonce le thème 5 sur un contrechant du violon (**exemple 24**), et les rôles s'inversent en C'. On peut noter que les thèmes 4 et 5 ont tous deux recours au motif x, exposé en thème 2 (**exemple 21**).

Introduction	A		B			C	A'	C'
	00:09	00:38	01:10	01:41	02:15	02:45	03:29	04:17
	Th. 3		Th. 4			Th. 5	Th. 3	Th. 5
Hp.	Vln (Hp.)	Vln (Hp., orch.)	Orch.	Vln (Orch.)	Orch. [Vln]	Orch. [Vln]	Vln (Orch.)	Vln (Orch.)
sol								

TABLEAU 9
La Liste de Schindler, « Remembrances (with Itzhak Perlman) », structure.

Andante ♩ = 72

VI. solo

EXEMPLE 22
Three Pieces for Violin and Orchestra, « Remembrances », thème 3, m. 14-21.

Tenderly ♩ = 72 x"

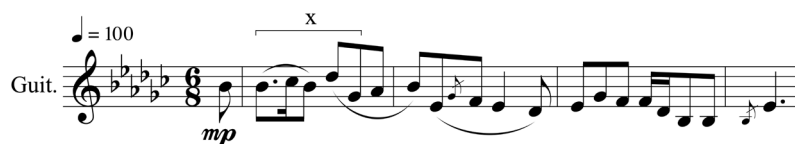
VI. 1

EXEMPLE 23
Three Pieces for Violin and Orchestra, « Remembrances », thème 4, m. 30-39.



EXEMPLE 24
Three Pieces for Violin and Orchestra, « Remembrances », thème 5, m. 59-62.

- 49 Le « End Credits » de *Ma meilleure ennemie* propose une écriture soliste avec de nombreux dialogues et contrechants (**tableau 10**). Ainsi la guitare énonce-t-elle d'abord les deuxième et troisième thèmes (**exemples 25 et 26**) avant que ceux-ci soient repris à l'orchestre. La guitare propose également des contrechants à deux reprises sur le second thème.



EXEMPLE 25
Ma meilleure ennemie, thème 2 (contenant le motif x).



EXEMPLE 26
Ma meilleure ennemie, thème 3 (contenant le motif x').

Intro.	A	B	A'	B'	A''	B''	A'''	Intro.	A	B	A'
	00:35	01:44	01:58	02:09	02:45	02:57	03:16	04:04	04:43	04:52	05:11
	Th. 2	Th. 2	Th. 3	Th. 2	Th. 2	Th. 3	Th. 2	Th. 2	Th. 3	Th. 2	Th. 2
Orch.	Guit. (Orch.)	Orch. [Guit.]	Guit. (Orch.)	Orch. [Guit.]	Guit. (Orch.)	Orch.		Guit. (Orch.)	Orch.		Guit. (Orch.)
mi♭	~	ré	RE	ré	la ~	SOL LA	RE				SOL

TABLEAU 10
Ma meilleure ennemie, « End Credits », structure.

- 50 Le *cue* « Taking Pictures » est structuré par une forme rondo autour de deux thèmes uniques. Violoncelle et orchestre dialoguent, tout en conservant chacun sa thématique (**tableau 11**).

Refrain	A	Refrain	A'	Refrain	Coda
	00:24	01:22	01:54	02:24	02:46
Th. U1	Th. U2	Th. U1	Th. U2	Th. U1	
Guit. (Orch.)	Orch. [Guit.]	Guit. (Orch.)	Orch.	Guit. (Orch.)	Synth.
LA					

TABLEAU 11

Ma meilleure ennemie, « Taking Pictures », structure.

- 51 C'est le *cue* éponyme de *Sept ans au Tibet* (**tableau 12**) qui offre l'exemple le plus représentatif d'une écriture concertante avec un dialogue approfondi entre le soliste et l'orchestre²⁶. Les matériaux thématiques sont répartis entre l'orchestre et le soliste dans une alternance équilibrée, comme le montre les parties grisées du tableau correspondantes aux interventions du violoncelle soliste. La forme générale est une forme ternaire ABA', permettant à Williams de citer les quatre thèmes récurrents du film – un cinquième intervient lors du dernier *cue* (voir plus haut).

26. « Le dialogue soliste/orchestre est la condition *sine qua non* d'un mouvement de concerto traditionnel. » (« Solo-orchestra dialogue is a *sine qua non* of the traditional concerto movement », [Dahlhaus 1989, 141](#))

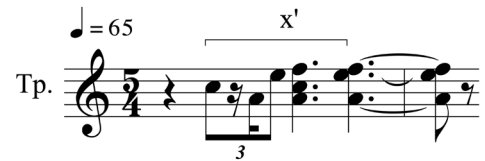
A							B				A'		
00:00	00:33	00:48	01:46	02:35	02:52	03:25	03:38	04:36	05:17	05:35	05:51	06:12	06:53
Th. 1	tr. 1 tr. 2	Th. 1	Th. 2 tr. 3	Th. 1	tr. 1	Th. 3	Th. 4				Th. 1	tr. 3	Accord final
Orch.	Vlc. [Fl., célesta] (Orch.)	Vlc. (Orch.)	Orch.			Vlc. (Orch.)	Orch.	Vlc. (Orch.)	Pno [Vlc.]	Vlc. (cadence)	Vlc. (Orch.)		
do	la			fa	fa#	ré dorien	la				ré		

TABLEAU 12

Sept ans au Tibet, « Seven Years in Tibet », structure.

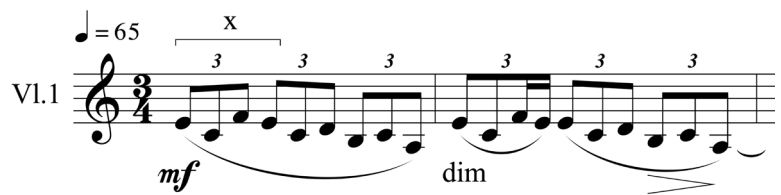
- 52 Les violons commencent par énoncer l'un des thèmes principaux, appelé ici « thème 1 » (**exemple 10**), caractérisé par son motif x placé en incipit. Ce même motif forme les deux motifs de transition, « tr. 1 » (inversion des deux dernières notes en x', **exemple 27**) et « tr. 2 » (**exemple 28**), qui interviennent successivement dès la mesure 8, préparant la première intervention du soliste.
- 53 En combinant la reprise majestueuse du premier thème d'abord joué à l'orchestre en *do* mineur et la stabilisation sur le ton de *la* mineur, l'arrivée du violoncelle accuse un relief très puissant, sa prise de parole ostentatoire le situant dans l'héritage des entrées de soliste mozartiennes²⁷. Lors de cet énoncé, le motif x fait l'objet d'imitations variées aux flûtes (**exemples 29 et 30**).

27. « Dans tous les concertos de Mozart après 1776, l'entrée du soliste est un événement comparable à l'arrivée d'un nouveau personnage, et cet événement est mis en relief, souligné, coloré, par une étonnante variété de moyens. [...] » ([Rosen 1978, 254](#))



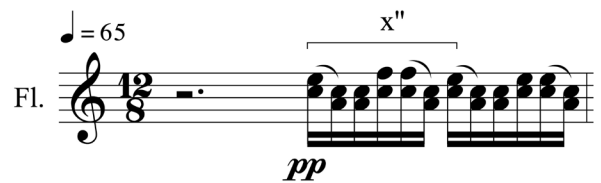
EXEMPLE 27

Sept ans au Tibet, « 15M3 End Credit », motif de transition 1 (tr. 1) s'appuyant sur le motif x', m. 9-10.



EXEMPLE 28

Sept ans au Tibet, « 15M3 End Credit », motif de transition 2 (tr. 2) s'appuyant sur le motif x', m. 11-12.



EXEMPLE 29

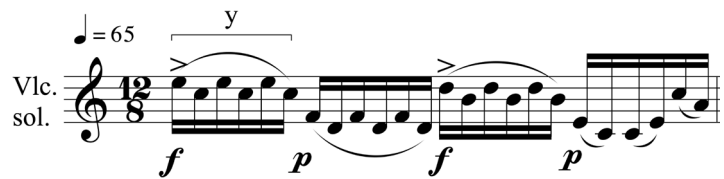
Sept ans au Tibet, « 15M3 End Credit », motif x'', m. 13.



EXEMPLE 30

Sept ans au Tibet, « 15M3 End Credit », motif x, m. 21.

- 54 Le second thème (**exemple 11**) est cette fois présenté d'abord au violoncelle à la suite d'une préfiguration thématique (m. 28-29) et d'un passage soliste virtuose marqué par l'apparition d'un nouveau motif de transition « tr. 3 » caractérisé par le motif y en oscillation (**exemple 31**).
- 55 L'orchestre répond en donnant à entendre ce second thème (m. 40-44) puis, à la faveur d'une modulation, en reprenant le premier thème qui vient conclure cette partie A. La partie B consiste en l'exposition des thèmes 3 et 4. Elle s'ouvre par une double exposition du thème 3 (**tableau 13**) joué d'abord à l'orchestre (m. 58-75) en *fa* dièse dorien puis au violoncelle



EXEMPLE 31

Sept ans au Tibet, « 15M3 End Credit », motif de transition 3 (tr. 3), m. 32.

(m. 76-83) en *ré* dorien. Le thème 4 (**tableau 14**) fait également l'objet d'une double exposition, entièrement en *la* mineur, d'abord aux cuivres, puis au violoncelle solo renforcé par les cordes.

- 56 La partie A' est conçue comme une réminiscence douce plutôt qu'un retour triomphal des matériaux de A. Elle commence par un contrechant de violoncelle solo sur le thème 1 joué au piano (**exemple 32**) avant que le soliste ne propose sa cadence sur les motifs x et tr. 3. L'ensemble s'achève sur un accord de *ré* mineur à la sonorité sépulcrale.

EXEMPLE 32

Sept ans au Tibet, « 15M3 End Credit », m. 76-79.

- 57 On soulignera la variété des dispositifs entre le soliste et l'orchestre (thème 1 énoncé par l'orchestre repris par le violoncelle, puis l'inverse pour le thème 2), la cohérence formelle et l'unité thématique du *cue*, la manière dont les tonalités, jouant un rôle plus expressif qu'architectural, mettent en valeur les prises de paroles du soliste (reprise du premier thème en *la* au début, reprise du thème 3 en *ré* dorien, cadence et conclusion en *ré* mineur).
- 58 La plupart des autres *cues* de *Sept ans au Tibet* conservent cette approche concertante avec un soliste théâtralisant son opposition à l'orchestre ou au

piano, ce qui ne l'empêche pas de proposer des contrechants aux thèmes énoncés par d'autres instruments (principalement le piano et la flûte), comme le montre les tableaux formels suivants, correspondant à tous les *cues* qui font intervenir violoncelle et orchestre (**tableaux 13 à 16**).

00:00	01:16	01:26	01:47	02:20	02:34	03:13
Th. 4	tr. 2	Th. 1		tr. 1	Th. 1	tr. 2
Orch.		Pno [Vlc.]	Orch.	Orch.	Vlc. (Orch.)	Orch.
<i>do</i>		<i>do</i> [#]	<i>do</i>	<i>LA</i> _b	<i>do</i>	

TABLEAU 13
Sept ans au Tibet, « Leaving Ingrid », structure.

00:00	00:44	00:53	01:03	01:26	01:47	02:10	02:19	02:51	02:59	03:58	04:38	04:50
Th. 3	Th. 1	tr. 2	Th. 1	tr. 2	Th. 1	tr. 1	Th. 4	tr. 2	Th. 1	Th. 4	tr. 2	x
Tibet	Hp.	Orch.							Pno/ Fl. [Vlc.]	Vlc. (Orch.)	Orch.	
<i>si</i> _b	<i>fa</i>	<i>do</i>			<i>do</i> [#]		<i>LA</i> _b	<i>do</i>			<i>ré</i>	<i>si</i>

TABLEAU 14
Sept ans au Tibet, « Approaching the Summit », structure.

00:00	00:41	01:35	01:44	02:00	02:53	03:58	04:05	04:28	04:49	04:59	05:29	06:15	06:58	07:27	07:47
Th. 3	Th. 1	Th. 4	tr. 2	Th. 1	Th. 3	tr. 2	Th. 1	Th. 3	tr. 2	Th. 3	Th. 1	Th. 4	tr. 2	Th. 1	Th. 1
Tibet	Orch.			Hp.	Cél. [Vlc.]	Orch.		Fl.	Orch.	Fl.	Vlc. [Fl.]	Orch.			Pno [Vlc.]
<i>ré</i>	<i>do</i>			<i>do sol</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>ré</i>					<i>si</i>	<i>fa</i> [#]		<i>si</i>	

TABLEAU 15
Sept ans au Tibet, « Heinrich's Odyssey », structure²⁸.

00:00	00:59	01:37	01:56	02:29	02:38	03:17	03:26	03:49	04:06
Mot. x	Th. 1	Th. 1	Th. 4	Th. 1	Th. 1	Th. 1	tr. 2	Th. 1	tr. 2
Vlc. [Hp.]	Pno	Pno [Vlc.]	Orch. vlc.	Pno	Vlc. [Hp.]	Orch.			
~	<i>do</i>		<i>do</i> [#]		<i>do</i>	<i>mi</i>	~	<i>ré</i>	

TABLEAU 16
Sept ans au Tibet, « Quiet Moments », structure.

59 Le dernier *cue* « Regaining a Son », fait intervenir un nouveau thème, le « thème 5 » (**exemple 14**), correspondant au père et au fils dans la dernière séquence du film, quand le premier transmet sa passion de l'alpinisme au second²⁹. Le thème 1 y fait une brève apparition sur le drapeau du Tibet (02:05:28) planté par Harrer (**tableau 17**).

A				B	A'
	00:28	00:40	00:53	01:04	01:21
Th. 5				Th. 1	Th. 5
Orch.	Vlc. (Orch.)	Orch.	Orch. (Vlc.)	Orch.	
SOL				ré	RÉ

TABLEAU 17
Sept ans au Tibet, « Regaining a Son », structure.

Le soliste improvisateur

60 La partition de *Arrête-moi si tu peux* représente le modèle de l'écriture soliste de type improvisateur³⁰. Contrairement à l'écriture *cantabile* où le chant reste toujours au-dessus de l'accompagnement³¹, le soliste improvisateur ne se détache qu'à certains moments de l'orchestre. La situation est également différente du soliste concertant qui, lui, dialogue en échangeant des matériaux thématiques avec l'orchestre : le soliste improvisateur participe à l'exposition des thèmes avec l'orchestre mais ses interventions s'appuient moins sur des matériaux thématiques que sur des formules idiomatiques – qu'elles proviennent du jazz ou de la musique balkanique. Le fait que cette improvisation soit écrite ne change en rien son caractère improvisé (on parlera ici de simili-improvisation) et le fait qu'elle interagisse peu avec l'orchestre sur le plan thématique. Ces moments solistes apparaissent tels des fenêtres d'improvisation (marquées « impro. » dans les tableaux) dans un dispositif orchestral qui rappelle le *big band*.

61 Les trois principaux *cues* de *Arrête-moi si tu peux* sont le « Main Theme », « Recollections (The Father's Theme) » et « The Float » ; tous trois se suivent dans la pièce de concert retravaillée par John Williams sous le titre d'*Escapades for Alto Saxophone and Orchestra* dans laquelle ils apparaissent respectivement sous les titres de « Closing in », « Reflections » et « Joy Ride »³² (cet ordre correspond aussi à leur chronologie d'apparition dans le film). Ces *cues* principaux sont tous trois structurés selon une forme rondo au sein de laquelle un thème principal remplit la fonction du refrain tandis que les couplets font entendre des simili-improvisations sur

28. Je désigne par « Tibet » l'instrumentarium tibétain utilisé par Williams soit des gyalings (trompes), des damarous (petits tambours) et diverses cymbales : tingshas (petites cymbales) et rolmos (cymbales hémisphériques tenues à deux mains).

29. Ce « thème 5 » fera l'objet d'une composition autonome de Williams interprétée par Yo-Yo Ma sous le titre *Elegy for Cello and Orchestra*. Voir *Yo-Yo Ma plays the Music of John Williams* (Sony, 2001, B00005YVQ8).

30. Pianiste de jazz à ses débuts professionnels, John Williams a d'ailleurs pu dire que la composition de cette partition s'apparentait pour lui à une régression : « En vérité pour moi, c'est une forme de régression parfaite car j'écrivais de la musique de jazz dans les années cinquante et soixante ; cela fait une sorte de boucle pour moi, une gracieuse boucle. *Arrête-moi si tu peux* a été une belle opportunité de revisiter une part de mon identité qui sommeillait en moi » (« Actually for me personally it's a kind of perfect regression because I would write some jazz music in the fifties and sixties; it made a kind of loop for me, a graceful loop. [...] *Catch Me If You Can* has been a good opportunity to revisit some parts of myself that's been slumbering dormant. », **Nicholas 2010**). John Williams rend d'ailleurs hommage à l'un des maîtres du jazz *westcoast*, Dave Brubeck et son célèbre « Blue Rondo à la Turk », dont on trouve un clin d'œil appuyé dans le *cue* « Learning the Ropes » (05:36) et dont on sent l'influence diffuse sur l'ensemble de la musique du film.

31. Cette situation rappelle aussi les premiers concertos baroques comme ceux de Torelli qui, en allégeant l'accompagnement (en maintenant uniquement le

des motifs issus de ces refrains (x et y) ou un matériau reposant sur des formules d'improvisations (couplet 1 du « Main Title », thème 4). L'observation des parties grisées des **tableaux 18 et 19** – correspondant aux moments où le soliste joue – montrent la présence presque continue du soliste, tandis que les parenthèses dont je l'ai entouré montrent qu'il est totalement intégré à l'orchestre (ce qui l'éloigne de la formule concertante).

- 62 Même si sa sonorité domine, le saxophone n'est finalement que peu entendu seul dans le « Main Title », apportant son concours à l'orchestre pour les refrains (à l'exception de la partie a du premier refrain où il reste silencieux) et formant divers alliages instrumentaux lors de ses improvisations écrites. En b (refrain 1), doublé par le vibraphone et la main droite du piano, il dialogue en question/réponse (il a pour matériau le motif x, issu du thème 1 ; voir **exemple 4**) avec un petit ensemble formé d'une clarinette basse, d'un basson et de la main gauche du piano (**exemple 33**). En b' (refrain 1), il est doublé par le saxophone ténor et le basson, auxquels s'opposent les flûtes, la clarinette basse et le piano en octaves main gauche/main droite.

continuo), transforme à certains moments le premier violon en soliste (voir dans l'opus 6, les mouvements extrêmes du *Concerto n° 6* et le dernier mouvement du *Concerto n° 12*).

32. Le premier morceau, « Closing in » est repris à l'identique du « Main Title » éponyme du film, tandis que les deux autres mouvements ont fait l'objet de quelques aménagements. Dans « Joy Ride », Williams a globalement renforcé la présence du saxophone pour qu'il corresponde mieux à l'idée d'un concerto. D'un point de vue rythmique, ces trois morceaux correspondent parfaitement à la succession – calquée sur l'ouverture d'opéra à l'italienne – des mouvements vif/lent/vif qui caractérisent majoritairement les concertos depuis les débuts du genre (concerti de Vivaldi, concerti de solistes de Bach). Tout en nous appuyant sur les partitions de ces mouvements pour les relevés, nous ferons référence aux *cues* de la bande originale pour tous les exemples.

Intro.	Refrain 1					Couplet 1
	00:10					00:55
	a	b	a'	c	b'	
Th. 1	Th. 1	Impro.	Th. 1	Th. 1	Impro., mot. x	Impro.
Orch.	Orch.	Sax., vib., pno / Bas., clar. b., pno	Orch. (Sax.)	Orch. (Sax.)	Sax., bas. / fl., clar. b., pno	Sax. / vib. (Clar. b.)
<i>sol</i>						

Refrain 2	Couplet 2	Refrain 3	Couplet 3	Refrain 4	Coda
01:12	01:27	01:42	01:51	02:10	02:21
Th. 1	Mot. x varié	Th. 1	Accords	Th. 1	Th. 1
Orch. (Sax.)					
<i>sol</i>			~	<i>fa#</i>	

TABLEAU 18
Arrête-moi si tu peux, « Main Title », structure.

Stealthily ♩ = 152

EXEMPLE 33

Arrête-moi si tu peux, « Main Title », improvisation à partir du motif x, m. 17-24.

- 63 Pour le couplet 1, le saxophone, doublé par le vibraphone, développe une improvisation à base de formules jazzistiques, sur une *walking bass* jouée par une contrebasse solo en *pizzicato* (exemple 34). De par son caractère formulaire, cette improvisation écrite ne se prête pas à des interactions avec l'orchestre, qui se contente à ce moment-là d'un accompagnement minimaliste (essentiellement contrebasse en *pizz.*).

Stealthily ♩ = 152

EXEMPLE 34

Arrête-moi si tu peux, « Main Title », couplet 1, m. 49-53.

- 64 Le même type d'écriture soliste est observable dans « The Float » avec une présence presque continuelle du saxophone dans l'orchestre sans pour autant que son timbre puisse toujours en être distinctement dégagé (tableau 19). Il intervient en soliste dans les deux couplets développant des simili-improvisations (exemples 36 et 37) à partir de l'incipit du thème du refrain (motif y, exemple 35).

Intro.	Refrain	Couplet 1	Refrain	Couplet 2	Refrain	Coda
00:00	00:44	01:28	01:53	02:35	03:10	04:23
	Th. 4	Impro. sur mot. y et y'	Th. 4	Impro. sur mot. y'	Th. 4 Impro.	Impro.
Orch. (Sax.)	Orch. (Sax.)	Sax. (Orch.)	Orch. (Sax.)	Sax., vib. (Orch.) (Clar. b.)	Orch. (Sax.)	Sax. (Orch.)
DO	SOL	DO RÉ	DO RÉ $\flat$ RÉ ~	si ~	SI SOL RÉ $\flat$ RÉ ~	RÉ

TABLEAU 19

Arrête-moi si tu peux, « The Float », structure.

Joyfully, with quiet expectation $\text{♩} = 134$

Célesta

EXEMPLE 35

Arrête-moi si tu peux, « The Float », thème 4 (00:46).

Joyfully, with quiet expectation $\text{♩} = 134$

Sax alt.

EXEMPLE 36

Arrête-moi si tu peux, « The Float », improvisation sur motif y (01:30).

Joyfully, with quiet expectation $\text{♩} = 134$

Sax alt.

EXEMPLE 37

Arrête-moi si tu peux, « The Float », improvisation sur motif y' (02:37).

- 65 À une introduction au saxophone solo en simili-improvisation jouée « Reflexively and freely », le *cue* « Recollections (The Father's Theme) » de *Arrête-moi si tu peux* fait succéder les thèmes 2 et 3 énoncés au saxophone (exemple 38). L'entrée de l'orchestre, sur des notes tenues de saxophone, est marquée par une stabilisation tonale sur *sol* mineur et une variation du motif associé (« motif y' », 01:22) énoncé auparavant au saxophone :

la phrase des premiers violons en retient essentiellement le profil en dents de scie et les grands intervalles.

- 66 Ce *cue* montre la porosité des modèles *cantabile*, concertant et improvisateur (**tableau 20**). Si le saxophone domine mélodiquement le *cue*, on ne peut pour autant parler d'écriture *cantabile*. Le contrechant du saxophone au couplet 1 (pendant le thème 3 varié à l'orchestre) ou l'énoncé du thème par l'orchestre au second refrain relèvent d'une écriture concertante, tandis que le profil très libre du thème 3 joué au saxophone (appelé ici « thème » en raison de son retour à l'identique à la fin du *cue*) ou ses simili-improvisations aux couplets 2 et 3, ne s'appuyant sur aucun motif repris par ailleurs mais sur des formules idiomatiques de jazz, tendent vers le modèle improvisateur.

Intro.	Refrain	Couplet 1				Refrain	Couplet 2	Refrain	Couplet 3	Refrain	Coda	
00:00	00:20	00:56	01:22	01:40	01:53	02:16	02:40	03:08	03:42	04:01	04:11	04:28
Impro.	Th. 2	Th. 3	Th. 3 varié	Th. 3	Impro.	Th. 2	Impro.	Th. 2	Impro.	Th. 2	Th. 3	Impro.
Sax.		Orch.		Sax.		Orch.	Sax.					
[Vib.]		[Sax.]		(Orch.)			(Orch.)					
	<i>sol</i>	<i>~ sol</i>		<i>~</i>		<i>la</i>	<i>~</i>	<i>mi do</i>		<i>fa#</i>	<i>ré</i>	

TABLEAU 20
Arrête-moi si tu peux, « Recollections (The Father's Theme) », structure.

Moderato (Nostalgically)

EXEMPLE 38
Arrête-moi si tu peux, « Recollections (The Father's Theme) », thème 2 (00:20).



EXEMPLE 39

Arrête-moi si tu peux, « Recollections (The Father's Theme) », thème 3 (01:40).

- 67 De même, le *cue* « The Tale of Viktor Navorski », titre principal du *Terminal*, se situe à la confluence des modèles concertant et improvisateur (**tableau 21**). L'exposé thématique (thème 1 et motif x) est d'abord donné par la clarinette avant de passer à l'orchestre (flûtes, hautbois, clarinettes, accordéon) dans un dialogue de type concertant. Le couplet 2 donne à entendre le binôme clarinette/accordéon avec une écriture de type improvisée (formules idiomatiques balkaniques). À la suite, l'orchestre refait entendre le motif x puis le thème 1. La clarinette se joint à l'orchestre sur la fin du thème et termine le morceau par une cadence, qui peut être comprise comme une cadence de soliste (concerto) ou une improvisation finale... Sachant que ces cadences de solistes étaient elles-mêmes souvent improvisées (vers les points d'orgue de la plupart des mouvements des concertos pour piano de Mozart), on comprendra que les diverses catégories proposées ici ne doivent pas être perçues comme trop strictes.

Refrain	Couplet 1	Refrain	Couplet 2		Refrain	Coda	
00:00	00:50	01:15	01:39	02:22	02:41	03:05	03:25
Th. 1	Mot. x	Th. 1	Impro.	Mot. x	Th. 1	Th. 1	Impro.
Clar. (Orch.)	Clar. (Orch.)	Orch. (Clar.)	Clar./acc. (Orch.)	Orch.	Orch.	Cl. (Orch.)	
ré	la	ré	la si do		~	~	fa

TABLEAU 21

Le Terminal, « The Tale of Viktor Navorski », structure.

Niveau de la bande originale

- 68 Il convient à présent de se demander quelle est la prégnance de l'écriture soliste dans l'ensemble de la bande originale, une question délicate en raison de la nature fragmentaire de l'œuvre musicale de film. Tous les *cues* ne font pas intervenir l'instrument soliste (dans les **tableaux 22 à 28**, seuls les *cues* sur fond grisé font intervenir un instrument soliste) et certains ne l'utilisent que de manière très ponctuelle (barre oblique dans la dernière colonne des tableaux), se contentant d'une citation thématique, d'un contrechant voire d'une couleur instrumentale. Je reprendrai ici ma

distinction entre thèmes uniques (Th. U) – répétition possible au sein d’une *cue* mais pas dans plusieurs *cues* – et thèmes récurrents (simplement indiqués Th.) – répétitions des thèmes dans plusieurs *cues*. Les cas étant différents pour chaque film, il faut désormais passer en revue chacune des bandes originales pour voir comment le soliste est positionné.

Sugarland Express

- 69 *Sugarland Express* est l’une des rares bandes originales de John Williams à ne pas avoir fait l’objet d’une sortie officielle en bande originale, quoique le thème principal ait souvent figuré au répertoire de concert du compositeur. Je m’appuierai donc sur une « édition pirate » de 1974 très largement diffusée³³. Outre les thèmes 1 et 2 très utilisés tout au long de la musique originale, deux *cues* « The Roadblock » et « On the Trail », font encore appel à l’harmonica pour un court motif descendant de cinq notes (*mi fa mi do si*) qui constitue l’une des strates parmi d’autres éléments d’une texture éclatée comprenant timbales, traits de piano dans le grave et déplacements de cordes. La partition ressort très largement de l’écriture *cantabile*.

33. Cette édition est notamment recensée sur la base de données *Soundtrack Collector* : <https://www.soundtrackcollector.com/title/23656/Sugarland+Express%2C+The>.

« Theme from Sugarland Express »	Th. 1	<i>cantabile</i>
« Main Title »	Th. 1	<i>cantabile</i>
« Lou Jean and Clovis »	Th. 1	<i>cantabile</i>
« Freedom »	Th. 2	<i>cantabile</i>
« Taking a Hostage »	Th. 1, Th. 2	<i>cantabile</i>
« Texas Police »		
« The Roadblock »	motif unique	/
« On the Trail »	motif unique	/
« Drumming Along »		
« Traveling Music »	Th. 2	<i>cantabile</i>
« Bathroom Break »	Th. 2	<i>cantabile</i>
« Out of Gas »	Th. 1, Th. 2	<i>cantabile</i>
« Peaceful Moments »	Th. 1	<i>cantabile</i>
« Cartoon Music »		
« Making a Deal »		
« Rearranging Furniture »		
« The Convoy »	Th. 1, Th. 2	<i>cantabile</i>
« Last Words »		
« Aftermath »		
« End Title »	Th. 1	<i>cantabile</i>

TABLEAU 22

Thématique confiée à l’harmonica soliste dans *Sugarland Express*.

Né un 4 juillet

- 70 Si la composition de John Williams pour *Né un 4 juillet* n'est pas d'une longueur considérable (vingt-quatre minutes sur le disque de la bande originale), elle n'en constitue pas moins une partition maîtresse dans la filmographie du compositeur par sa noirceur trouée par la lumière éclatante du timbre de la trompette de Tim Morrison, présente dans tous les *cues*, quoique parfois de manière très ponctuelle. C'est le cas du « thème 1 » à la trompette que l'on entend à la fin de « The Shooting of Wilson » (une phrase sur les trois) ou au beau milieu de « Cua Viet River, Vietnam, 1968 » (seulement la première mesure), deux *cues* par ailleurs violemment atonaux. Même si le dernier *cue* (voir discussion *supra*) ressort d'une écriture concertante, *Né un 4 juillet* correspond au type *cantabile* mais à une courte majorité.

« Prologue »	Th. 1	<i>cantabile</i>
« The Early Days, Massapequa »	Th. 2, Th. 1	/
« The Shooting of Wilson »	Th. 1	/
« Cue Viet River, Vietnam, 1968 »	Th. 1	/
« Homecoming »	Th. 2, Th. 3	<i>cantabile</i>
« Born on a Fourth of July »	Th. 3, Th. 1	concertant

TABLEAU 23
Thématique confiée à la trompette soliste dans *Né un 4 juillet*.

La Liste de Schindler

- 71 L'écriture concertante domine dans *La Liste de Schindler* en dépit de la présence de deux *cues cantabile* (voir plus haut). Le violon est également présent en duo ou dans des petits ensembles de chambre au sein de nombreux morceaux diégétiques (séquence d'ouverture au restaurant, soirées au camp de travail) qui ne sont pas présents dans la bande originale mais qui figurent dans l'édition de l'intégrale des enregistrements.

« Theme from Schindler's List »	Th. 1, Th. 2	concertant
« Jewish Town (Krakow Ghetto – Winter '41) »	Deux thèmes uniques	<i>cantabile</i>
« Immolation (With Out Lives, We Give Life) »		
« Remembrances »		
« Schindler's Workforce »		
« OYF'N Pripetshok and Nacht Aktion »		

« I Could Have Done More »	Th. 1, [Th. 2], dvpt Th. 1	concertant
« Auschwitz-Birkenau »	Vln solo	<i>cantabile</i>
« Stolen Memories »		
« Making the List »	Th. 3, Th. 4	/
« Give Me Your Names »	[Th. 1], [Th. 4]	concertant
« Yeroushalaim Chel Zahav (Jerusalem of Gold) »		
« Remembrances (with Itzhak Perlman) »	Th. 3, Th. 4, Th. 5	concertant
« Theme from Schindler's List (Reprise) »		

TABLEAU 24

Thématique confiée au violon soliste dans *La Liste de Schindler*.

Sept ans au Tibet

72 Si on ne peut pas considérer comme un morceau soliste le *cue* « Palace Invitation » (02:21-03:18) de *Sept ans au Tibet* en raison d'un contrechant du violoncelle trop court, ou le *cue* « Reflections » où le violoncelle se contente d'une introduction³⁴, la bande originale de *Sept ans au Tibet* appartient majoritairement à l'écriture concertante.

34. Dans le *cue*, le violoncelle intervient également encore quatre secondes en contrechant à la flûte (02:25-02:48).

« Seven Years in Tibet »	Th. 1, Th. 2, Th. 3, Th. 4, tr. 3	concertant
« Young Dalai-lama and Ceremonial Chant »	Th. 3	<i>cantabile</i>
« Leaving Ingrid »	Th. 1	concertant
« Peter's Rescue »		
« Harrey's Journey »		
« The Invasion »		
« Reflections »	Th. 3	/
« Premonitions »	Vlc. solo sur Th. 3	<i>cantabile</i>
« Approaching the Summit »	Th. 4	concertant
« Palace Invitation »	Th. 2	/
« Heinrich's Odyssey »	Th. 1	concertant
« Quiet Moments »	Th. 1, Th. 4	concertant
« Regaining a Son »	Th. 5	concertant

TABLEAU 25

Thématique confiée au violoncelle soliste dans *Sept ans au Tibet*.

Ma meilleure ennemie

- 73 Sur les quatorze *cues* de *Ma meilleure ennemie*³⁵, la guitare n'intervient que dans quatre : « Taking Pictures », « The Day Between » repris dans le « Ending Credits », « Jackie and Isabelle ». Si le premier est de forme soliste *cantabile* et les trois autres de forme concertante, le rôle du soliste reste cependant mineur au sein de cette partition.

35. Nous ne comptons pas la chanson en quatorzième position sur le disque.

Arrête-moi si tu peux

- 74 En plus des trois titres « Catch Me If You Can », « Recollections (The Father's Theme) » et « The Float », le saxophone est également dans une position de soliste improvisateur dans « The Flash Comic Clue » qui reprend les éléments du « Main Theme ». Si ses interventions se résument à des rappels du thème de « Recollections (The Father's Theme) » dans « Learning The Ropes », « Father and Son » et « A Broken Home³⁶ » ainsi qu'à deux motifs non récurrents dans « Learning The Ropes » (04:52-05:08, 05:27-05:50), le modèle d'écriture soliste est celui d'une improvisation (ou plutôt « simili-improvisation », car tout est ici écrit) en *big band*.

36. « Broken Home » donne aussi à entendre le motif x de « Recollections (The Father's Theme) ».

« Catch Me If You Can »	Th. 1, motif x	improvisateur
« The Float »	Th. 4, motif y	improvisateur
« Recollections (The Father's Theme) »	Th. 2, Th. 3	concertant/improvisateur
« The Airport Scene »		
« Learning The Ropes »	Th. 2, 2 motifs uniques	/
« Father and Son »	Th. 2, Th. 3	/
« The Flash Comics Clue »	Th. 1, motif x	improvisateur
« Deadheading »		
« A Broken Home »	Th. 2, Th. 3	/
« Doctor, Lawyer, Lutheran »		
« Catch Me If You Can »	Th. 1, motif x	improvisateur

TABLEAU 26

Thématique confiée au saxophone alto dans *Arrête-moi si tu peux*.

Le Terminal

- 75 Dans *Le Terminal*, le thème principal et son motif associé sont complétés par deux autres thèmes : celui de la fête (Th. 2), entendu à l'accordéon au début du *cue* « Dinner with Amelia » puis à la clarinette (05:39-06:13),

et le thème d'amour (Th. 3), que l'on entend aux violons dans « Fountain Scene » et qui est repris à la clarinette dans le même *cue* (04:00-04:18) puis dans « A Happy Navorski Ending! » (01:54-02:47) où il sert d'amorce à une courte cadence finale. Le thème 1 est entendu dans de nombreux *cues* (« A Legend is Born », « Refusing to Escape », « Finding Coins and Learning to Read ») – parfois dans des versions rapides (« Viktor and His Friends », début de « Finding Coins and Learning to Read ») – tout comme le motif x (« Viktor and His Friends », « Refusing to Escape »), mais il ne s'agit souvent que de brèves citations qui, quoique signifiantes narrativement, relèvent moins d'une écriture soliste que d'une texture orchestrale avec passages solistes : le *cue* « Finding Coins and Learning to Read » fait ainsi entendre des passages qui mettent en avant le piano, la flûte et l'accordéon. Au final, l'écriture de soliste improvisateur ne concerne que le *cue* « The Tale of Viktor Navorski » et sa reprise finale (« “Destiny”... “Canneloni”... and The Tale of Viktor Navorski Reprise »).

« The Tale of Viktor Navorski »	Th. 1, motif x	concertant/improvisateur
« Dinner With Amelia »	Motif unique, Th. 2	/
« A Legend is Born »	Th. 1	/
« Viktor and His Friends »	Th. 1, motif x	/
« The Fountain Scene »	Th. 3	/
« The Wedding of Officer Torres »		
« Jazz Autographs »		
« Refusing to Escape »	motif x, Th. 1	/
« Krakozhia National Anthem and Homesickness »		
« Looking For Work »		
« Gupta's Deliverance »		
« Finding Coins and Learning to Read »	Th. 1	/
« “Destiny”... “Canneloni”... and The Tale of Viktor Navorski Reprise »	Th. 1, motif x	concertant/improvisateur
« A Happy Navorski Ending! »	Th. 3	/

TABLEAU 27
Thématique confiée à la clarinette soliste dans *Le Terminal*.

Mémoires d'une geisha

- 76 La partition de *Mémoires d'une geisha* fait appel de manière assez égale aux deux modèles de l'écriture *cantabile* et concertante, tandis que de nombreux *cues* ont recours au timbre du violoncelle sans pour autant témoigner

d'une écriture soliste sur toute sa durée. « Chiyo's Prayer » (**exemple 40**) et « Finding Satu », deux *cues* qui partagent le même « motif x », n'utilisent par exemple le violoncelle que sur la première moitié du morceau.



EXEMPLE 40
Mémoires d'une geisha, « Chiyo's Prayer », motif x (00:31).

- 77 « Becoming a Geisha » commence sur un modèle concertant, mais le morceau prend une autre direction dans sa seconde moitié avec l'entrée des taïkos.

	Violoncelle	Violon	
« Sayuri's Theme »	Th. 1 [Th. 1]		concertant
« The Journey to the Hanamachi »	Th. 2 [Th. 1]		concertant
« Going to School »		Th. U	<i>cantabile</i>
« Brush on Silk »			
« Chiyo's Prayer »	Motif x		/
« Becoming a Geisha »	Th. 1		/
« Finding Satu »	Th. U, motif x		/
« The Chairmans Waltz »		Th. 3	<i>cantabile</i>
« The Rooftops of the Hanamachi »			
« The Garden Meeting »		Th. 1, Th. 3	<i>cantabile</i>
« Dr. Crabs Prize »			
« Destiny's Path »			
« A New Name... A New Life... »	[Th. 1] Th. 1	Th. 1	<i>cantabile</i>
« The Fire Scene and the Coming of War »			
« As the Water... »			
« Confluence »		[Th. 2], Th. 1	concertant
« A Dream Discarded »	Solo		<i>cantabile</i>
« Sayuri's Theme and End Credits »	Th. 1	Th. 1	concertant

TABLEAU 28
Thématique confiée au violoncelle et au violon solistes dans *Mémoires d'une geisha*.

Conclusion

- 78 Si d'un point de vue narratif, les significations attribuées à l'utilisation d'un instrument soliste sont assez peu variées, ressortant essentiellement d'un face-à-face avec la société ou de l'affirmation de la solitude, les formes d'écriture solistes de John Williams sont diversifiées et peuvent être classées en trois types d'écriture soliste bien différenciés au niveau du *cue* : *cantabile*, concertant et improvisateur.
- 79 L'observation des *cues* à l'échelle d'une bande originale amène à relativiser l'importance de l'écriture soliste. Sur les huit bandes originales étudiées, trois ne développent pas le type d'écriture illustré par le « *cue* caractéristique³⁷ » (titre principal ou titre de générique) : à côté de son « Main Title » sur le modèle concertant/improvisateur, la clarinette du *Terminal* s'en tient essentiellement à des citations thématiques disséminées dans les différents *cues* ; quant à la guitare de *Ma meilleure ennemie* et à la trompette de *Né un 4 juillet*, elles sont absentes d'un nombre élevé de *cues*. *Mémoires d'une geisha* propose une répartition égale des types d'écriture *cantabile* et concertant.
- 80 Tout en montrant l'extraordinaire inventivité mélodique de John Williams, cette étude illustre la capacité du compositeur à absorber plusieurs modèles stylistiques – chanson, improvisation en *big band*, concerto – en les mettant au service de la narration, renouvelant ses approches au gré des propositions cinématographiques et des genres dans lesquels elles s'inscrivent. Des travaux complémentaires, consacrés à des partitions mettant en œuvre des solistes par d'autres compositeurs – voir par exemple *Mission* (Roland Joffé, 1986) ou *Le Village* (M. Night Shyamalan, 2004) –, pourraient utilement venir compléter cette proposition de typologie autour de l'écriture soliste au cinéma.

37. J'entends par « *cue* caractéristique » les *cues* éponymes des films, généralement situés en début et/ou en fin de film : « Catch Me If You Can », « Seven Years in Tibet », « Born on a Fourth of July », « Theme for Schindler's List ». Pour *Sugarland Express*, le *cue* caractéristique est le « Main Title » entendu pendant les génériques de début et de fin ; pour *Ma meilleure ennemie*, *Le Terminal* et *Mémoires d'une geisha*, ce sont respectivement les *cues* « End Titles », « The Tale of Viktor Navorski » et « Sayuri's Theme and End Credits » qui concluent les films.

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Boyish Worlds: John Williams and Child Gaze

Des mondes enfantins : John Williams et le *child gaze*

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Keywords: child gaze, Williams (John), children's films, family films

Mots clés : child gaze, Williams (John), cinéma pour enfants, cinéma familial

ABSTRACT

Films whose main characters are children occupy an important place in John Williams's cinematic *oeuvre*. From *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), to the *Harry Potter* series, the composer co-created the audiosphere of movies recognized as classics of children's cinema. *Home Alone* (1990), *Hook* (1991), and *Artificial Intelligence: A.I.* (2001) introduce a unique childlike perspective. *Child gaze* is a mode of representation opposite to the *adult gaze*. The paper aims to consider whether Williams's music in Steven Spielberg's and Chris Columbus's films corresponds with a tendency to show the world from a child's perspective. How this music refers to the idea of a child gaze is most easily captured in four complementary spheres: nostalgic connecting, reacting, reducing, and coloring. In order to analyse these spheres, the authors focus on the sound language of children's films and selected single scenes with Williams's music and its structural and affective dimensions (*primary* and *secondary musical parameters*, according to the terminology of Leonard B. Meyer).

RÉSUMÉ

Les films dont les personnages principaux sont des enfants occupent une place importante dans l'œuvre cinématographique de John Williams. De *E.T., l'extra-terrestre* (1982) à la saga *Harry Potter*, le compositeur a cocréé l'univers sonore de films désormais reconnus comme des classiques du cinéma pour enfants. *Maman, j'ai raté l'avion* (1990), *Hook* (1991) et *A.I. Intelligence artificielle* (2001) introduisent une perspective singulière, empreinte d'un regard enfantin. Le regard de l'enfant (*child gaze*) constitue un mode de représentation à l'opposé du regard adulte (*adult gaze*). Cet article se propose d'examiner dans quelle mesure la musique de Williams, dans les films de Steven Spielberg et de Chris Columbus, témoigne d'une tendance à représenter le monde du point de vue de l'enfant. La manière dont cette musique renvoie à un *child gaze* peut être analysée à travers quatre axes complémentaires : le lien nostalgique, la réaction, la réduction, et la coloration (*coloring*). Pour ce faire, les autrices analysent le langage musical propre aux films destinés à un jeune public, à partir de scènes choisies mettant en valeur la musique de Williams – celle-ci étant étudiée sous ses dimensions structurelles et expressives, en mobilisant les notions de paramètres musicaux primaires et secondaires définies par Leonard B. Meyer.

- 1 One of the most famous shots from Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) depicts a little boy standing in a doorway gazing into space illuminated by the glow of a spaceship. The iconic frame,¹ which was featured years after on the cover of the film's anniversary DVD release, prompts questions about the nature of the child gaze. What does little Barry actually see when standing in an open doorway (**Figure 1**)? How does he perceive the unearthly light? It is significant that we don't see his face in this scene—the child gaze is hidden from us and seems mysterious, as well as inaccessible. It couldn't be otherwise. After all, films about and for children are made by adults. Although, as Cary Bazalgette and David Buckingham remind us, childhood “is a world we have all visited, it has become inaccessible to us except through the distortions of memory” (1995, 1).
- 2 Over the past thirty years, this inaccessible child gaze has become an important issue in the field of children's studies. In film theory, it has been around even longer, although—with some exceptions—it has rarely received much attention. In contemporary film studies, the term *child gaze* functions similarly to the concepts of male gaze or female gaze. It is considered a particular mode of representation for which the primary opposition is the *adult gaze*. Interestingly, scholars dealing with this phenomenon generally look for traces of the child gaze outside Hollywood cinema, usually separating reflections on the American family film from the European (but also, for example, the Middle Eastern) children's film.²

1. This image is meticulously analyzed by Karolina Kostyra in her Ph.D. dissertation *The Secret Life of Objects. The Topography of the Children's Room in the Fantasy Cinema of the 1980s* (2022, 137–143). According to the author, the picture of a child standing in a lighted doorway is not only a Spielbergian “ideal image,” an image-as-memory but also an “affirmation of the potency inherent in immaturity”.

2. On the difficulties in defining children's film see the works of Becky Parry (2013, 15–18) and Noel Brown (2017, 1–34).



FIGURE 1

Close Encounters of the Third Kind, Barry stands in the open doorway (51:24).
© EMI Films / Columbia Pictures

- 3 In our paper, we take a different perspective. We believe that the child gaze can be found in such mainstream productions as the films of Steven Spielberg or Chris Columbus. Starting from this assumption, we will consider whether John Williams's music in these films reflects a tendency to show the world from a child's perspective and helps to reinforce it. Although such a topic naturally raises questions about the specifics of child's hearing, we will not pursue this thread in this article. Child's hearing has not yet been discussed in film studies, and the films we will be looking at here only replicate children's perception in a limited way. Therefore, we will focus on analyzing selected scenes with Williams's music and their structural and affective dimensions (primary and secondary musical parameters, according to the terminology of Leonard B. Meyer). We will ask whether such emotions as curiosity, surprise, astonishment, and delight, typical of children's view of the world,³ are reflected in Williams's music—in its colors, dynamics, tempo, instrumentation, harmony, and musical space. We will therefore look first at the concept of the child gaze and its place in film theory, and then identify four areas where, in our view, Williams's desire to convey a child's perspective through music is most noticeable. Picking up on these threads seems particularly important to us because of a certain lack in the field of film music research. Although the function of music in cinema has already been covered in quite some detail in several publications (Audissino 2017; Donnelly 2001; Wierzbicki 2009), there are still few in-depth studies on its role in films for and about children.

3. There are several recent papers on the emotional development of the child. For example, see the reports and working papers of the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, especially *Children's Emotional Development Is Built into the Architecture of Their Brains* (2004). See also the works of Carolyn Saarni, Joseph J. Campos, Linda A. Camras, and David Witherington (Saarni 2000, 68–91; Saarni et al. 2006, 226–299; Saarni et al. 2008, 361–405), Amy G. Halberstadt, Alison E. Parker, and Vanessa L. Castro (2013, 93–128), Klaus R. Scherer, Marcel R. Zentner, and Daniel Stern (2004, 389–402).

The Child Gaze in Film Theory

- 4 An excerpt from an essay by Béla Balázs published in 1924 is probably one of the first theoretical film commentaries related to the child gaze:

The poetry of ordinary life that constitutes the substance of good films is more easily visible from the closer perspective of little people [...]. They know more about the little moments of life because they still have time to dwell on them. Children see the world in close-up. [...] Only children at play gaze pensively at minor details. (Balázs 2011, 62)

- 5 In subsequent years, the theme of the child's perspective and its influence on film aesthetics was taken up by prominent critics and theorists, including André Bazin, Edgar Morin, and Gilles Deleuze. Their concepts, although extremely important for the development of film studies, did not, however, reflect the problem of child subjectivity as such. They were not focused on the issue of choosing those means of cinematic expression that would let the child's voice be heard. The child's perspective served as a certain model of perception. By adapting this model, cinema could free itself from any conventions and look at the world—and at itself—from a different point of view. This is what Bazin ([1949] 1997, 124) and Deleuze, who continued his reflections years later, seem to have in mind when they write about the role of the child in neo-realism: "The role of the child in neo-realism has been pointed out [...]; this is because, in the adult world, the child is affected by a certain motor helplessness, but one which makes him all the more capable of seeing and hearing" (Deleuze [1985] 1989, 3). While Bazin and Deleuze associate the child gaze with realism, for Morin it is similar to magical thinking: "Thus magic appears to us: a vision of life and a vision of death, common to the infantile part of archaic peoples' vision of the world and the childish part of modern peoples' vision of the world, and to neuroses and psychological regressions like the dream" ([1956] 2005, 76).

- 6 What these concepts have in common is the conviction that the child's view is somehow unconventional, non-standard, and different from the dominant mode of perceiving reality. Some authors, however, have argued that the notion of the child and childhood is not a universal one, but varies according to time, culture,⁴ and ideological context.⁵ Others have pointed out that it is a gross oversimplification to assume that—by imitating a child's perspective—cinema can return to an unformed, "innocent" perception of the world (Helman 2013, 25). Moreover, in the classic "theoretical discussions of the child in film, there is [...] a strong focus on the adult spectator's desires, responses and feelings in relation to the on-screen child" (Martin 2019, 3). After all, as Deborah Martin points out, "For both Bazin and Balázs, the act of watching the child on

4. Deborah Martin states: "whether one counts as a child may depend on behaviour and activity, and in turn on class or ethnicity, as well as age" (2019, 2–3). Sophie Dufays points to two criteria to define the child on screen: "the objective age category and the relationship that the child [...] has with sexuality [...] and death, that is, the two limits of his or her existence" (2014, 22). For most scholars who take up this theme, Philippe Ariès's study *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* is of fundamental importance ([1960] 1962). Worth noting are also Jacqueline Rose's recognitions presented in *The Case of Peter Pan, or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* ([1984] 1992). On defining the child and childhood, see also the works of Ewan Kirkland (2017, 1–25) and Becky Parry (2013, 9–15).

5. In the context of ideologies and policies of child representation, Karen Lury states that the child is a construct supporting the "popular myths and ideological structures [...] the 'family', the 'life-cycle', childhood as 'universal', and the child as the emblematic figure who [...], shoulders society's fantasies of the 'future and the past' and with this the anthropocentric view of history" (2005, 308).

screen is a means of recapturing something: ‘paradise lost’ (Balázs) or ‘the innocence, awkwardness and naiveté we lost’ (Bazin). In this sense, both theorists hint that what the child fulfils for the adult spectator is also the desire to return to the child self, to re-inhabit that self, or to recapture the past” (Martin 2019, 5).

- 7 In recent film studies, particularly in those areas where it meets children’s studies, the child gaze is understood differently. The primary point of reference in this research is no longer film aesthetics, but the question of the politics of representation.⁶ The child’s perspective is thus reflected upon, for example, in audience studies (Bazalgette and Buckingham 1995; Beeler and Beeler 2015), or in analyzing discourses of power. After all, as Bazalgette and Buckingham point out, “definitions of childhood and adulthood will always express the power-differential between children and adults. The texts produced by adults for children [...] are inevitably bound up in these power relationships” (1995, 5). Deborah Martin, in turn, speaks of “the adult’s colonisation of the child-figure, the mastery of the viewer-subject as opposed to the colonized object of the gaze, a relationship which, of course, reflects the social positioning of these groups” (2019, 4).
- 8 Karen Lury argues that the cinematic gaze can be a vehicle for codes of power. In her opinion, the fundamental difference between the child’s and the adult’s perception of reality is expressed in the opposition of the terms *showing* and *seeing*.

Seeing implies certain qualities and a particular response: it is an unregulated gaze, timeless and ahistorical, it also implies fascination and a sense in which effects (what is seen) are closer to affect (what is felt). “Seeing” is the “oooh!” of wonder at fireworks in the night or the absorbed but pointless gaze which follows ants and beetles as they labour in the grass, returns again and again to the scab on your knee, explores cloudy breath on a windowpane. “Showing”, in contrast, is precisely not this, but is a directed gaze, purposeful; it is also historical, part of a narrative which links cause to effect, it demonstrates, names and classifies. (Lury 2005, 308).
- 9 The child sees, and the adult shows. Elliott, the protagonist of Steven Spielberg’s *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), seems to know this very well when he introduces the alien into his world. While showing his new friend various objects and explaining their use, the boy continually and nervously asks: “See?”. He’s clearly not entirely comfortable with the position of a “demonstrator,” normally reserved for adults.
- 10 In Lury’s opinion, “the ‘trick’ of cinema is that it presents ‘showing’ as ‘seeing’. Seeing is what children do; showing is what adults do for children” (2005, 309). Sometimes, however, “The child’s presence and the child’s

6. The issue is pressing because, as Karen Lury notes, “Romanticized as innocent, as the ‘investment in our future’, or invoked as symptomatic of society’s failure, the child is at the centre of cultural and political debates” (2005, 307).

actions [...] may serve to remind us of this ‘trick’ of cinema, and often interrupt the controlling discourse of the film’s showing by recalling the pleasures and fears of seeing” (Lury 2005, 309). It also happens that the filmmakers themselves try to withdraw from the ‘showing’ position to make room for the ‘seeing’, abandoning (partly or entirely) the adult gaze in favor of the child gaze. Such a perspective doesn’t necessarily lead to a radical change in aesthetics and a complete abandonment of mainstream cinema. The spectrum of possibilities is vast. The construction of the child gaze in cinema may involve the use of the character’s point of view, the positioning of the camera at the eye level of a child, the use of a large number of close-ups (Wilson 2005, 329–340), or introducing music “for emotion rather than drama” (Bazalgette and Staples 1995, 102). The use of space is also significant (Kuhn 2010, 82–98): in films emphasizing the child’s perspective, the number of locations is generally limited, with color and light playing an important role in their presentation (Kostyra 2022, 147–150). Most of the critics and academics writing about such strategies focus their attention on non-Hollywood children’s films, mainly European, Iranian, Chinese or Latin American.⁷ The works of Steven Spielberg or Chris Columbus are rarely considered in this context. We think, however, that they should be, because, as Becky Parry points out, *E.T.*, for example, “[...] was innovative in its use of shots, at the height of the child actors, which enabled the director to maintain adherence to the child’s point of view throughout” (2013, 16). Of course, it is significant that this “child’s point of view” in most of the films we will be discussing is essentially a boy’s point of view. Except for “short-sighted” [*sic*] Sophie from *The BFG* (Steven Spielberg, 2016), who nevertheless possesses the characteristics of a typical “bookworm”, the protagonists of these works are small, young, or adolescent men. Girls of different ages and—as in *E.T.*—characters of only presumed gender, who accompany boys, usually can’t be considered equal partners in their adventures. This interesting ideological motif will be left to the margins of our deliberations at this point, as we will focus on the child perspective in general. We believe that an integral component of its construction in the films of Spielberg or Columbus is John Williams’s music, which goes in line with Kathryn Kalinak’s reflections on the importance of music to the emotional experience in classical narrative movies (1992, 87). How the music corresponds to the idea of a child gaze is most easily captured in four complementary strategies: nostalgic connecting, reacting, reducing, and coloring.

7. See, for example, *The Child in World Cinema* (Olson 2018).

Nostalgic Connecting

11 The nostalgic dimension of Steven Spielberg's cinema has been pointed out many times before, also in the context of those of his works that can be categorized as family films (Brown 2017, 53–55).⁸ These films contain many references to classical adventure cinema or popular television shows.⁹ At the same time, they offer a kind of game with the expectations of a viewer, familiar with the genre conventions and narrative patterns. The nostalgic dimension of these works relies on two different spheres: that of references to already known (and loved) audiovisual texts and that of the idealized vision of childhood seen as a time of innocence, adventure, true friendship, etc. The subject of this nostalgia¹⁰ is, of course, the adult—both the creator and the viewer—who is given the opportunity to return to their carefree years. Unsurprisingly, the music in these films also contains more or less direct references to the classics¹¹—to both art music classics and Williams's own, in a way already classic, soundtracks (especially his sonically illustrated vision of childhood). In the first case, most often, we can talk about references to classical music reminiscent of specific sounds of the nineteenth and twentieth-century compositions. These include, for example, references to the sound climate, instrumentation and character of Tchaikovsky's or Prokofiev's music (heard in *Home Alone* [Chris Columbus, 1990]), to the works of Stravinsky¹² or Debussy¹³ (in *E.T.*). In turn, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* begins with a sound that may resemble the music of Ligeti or Penderecki. The sonic atmosphere created in this way precedes the appearance of a five-note motif essential for the film's plot. However, Williams's music also contains clear reminiscences or quotations of culturally recognizable compositions. In *The BFG*, for example, the British monarchy is portrayed through bombastic music (in which horns and military snare drums play a considerable role) constituting a kind of echo of the (supposedly?) much-loved by the British, *Symphony from the New World* by Anton Dvořák. In *Empire of the Sun* (Steven Spielberg, 1987), Chopin's *Mazurka Op. 17 No. 4* resounds literally, and its stunning performance reminds Jim—the protagonist—of his mother, who used to play that piece on the home piano during his happy childhood years. And the main theme from the *Harry Potter* films is a kind of paraphrase of the *Sicilienne* theme from Gabriel Fauré's ballet *Pelléas et Mélisande*.

12 In particular, many references to classical scores and techniques used in art music in the 20th century can be found in *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (Steven Spielberg, 2001). It is known that the film was initially intended to be directed by Stanley Kubrick, so the musical allusions Williams uses are expressive, unambiguous in intent, and of a particular kind. Thus, we find references to the orchestral *Atmosphères* by György Ligeti,¹⁴ Aram Khachaturian's ballet *Gayane*,¹⁵ and Richard Strauss's waltz from the

8. The purpose of this article is to analyze the construction of the child gaze, not the child characters themselves. However, it is worth noting the readings of the motif of childhood presented, among others, by the authors of the essays published in the volume *Children in the Films of Steven Spielberg* (Schober and Olson 2016).

9. One of them is the reference to Charles Laughton's *The Night of the Hunter* (1955) quoted in the opening scenes of *E.T.*

10. We are referring here, of course, to the kind of nostalgia that accompanies works described by Fredric Jameson as nostalgic films (1991, 286).

11. Emilio Audissino considers Williams's compositions (e.g. for the *Star Wars* or *Indiana Jones* series) in the context of the classic Hollywood style of film music; however, the author does not deal closely with the films of our interest (2014).

12. Echoes of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*.

13. Idiom of Debussy's *La Mer*.

14. The piece used in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968).

15. Especially to Khachaturian's *Adagio*, also used in the film *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

opera *Der Rosenkavalier*.¹⁶ Throughout this score, Williams repeatedly reaches for the atonal system and electronics (referencing Ligeti-style modernist vocalizations) and minimalism in the style of Steve Reich and John Adams.

16. It is also an allusion to another film by Kubrick: *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999).

13 The music composed by Williams for *Home Alone* also contains several exciting references that allow the story of a resolute eight-year-old from Chicago to be nostalgically inserted into the long tradition of Christmas stories in which children play a central role. As is well known, for this particular film, Williams was asked to compose music along the lines of the works of Sergei Prokofiev—a master of compositions intended for a children’s audience (Vernazza 1984, 36–37; Cazden 1954, 52–74; Klein 2014). Williams’s film score thus consciously references, as already stated, recognizable passages from two ballets: Tchaikovsky’s *The Nutcracker*¹⁷ and Prokofiev’s *Peter and the Wolf*.¹⁸ However, these evocations are woven into the dense fabric of Williams’s own music (along with the author’s charming Christmas song *Somewhere In My Memory*, for children’s choir and orchestra) and many traditional carols: *Jingle Bells*, *O Come All Ye Faithful*, *The First Noel*, *Joy to the World*, *Deck the Halls*, *Hark the Herald Angels Sing*, *It Came Upon a Midnight Clear* and *We Wish You a Merry Christmas*. In *Home Alone*, in a particularly appealing and satisfying way, Williams’s derivative and authorial music together create the innocent world of a child and the warm, almost magical aura of Christmas.

17. The reference to *The Nutcracker* seems particularly significant, as this ballet—the most famous in the history of the genre—has been associated, since its creation in 1892, with Christmas and the aura of wonder typical of the world of children (magic makes the impossible possible). The iconic part of the ballet is *The Dance of the Sugar-Plum Fairy*, which uses the specific—and culturally most famous—sound of the celesta. It is to this passage that John Williams refers.

14 Williams also references his own scores. For instance, *The BFG* is stylistically reminiscent of the scores of such earlier films as *The Adventures of Tintin* (Steven Spielberg, 2011), *War Horse* (Steven Spielberg, 2011), *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2004), *Home Alone* and *E.T.* However, the musical score of *The BFG* is by no means purely reproductive, derivative, or based on borrowing. By using a recognizable range of musical means, such as delicate melody in flute with the accompaniment of piano, orchestration including softness of the strings, harp and celesta, tonal harmonies, regularity, warm color of the middle and high register, the composer creates a friendly, intimate, warm, and charming atmosphere in his original score, particularly in the moments when Sophie feels safe.

18. Composed on the basis of a folk tale in 1936, Prokofiev’s ballet *Peter and the Wolf* aims to characterize each of the story’s characters with the sound of a different instrument. In this way, it familiarizes the youngest audience with the different sounds and possibilities of instruments of the symphony orchestra. The bird is symbolized by the flute; the duck is symbolized by the oboe; the cat—by the clarinet; the wolf—by the horns; Peter by the string quartet; the Hunters by the cymbals and the big drum. It is to the symbolism of instruments that Williams alludes in *Home Alone*.

15 Williams, therefore, does not shy away from sounds, sonorities and melodies that are unambiguously connoted and recognizable in high and pop culture. He reaches for them intentionally, in a thoughtful and sophisticated way. For example, in *Home Alone* he interweaves the tunes of traditional Christmas carols and of *Dies irae* sequence with the carols he created, to reinforce the meaning of movie’s narrative. The sound characteristics associated in classical music with various emotional states and dramatic situations became a point of reference in the process of his

compositional invention. Taking his cue from the classics and the associations developed from them, Williams creates his works of art: music through which he establishes a perfect connection with his audience by referring to their best memories. The nostalgic *connecting* becomes an additional advantage of his music.

- 16 Since, as we have already stated, these references aim to awaken nostalgic feelings for childhood in the adult viewer, can they be linked in any way to the concept of the child gaze? We believe that, on the one hand, they act as a framework, indicating important points of reference allowing us to identify *E.T.*, *Home Alone*, or *The BFG* as cultural texts belonging to “children’s worlds,” and, on the other hand, they constitute a first step towards the transition from the adult gaze towards the child gaze. Another step is the way Williams’s music resonates with the reaction shots contained in these films.

Reacting

- 17 Children’s film theorists consider reaction shots as a cinematic device that doesn’t embrace a child’s perspective, although it emphasizes the emotional value of a scene. Cary Bazalgette and Terry Staples describe the mechanism as follows: “The commonest use of a reaction shot in American cinema is to show a facial expression changing, and thus to emphasize a narrative point. [...] The more dramatically significant the moment, the more reaction shots will be used, allowing time for all the implications to sink in (both to the characters and the audience)” (1995, 101). We are all familiar with these types of shots from Spielberg’s or Columbus’s films: they appear when characters gaze in wonder and awe at spaceships in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *E.T.*, they accompany the scenes of the new students arriving at Hogwarts or the many moments in which Kevin McCallister confronts his fears of being home alone. The way Bazalgette and Staples write about reaction shots suggests that this kind of shot should be considered as a part of *showing* rather than *seeing* strategy, as it aims to show a reaction appropriate to the situation presented in the film. However, a closer look at these types of shots in Spielberg’s or Columbus’s films does not allow such conclusions to be drawn. In Spielberg’s films, alongside the classic reaction shots, there are interesting shots in which the children’s faces, viewed in close-up, are only partially illuminated—so that it is mainly their eyes that are visible. As in the aforementioned frame from *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, the child gaze seems to be the main topic of these shots. The consistency with which these types of shots recur in the director’s works, from *E.T.* to *A.I.*, can be seen as proof of the director’s conviction that facial shots

are extremely important in the film. In Columbus's *Home Alone* and *Home Alone 2: Lost in New York* (1992), on the other hand, the large number of reaction shots in which we observe Kevin's astonishment or fright as he opens his eyes and mouth wide (**Figure 2**), have an almost parodic, cartoonish effect, especially as reactions of this type often accompany situations that are by no means dramatic, but rather banal, such as meeting a neighbor or being in the bathroom.



FIGURE 2
Home Alone 2: Lost in New York, Kevin screams when he sees Harry and Marv (51:05).
© Twentieth Century Fox

- 18 Since, as Karen Lury writes, “Seeing’ is the ‘oooh!’ of wonder at fireworks in the night,” the presence of such shots is a desired illustration of a child’s experience in Spielberg’s films, whose themes are often wonder and awe. What is more, reaction shots of this kind aren’t restricted to the young protagonists of the films; they also involve adult protagonists: palaeontologists observing dinosaurs walking through *Jurassic Park* (*Jurassic Park*, 1993), representatives of government agencies observing the arrival of aliens in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* or the now-adult Peter Pan returning to Neverland after many years (*Hook*, 1991). The reaction of the protagonists of these films to unusual situations is not very different from the childish “oooh!” of wonder at fireworks in the night, suggesting that the essence of Spielberg’s reaction shots is not so much showing as seeing. Therefore, shots of this type signal the possibility of a perspective other than the rational and targeted adult gaze. This is suggested by the opening of *Hook*, in which we observe the faces of children attentively following the play about Peter Pan. The reaction shots used here seem

to encourage a change of perspective, choosing a child's point of view—which is exactly what Peter will have to do in the course of the action.

19 Williams's music, accompanying reaction shots, proves that the composer adopts—for the films—a child's perspective. After all, it should be remembered that for a child viewer, feelings are the most important. Therefore, music has a vital role to play: subordinated to the plot, illustrating the events unfolding on set, it should enhance their emotional, expressive dimension. Williams's music meets such requirements perfectly. It heightens the emotions experienced by the child and adds sound to what could not be expressed otherwise. For example, in *Home Alone* in the scene of Kevin's mother return the melody "Somewhere in My Memory" resounds at first softly, gently, and then, when the protagonist notices his mother's presence and rejoices at it, the music gains momentum, instrumental richness and sonic energy (**Clip 1**) E. T. Elliott's surprise and a certain fear at seeing E.T. for the first time supports the music with somewhat frightening effects of increased glissandos and string tremolos in very high registers (**Clip 2**). Just as a child's world is devoid of ambiguity or understatement and it is sometimes sketched in black and white tones (goodness pleases and encourages participation, while evil scares and forces one to flee), so Williams's music leaves no room for ambiguity as to the positive or negative message of a particular film scene. The appropriate choice of key, which is very idiomatic, also supports the clarity and unambiguity of the message—the major key emphasizes joy; the minor key emphasizes sadness and loss (e.g., in the scene when E.T. goes away). And the use of the redundant Mickey-Mousing effect is fully justified from this point of view. We can find another example in *Home Alone*, when "The Burglar's Theme" exploring a minor chord is contrasted with the main theme ("Somewhere in My Memory")—associated with Kevin—based on major chord (**Clip 3**; see [Lehman \[2020\] 2022](#)).

20 An excellent example of the musical enhancement of a protagonist reaction depicted on screen is found in several scenes from *Home Alone*, quoting the medieval *Dies irae* sequence. This iconic melody, taken from classical music, suggesting horror (because it is connotated with death, the day of wrath, destruction, and the Last Judgement) always resounds in the film with the appearance of Marley, an ominous-looking neighbor (the horror of the *Dies irae* motif is intensified by the sound of tubular bells). Meeting him "face to face" forces Kevin to escape immediately. Interestingly, however, Marley's transformation from fearful neighbor to kindly older man—which takes place during a meeting in a church against the background of the carol *O Holy Night*—is accompanied by a symbolic transformation of the *Dies irae* motif into the old Ukrainian song *Carol of the Bells*, composed of repeated ostinato motifs derived precisely from the *Dies irae* sequence.¹⁹

19. It's worth comparing scores of "Old Man Morley" theme (see [Lehman \[2020\] 2022, example 7, bars 3 and 4](#)) with "Setting the Trap" theme (first bars) based on Carols of the Bells" ([Lehman \[2020\] 2022, example 12a](#)).

- 21 In *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* Williams's music amplifies the perceptual response to an even higher level. Clearly, it balances between extremes: the world of humans and the world of artificial intelligence, as the film script intends. The sonic aura created by Williams is at times warm, intimate and personal (e.g. the cantilena theme of Monica in "For Always" or the borrowing from Strauss's opera) and at other times downright cold, distanced (electronics, atonality or Ligeti-style modernism). It leaves no illusion that the worlds that meet are emotionally different; the sound sphere unambiguously emphasizes and highlights the mutual incompatibility of their dimensions. In this way—following the idea of reaction shots—John Williams's music builds a space of emotional identification with the (especially, but not only) childlike characters. Another strategy—reducing—strengthens this effect on a perceptual level.

Reducing

- 22 According to the logic of the child gaze, the space in the film should be shown from an appropriate point of view (situated at the eye level of a non-adult); only then will it appear authentic. This rule is consistently applied by Chris Columbus in *Home Alone*, where in dialogue scenes the camera adopts an alternating point of view: it looks at Kevin from above, and at his adult interlocutors from below. Also, its vision is often limited to what the child can see in a given situation, for example: while hiding under a bed or observing something from the hall stairs. A child's perspective, however, is linked not only to the specific place of the viewer but also to a change of scale, as it is suggested in *Home Alone's* intro, in which the image of the house shrinks. What might look like an imbalance of proportions from an adult's perspective, may appear quite natural from a child's point of view—just as for Sophie from *The BFG* (**Figure 3**) it is natural to be very tiny, almost invisible in the giant's house—after all, to the adults in her everyday world, she is also tiny and almost invisible too, albeit in a more metaphorical sense. At the same time, in films that use a childlike perspective, it is the small things that are valued: Jim, the protagonist of *The Empire of the Sun*, seems fascinated by elements such as someone's footprints or handprints, while in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, taking the perspective of little Barry, the camera focuses on the toys and trinkets scattered around the child's room.²⁰
- 23 In films exposing the child gaze, the number of locations is fundamentally reduced to the spaces in which the kids most often function: the house, with heavily exposed children's bedroom and, for example, the garages serving as a "base" for meetings with friends, school, playgrounds and other places where the kids gather.²¹ The maps of these children's worlds

20. An interesting context for this thread—however, beyond the scope of our essay—is provided by Giorgio Agamben in *Infancy and History. The Destruction of Experience* ([1978] 1993).

21. This obviously evokes Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia (1967).



FIGURE 3
The BFG, Sophie gets out of the snozzcumber (28:56).
© Walt Disney Pictures

are not precise—they are more like sketches of treasure islands with a few clearly defined points than cartographic studies. Elliott in *E.T.*, for example, doesn't know how to get to the playground at his sister's nursery (because his mum always drove him there), Sophie in *The BFG* has only a vague idea of what London looks like (it seems that—apart from the view from the orphanage window—she recognizes only emblematic places such as Buckingham Palace), and in *Hook* all that is known about getting to Neverland is that you have to head for the “second star on the right and straight on ‘till morning” (see [McCaulley 2019](#)).

- 24 The reduction in the number of action locations can be linked to Williams's characteristic strategy of reducing the number of musical themes and thoughtfully manipulating the most important ones. Although in each of the films for which Williams's music provides musical support, there are several melodically and sonically recognizable themes (e.g. in *Home Alone* there are five, in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*—six, and in *E.T.* as many as nine), one most important (basic), clearly outlined motif characterizing the protagonist always comes to the fore. This completes the specific information about the main character's personality and adds what could not be otherwise expressed visually or verbally. This is the case, for example, in *E.T.* or *The BFG*, where the main characters are unambiguously defined sonically and the choice of motif and its instrumentation reveals the deeper qualities of their personality. We have in mind here, in particular, the solo, delicate piccolo flute theme, which tells the viewer

a lot about the feeling of loneliness of the tiny protagonist—E.T.—and his desire to find his family (see, for example, **Clip 2** [00:01–02:35]). On the other hand, Sophie’s six-note theme from *The BFG* is a charming ascending melody, revealing such features of the little heroine as delight in the world and childhood curiosity, lined with a hint of melancholy.

25 It is worth emphasizing that the most important musical themes recur frequently in Williams’s film score, being subjected to various changes and transformations. Depending on the visual narrative, they take on dramatic or playful qualities. An example is “Sophie’s Theme” from *The BFG*, which is clearly marked at the beginning of the film and becomes memorable for the viewer. Later, it accompanies Sophie’s adventures among the Giants, illustrates her developing friendship with the BFG (taking on the character of a gentle, delicate lullaby), or serves as a thoughtful and unsettling canvas for “Sophie’s Future”, supported by the sounds of flute and harp. In Williams’s music, the recurrence of themes thus finds its justification in content and narrative layers. At certain moments, they even acquire an impressionistic sonic flavor, undefined and yet evocative. They create a saturated, warm, profound ambient background aura (e.g., the meeting of Elliott and E.T. or the developing friendship between Sophie and the BFG). Even if—as in the case of *E.T.*—there are more themes (nine), they are linked in certain groups, finding a clear justification in the plot (e.g., the five themes of Elliott and E.T.’s developing friendship or the three themes of the antagonists). Moreover, the nature of the sonic background and the strategy of motivic transformations of the main theme clearly complement the other narrative levels and reveal them to the viewer (and, by interacting with the visual message, reinforce it).²² Thanks to the music, we learn—more and better—about the drama of the experiences, the emotions accompanying the adventures, the defeats suffered, and the disappointments experienced; we also get a fuller taste of victory. At the same time, Williams uses a limited number of themes to facilitate communication with the viewer. The latter, over time, recognizes the theme assigned to the protagonist and follows its transformation.

26 In the procedure of repeatedly transforming the themes, Williams once again reveals his acquired musical background and demonstrates his skill as a composer-symphonist. Of course, these features of his musical technique are typical for his entire oeuvre, not only of the soundtrack discussed here, but in the latter, they work brilliantly, reinforcing the intensiveness of the musical message. After all, the ability to use leitmotifs (whether in the form of extended themes or only in the form of sound signatures) stems precisely from the tradition of classical music and found its special crowning touch—transferred over time to the practice of film music—in the works of Richard Wagner. As we will see in the next section, the

22. The convincing analysis of Williams’s handling of musical themes (E.T.’s theme and Yoda’s theme) was presented by Brad Frey (2017).

transformation of these leitmotifs plays a key role in films that exhibit the child gaze.

Coloring

- 27 Color and light play a fundamental role in a child's experience of space (Day and Midjber 2007, 5–8). In his films, Spielberg has always tried to transcribe that phenomenon onscreen, among other things, in a whole series of techniques designed to make Elliott's house in *E.T.* look exactly as it might be perceived by a kid. During the shooting of the film, particular attention was paid to the source, intensity, and color of the light entering the protagonist's room. For instance, the house where Elliott hides the little alien looks different depending on the time of day (**Figure 4**).



FIGURE 4
E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial, Michael and Gertie discover E.T. in Elliott's closet (36:10).
© Universal Pictures / Amblin Entertainment

- 28 A child's sensitivity to color and light gives an unusual look and atmosphere to the orphanage in *The BFG* where Sophie wanders while everyone else sleeps, and to the room from which Captain Hook kidnaps Peter Pan's children. Also, the house of David's foster parents in *A.I.* undergoes a visual transformation under the influence of light. Its colors strongly correspond to the temperature of the characters' emotions—cooler colors appear when Monica has doubts about having an android child; and in the

finale, when David finally spends a whole day with his mother, the light is much softer and the colors warmer. The strategy used by Spielberg for the composition of space finds an equivalent in Williams's music. Indeed, Williams emphasizes the color of the image with changing texture and supports the composition of space with musical elements that bring out the various sound planes.

- 29 It is worth recalling at this point the distinction—proposed by Leonard B. Meyer (1956 and 1989) in relation to music—into its primary parameters and secondary parameters. The primary parameters are elements typical of and dominant in the music of the classical period, i.e., the form, harmony, and syntax of a musical work. In turn, secondary parameters—i.e., dynamics, agogics, and expression—characterize the sound utterances of nineteenth century Romanticism. Their use becomes crucial in realizing the Romantic ideal of musical communication achieved, among other things, through the handling of leitmotifs.
- 30 If we apply the optics of primary and secondary parameters to a child's perspective of world perception, the latter's priority is evident. In an adult's romanticized view of childhood, communication according to romantic principles, emphasizing emotions, is paramount ([Halberstadt et al. 2013, 93–128](#)). Although sometimes disrupted by unexpected twists and turns, the linear narrative must be supported by dynamic, agogic, and expressive contrasts. This is why Williams builds his musical world—about children and aimed at a young audience—with particular use of secondary parameters. He uses well-considered, specifically selected instrumentation such as: celeste, xylophone, glockenspiel, harps, strings or woodwinds (with articulation precisely assigned to the individual instruments). The main themes of protagonists such as Kevin, E.T. or Sophie are simple, catching, melodious, mainly based on the major mode and diatonic scale, built on single phrases of spread chords of harmonic triads, contrasted sometimes with the steps of seconds going in opposite directions. Williams's sound narrative is further colored by varied, contrasting dynamics, contrasting agogics, and (sometimes exaggerated) expressions. And again, these features of Williams's musical style are typical for all his music, but in the case of soundtracks for childhood's films they effectively enhance the narrative function.
- 31 At the same time, Williams's music participates in the process of transforming space into Crazyspace, typical for many family and children's films. According to Máire Messenger Davies and Karen Lury,

[Crazyspace] is a space in which children are active and frequently “impossible” [...] either because they exceed the bounds of realism (in that events are magical or simply implausible) or because they behave in ways that are apparently irrational, “crazy”—at least from

the adult's point of view. Significantly, Crazyspace takes place to one side of, or even "inside", the adult world (whether this is the spare bedroom, or in bulging trouser pockets illicitly stuffed with food). It is therefore often a space which the adult recognizes, knows and even owns, but its meaning and its "use" is determined by the child. (Lury 2005, 312)²³

23. See also Messenger Davies' paper on this subject (2005, 389–399).

- 32 This process is perfectly evident in *Empire of the Sun*, when Jim returns to his abandoned house, where—still not fully aware of the horror of the war events—he spends his time, among other things, cycling around the domestic premises. Crazyspace in Spielberg's film has a decidedly dark and disturbing dimension, unlike Chris Columbus's *Home Alone*, in which the McCallisters' home is being transformed every now and again by the stranded Kevin. Depending on the circumstances and needs, it can either be a space where all the rules are broken (Kevin, jumping on his parents' bed, scatters popcorn), or the scene where a supposed party is staged to convince nearby thieves that the house is guarded, or the fortress that Kevin defends with the means at his disposal: toys, cutlery, tools belonging to his father, and firecrackers stolen from his elder brother's room.
- 33 The childlike activity in the creation of Crazyspace translates in Williams's music in his simultaneous use, at selected moments in the film score, of all the previously mentioned techniques of handling musical matter. To emphasize the cinematic Crazyspace, Williams superimposes various motifs and themes—along with their transformations, contrasts sound plans, harnessing the multiple sounds of instruments, the entire scale of dynamics, and articulation. And all this happens simultaneously, within a short period of time, but at a frenetic pace. The fantastic examples of such an overlapping of themes and operating them like a child's Crazyspace are given by David McCauley in his score reduction and analysis of *E.T.* movie (2018a) and of *Home Alone* (2018b). So Williams once again takes a child's perspective and identifies with it so that the film's viewer also feels captured by the ingenuity and peculiar "madness" of the characters in the story. Williams's music, thus, becomes a Crazyspace area, where rules may or may not be followed, and where the familiar is subjected to creative treatment.

Conclusion

- 34 Williams composes music for films, often using classical music principles. He builds sound narratives using specific themes and motifs; he weaves them together; and he repeatedly evokes them, modifying the character and message of partially unchanged melodic idioms with secondary parameters. He is conscious—as in all of his musical output—of music's

ability to “carry many kinds of emotional information in its harmony, rhythm, melody, timbre, and tonality” (Cohen 2010, 902).

- 35 He also makes effective use of the Wagnerian technique of handling leitmotifs, following for example Max Steiner’s strategy but doing it according to his own idiomatic sound language. Williams’s themes are recognizable, short, and sometimes symbolic. Thanks to their multiple repetition, the (child?) viewer more easily recognizes them and unambiguously associates them with a particular character or situation.
- 36 Although Williams’s scores frequently evoke memories and sounds of well-known compositions belonging to the classical music canon or existing original soundtracks, these borrowings are no coincidence. Williams draws on familiar fragments and musical idioms precisely because they already contain culturally recognizable characterizations of certain emotional states and specific situations. It goes in line not only with Fredric Jameson’s concept of nostalgia film (1991, 286), but also with a statement by Annabel J. Cohen that “Films provide a major source for transmission of a culture’s musical conventions” (2010, 899).
- 37 Finally, the composer makes masterful use of the timbral and articulation capabilities of the individual orchestral instruments, thus demonstrating his skill as a composer trained in symphonic music. He thoughtfully selects the instrumental “actors,” creating a rich, multifaceted sound layer that is easily recognizable to his music lovers. He is, therefore, characterized by a professionalism worthy of a composer of symphonic music. Is he also the last great symphonic composer in the field of film music?
- 38 What draws particular attention is the multiplicity and variety of strategies with which, in films that expose the child gaze, Williams attempts to relate both to the child’s experience and to the culturally established vision of childhood. His music, nostalgically connected with motifs associated with a child’s perspective, operating with strategies of reducing and coloring, and referring to the principle on which reaction shots are based, does not so much bring us closer to the idea of a child’s hearing as it reinforces the sense of viewing the world from the perspective of a non-adult or one who is attempting to reconstruct such a perspective. Deborah Martin, citing Claudia Castañeda, states that “the child is constructed in modern culture as a figure of possibility and transformation, of potentiality and becoming. The child is a figure through which the adult subject experiences or imagines transformation” (2019, 6).²⁴ This observation strongly resonates with the music composed by John Williams for all the films, in which individual themes are constantly transformed, and works by both classical composers and Williams himself are creatively invoked or quoted. As films made by adults with children in mind, the works of Spielberg and Columbus mediate between two perspectives:

24. In this passage, the author recalls Castañeda’s concept presented in the book *Figurations. Child, Bodies, Worlds* (2002).

the nostalgic adult gaze and the meticulously reconstructed child gaze. Although many of their elements may be associated with showing rather than seeing, it is certainly possible to see in them an attempt to adopt a child's perspective and, thus, give the child a subjective role in shaping and designing the reception of the cultural text. Accompanying these attempts, John Williams's music harmonizes with the idea that childhood is worth revisiting and worth holding onto.

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Representations of “Idyllic” Childhood in the Film Music of John Williams

Représentations de l'enfance « idyllique » dans la musique de film de John Williams

Jacob Friedman

Keywords: Williams (John), childhood, film music, topic theory, naivety, Spielberg (Steven)

Mots clés : Williams (John), enfance, musique de film, théorie des topoï, naïveté, Spielberg (Steven)

ABSTRACT

In his film music, John Williams has consistently explored the condition of childhood. This paper examines Williams's representations of “idyllic” childhood, analyzing how he deploys the childhood topic in scores for *Harry Potter*, *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*, *Hook*, *Jurassic Park*, *Empire of the Sun*, *Jaws*, and *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*. Williams both fulfills and disrupts topical conventions to portray childhood as a distinct realm, a precious refuge from adult darkness. Ultimately, his idealization of childhood (while partly reflecting his collaborations with Steven Spielberg) participates in centuries-old discourse about nostalgia and naivety in Western art music, hearkening back to eighteenth-century aesthetics that elevated naïve purity and placed the uncorrupted child in relief against darker visions of adulthood.

RÉSUMÉ

Dans ses musiques de film, John Williams a fréquemment exploré la condition enfantine. Cet article examine ses représentations d'une enfance « idyllique », analysant la manière dont il déploie ce thème dans les partitions de *Harry Potter*, *E.T.*, *l'extra-terrestre*, *Hook*, *Jurassic Park*, *Empire du soleil*, *Les Dents de*

la mer et *A.I. Intelligence artificielle*. Williams, tout en respectant les conventions thématiques, les transgresse pour dépeindre l'enfance comme un monde à part, un refuge précieux face aux ténèbres de l'âge adulte. Finalement, son idéalisation de l'enfance (qui reflète en partie ses collaborations avec Steven Spielberg) s'inscrit dans un discours séculaire sur la nostalgie et la naïveté dans la musique savante occidentale, renouant avec l'esthétique du XVIII^e siècle qui glorifiait la pureté naïve et opposait l'enfant innocent aux visions plus sombres de l'âge adulte.

- 1 This article examines and contextualizes John Williams's significant engagement with the concept of childhood in his film music. Williams may be strongly associated with the "maximalism" of spectacle and adventure (Willman 2024),¹ but in his intimate depictions of childhood, we can find some of his most memorable and dramatically consequential music. He has certainly had the opportunity to imbue musical life into a number of the most beloved child characters in the last half-century, such as Harry Potter, Elliott of *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* (Steven Spielberg, 1982), and Kevin McCallister of *Home Alone* (Chris Columbus, 1990). Other children who have served as the main protagonist in Williams's films include Jim of *Empire of the Sun* (Steven Spielberg, 1987), David of *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (Steven Spielberg, 2001), and Sophie of *The BFG* (Steven Spielberg, 2016). Besides these examples, other films scored by Williams use representations of childhood as a frame through which adult characters find meaning in their own lives: for example, *Jaws* (Steven Spielberg, 1975), *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (Steven Spielberg, 1977), *Hook* (Steven Spielberg, 1991), *Jurassic Park* (Steven Spielberg, 1993), *The Patriot* (Roland Emmerich, 2000), and *Minority Report* (Steven Spielberg, 2002).
- 2 Williams's consistent engagement with this theme is partly due to his frequent collaborations with Steven Spielberg, who often crafts stories around the idea of childhood. Indeed, a recently published collection of essays (Schober and Olson 2016) examines this very concept in Spielberg's films; however, despite Williams's seemingly central role in conveying this important facet of Spielberg's filmography, Schober and Olson's collection contains only two passing references to Williams's music. By exploring the close relationship between his music and this recurring thematic emphasis in the films Williams has scored, this article can thus provide further insight into this important aspect of Spielberg's work. Its main purpose, however, is to highlight Williams's role in idealizing a Romantic, idyllic notion of childhood, exploring the strategies he undertakes to do so.

1. A recent cover story in *Variety* introduces Williams by asserting that "big, bold, brassy musical moments [have] become Williams' trademark over his seven-decade career" (Willman 2024). It also notes the "zesty sense of adventure that is positively Williams-esque."

Musical approaches to representing childhood in film: idyllic vs. fantastic

- 3 What does childhood sound like in film? Before delving into this question, two important qualifications are necessary to establish the framework of this paper. To begin, the focus here is on film music composed in the symphonic idiom of the Classical Hollywood revival that Williams operates in. Secondly, this paper considers musical representations *of* children or childlike feelings, rather than music *for* children. This distinguishes this study from such scholarship as Maloy (2020), which examines music written for child audiences, or McQuiston (2017), which discusses the score to *Moonrise Kingdom* (Wes Anderson, 2012) and its use of music “performed by, listened to, and even written by children” (2017, 483).² It has a closer kinship with scholarship like Bottge (2006), which devotes some attention to exploring songs written about children in the nineteenth century.
- 4 Bourne (2024) frames childhood as a topic in film music. In doing so, she identifies a number of attributes we tend to observe in musical depictions of childhood on screen, including: major modes; high-register instrumentation (noting prominence of piano, music box, glockenspiel, etc.); singable, simple or “jumpy” melodies; sparse texture; syncopation; running 8th and 16th notes; and “playful” chromaticism (Bourne 2024, 93). To elaborate on Bourne’s description, we might divide the characteristics she identifies into two categories, using a framework devised by Ian Sharp (2000, 26–27): the first half shows a more tranquil, idealized childlike naivety, which Sharp deems the “idyllic approach” to representing childhood musically; the second half corresponds to a more playful, vigorous depiction of childhood, or the “fantastic dimension” (Table 1).

2. Specifically, music written by Benjamin Britten that was reused for the film.

Idyllic Childhood	Fantastic Childhood
Major modes	Jumpy melodies
High-register instrumentation (ft. piano, glockenspiel, etc.)	Syncopation
Singable, simple melodies	Running 8 th and 16 th notes
Sparse texture	Sparse texture

TABLE 1
Childhood as a topic in film music, derived from Bourne (2024).

- 5 Consider the two sides of childhood depicted in *The BFG*. In a scene midway through the film (47:11, [Clip 1](#)³), we can observe the adventures of Sophie (and her giant friend) depicted with a jumpy melody, running

3. This cue appears as part of the track titled “Dream Country” on the official release of the *BFG* film soundtrack (track 4, from 04:30).

16th notes, and “playful” chromaticism—the “fantastic” dimension. A more reserved portrait of childhood is exemplified in an earlier scene (29:32, [Clip 2](#)⁴), in which Sophie begins to trust the strange creature she has just met (**Figure 1**). Childhood is represented here with a simple, diatonic, major-mode melody in a high register; sparse orchestration; and prominence of piano (colored by celeste)⁵—the “idyllic” dimension.

4. This cue appears as part of the track titled “Building Trust” on the official release of the *BFG* film soundtrack (track 6, from 00:33).



FIGURE 1
The BFG, first measures of the cue “Building Trust.”

- 6 Such idyllic childhood moments stand out in Williams’s body of work for two reasons: the sheer number of times they occur across his oeuvre; and the striking degree to which they are musically and dramatically marked or offset in the film. These moments are fundamental to a common characterization of Spielberg’s output as “elevat[ing] childhood qualities such as naïveté, innocence, and curiosity to a blissful, sublime state, impelling viewers to assume this state, reduced to awestruck children” ([Balanzategui and Kristjanson 2016, 183](#)). We can observe them in Williams’s scores for other directors as well. These idyllic representations are sometimes considered evocative of childlike wonder ([Richards 2018, 142](#); [Bourne 2024, 93–95](#)),⁶ but as this paper illustrates, they contain additional layers of emotional and dramatic complexity.
- 7 This idyllic childhood mode is not unique to Williams, and many other composers (such as Ravel, Tchaikovsky, or Britten) have more famously represented childhood in their compositions.⁷ Yet perhaps only Williams has so habitually afforded childhood such a privileged, almost spiritual place. An apparent musical simplicity belies the emotional richness of many of these scenes, and he at times contradicts the topic’s associated

5. Williams often uses the sound of a celeste (produced electronically by synthesizer) in his depictions of childhood.

6. [Lehman \(2018\)](#) explores the evocation of wonder in film music, but does not discuss any particular relationship to childhood and innocence.

7. Scholarship referencing or examining the relationship between these composers and childhood include [Orledge \(2000, 44\)](#); [Mawer \(2000, 58\)](#); [Lindberg \(2011\)](#); [Mahiet \(2016\)](#); [McQuiston \(2017\)](#); [Leccia \(2023\)](#).

expectations. In what follows I will demonstrate the strategies Williams uses to fulfill or disrupt the idyllic childhood topic. In all cases his work serves to idealize the concept of childlike naivety, doing so at critical junctures in his films.⁸

Contextualizing Williams's depictions of childhood

8 Williams is part of a long tradition of composers who have devoted special attention to childlike naivety through their music. Much has been written about the naïve “Romantic child,” a construction of the eighteenth century that glorifies childhood as a distinct realm free from these burdens (Nikolajeva 2013, 321): as Paula Fass explains, writers and artists since this time have depicted childhood as “a privileged ethereal realm that we all desire personally and socially” (2013, 7). Sharp (2000, 67) contends that the first musical composition to represent this idealized condition of childhood was Schumann’s 1838 *Kinderszenen*. However, this impulse can be traced earlier, and can be aligned more closely with the development of modern ideas of childhood during the eighteenth century as well.⁹ Nostalgia for childlike innocence in fact existed in a great deal of music in the half-century preceding *Kinderszenen*, often presenting in the more abstract form of naivety. As Friedrich Schiller asserted in 1795, the “naïve manner of thinking” is only possible in “children and people with a childlike disposition” (Schiller 1795).

9 While the idealization of childhood naivety is commonplace in modern society, to call someone “naïve” today is generally not a compliment. This was not always the case. Describing a grown artist as naïve was, until the early nineteenth century, high praise (Friedman 2021, 703). Naivety was generally seen as representing closeness to the divine, and with it access to knowledge, true beauty, and an understanding of life’s mysteries. It also was considered an antidote to the excesses of an increasingly modernizing and urbanizing world, and all the anxieties that came with it (Bottge 2006, 250–251). This state of detachment was thus highly desirable. Beyond a small selection of artists, only children were considered blessed with such powers, as the Schiller quote above suggests. Children were accordingly revered, indicated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s famous urging in his 1762 treatise *Émile* to “hold childhood in reverence” and preserve their cherished, ephemeral innocence (1961, 71). Given the weight afforded naivety at the time, some of the era’s most influential thinkers, including Diderot, Kant, and Schiller, contemplated how this condition achieved representation in the arts (Friedman 2021, 689–693).

8. This paper contributes to a body of literature investigating how an individual composer treats a single style topic. This literature includes Tillman (2018) on Williams’s “villain’s march topic,” as well as Dreyfus (1991), Head (2005), McKee (2007), Monelle (2006), Rumph (2015), Sutcliffe (2007), and Wollenberg (2007).

9. That said, according to Fass (2013), such ideas had a more complex genesis than commonly thought.

10 Certain musical characteristics were considered representative of naivety. We can observe the musical connection between naivety and childhood by comparing an 1805 description of “naïve” music by C.F. Michaelis with Sharp’s and Bourne’s contemporary definitions of music for childhood (**Table 2**).

a. Michaelis 1805, 149–150.

b. Sharp 2000, 60–61.

c. Bourne 2024, 93.

	Michaelis on “naïve” music ^a	Sharp on music for childhood ^b	Bourne on music for childhood in film ^c
Melody	“Melody is easily flowing”	“Relatively easy to take in at a first hearing, with few surprises”	“Singable, simple melody”
		“Affinity with folk music”	
		“Melodic writing is significant”	
Rhythm	Avoids “rhythmic illusions”	“Neat and tidy” rhythm and meter	“Singable, simple melody”
Harmony	“Harmony is artless, simple, and natural in the chords and phrases”	“Intervals of thirds and sixths are often to the fore”	“Parallel thirds”
	“Modulation without bold leaps and striking alternations”	“Affinity with folk music”	“Diatonicism, pentatonicism”
	Avoids “shocking dissonances”		
Texture	“Their movement is even and mild”	“More emphasis on the vertical (harmony) than the horizontal (counterpoint)”	“Sparse texture”
Orchestration	Avoids “striking [orchestral] reinforcements” ^d	“Timbres and sonorities are fairly bright, but unadventurous”	“High instrumentation”
			“Sparse texture”
Development	“Free from strong contrasts”	“Little sense of development apart from variation”	

d. Ferdinand Hand expanded on Michaelis’s definition in 1837, specifying the importance of avoiding “full-throated instrumentation” (**Hand 1837, 302–303**).

TABLE 2
Shared characteristics of music depicting childhood and naivety.

11 Music written to depict childhood from the mid-nineteenth century to the present, as described by Sharp and Bourne, has clear overlaps with the well-established “naïve” music described by Michaelis in 1805.

Indeed, a discussion of naïve music in 1837 by Ferdinand Hand essentially reproduces Michaelis's definition, but describes it as characterizing the "naivety of childishness" [*Naivetät der Kindlichkeit*] rather than simply naivety (1837, 303). It is apparent, then, that naivety and childhood were conceptually and musically intertwined.

- 12 The composer who most closely represented naivety for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century listeners was Joseph Haydn, whose compositions, according to E.T.A. Hoffmann, are dominated by "a feeling of childlike optimism" ([1810] 1989, 97). For Hoffmann, Haydn's symphonies evoke the following scene:

Youths and girls sweep past dancing the round; laughing children, lying in wait behind trees and rose-bushes, teasingly throw flowers at each other. A world of love, of bliss, of eternal youth, as though before the Fall; no suffering, no pain; only sweet, melancholy longing for the beloved vision floating far off in the red glow of evening, neither approaching nor receding.

- 13 Haydn enjoyed towering fame in his lifetime, in part due to his ability to tap into this zeitgeist with his music (Friedman 2021). Although the artistic currency of childlike naivety dwindled over the course of the nineteenth century—Wagner, for example, derided it as sheer vapidty (Wagner [1872] 1966, 264),¹⁰ and Dickens believed it to be an irresponsible retreat from reality (Dickens 1853, 337)—this element of nostalgia for simpler times, for the uncomplicated, blissfully ignorant existence of childhood, has remained firmly rooted in Western culture through the twenty-first century (Grant 2013, 120). This is especially palpable in the film music of John Williams, a body of work that has reached billions across the world.
- 14 It might be little coincidence that Williams has named Haydn as his favorite composer (Morrison 2020), whom he describes, using language reminiscent of aforementioned writings on childlike naivety, as "one of the purest, most instinctive talents in the history of music" (Sullivan 2007).¹¹ Williams continues the tradition of idealizing naïve simplicity in the arts by persistently emphasizing an archetypically Romantic notion of childhood: as a peaceful, safe, spiritual retreat from the darkness of the adult world.

10. In discussing the heroes in the stories of the Brothers Grimm, Wagner writes of his admiration for their "child-like gentleness and guileless sweetness," but continues, "To see the attributes of great genius or grave misfortune assumed by sheer vapidty, has something really laughable." ([1872] 1966, 254)

11. In the end credits to *The Fabelmans* (Steven Spielberg, 2022), Williams even orchestrates out a simple Haydn keyboard sonata (*Sonata No. 48 in C Major*, Hob. XVI: 35, 1. Allegro con brio) that is often used as a teaching piece for children.

Fulfilling the childhood topic

- 15 The following discussion considers several films in which Williams uses the idyllic mode identified earlier to represent childhood as a refuge of security and happiness. It will demonstrate that Williams achieves this

aim by deploying either one of two seemingly opposing approaches: conventional fulfillment of the childhood topic, or by subverting its expected tropes. In both approaches, he uses similar salient strategies to offset these moments from the rest of the film.

Common techniques : preparation and contrast

- 16 First, it will be useful to specify two strategies that Williams tends to employ to heighten the dramatic effect of these moments: preparation and contrast. The former is a similar concept to his well-known “gradual disclosure of the main theme” (Audissino 2021, 145; Schneller 2014, 101–103), whereby fragments of a theme are presented over the course of a film before coalescing into a complete statement at a climactic moment. Bribitzer-Stull (2015, 101–102) identifies this technique of “presentiment” as a favored one of Wagner, and it is a key factor in what Schneller (2014) terms “teleological genesis,” a particular approach to film scoring that aims for a cohesiveness of musical form and structure alongside that of the film.¹² This priming and payoff approach intensifies the drama at the moment of complete disclosure (Bribitzer-Stull 2015), which “comes only at a strategic point in the narrative” (Audissino 2021, 146). Williams most famously executes this in *E.T.*, *Jaws*, and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Steven Spielberg, 1981) (Audissino 2021, 146–147; Schneller 2014, 101–103). According to Williams, these are important moments that, due to musical preparation, are “inevitable” and “had to happen” (Williams, interviewed in Stock 2006).
- 17 Williams’s idyllic childhood scenes do not offer the same high drama as the more memorable payoffs of *E.T.* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and the priming is not as extensive, but the tactic is similar. When treating idyllic childhood, Williams may subtly hint at a fragment that is completed in a later scene (*The BFG*, *Empire of the Sun*, *A.I.*), or it might be a fully realized melody that is transformed into an idyllic childhood version via alterations in instrumentation, texture, tempo, etc. (*Hook*, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* [Chris Columbus, 2001], *Jurassic Park*, *The Reivers* [Mark Rydell, 1969]). Considering the extensive commentary on the narrative significance of these instances (Audissino 2021; Bribitzer-Stull 2015; Schneller 2014), and Williams’s (2006) own label of them as “inevitable,” his decision to prime these moments seems to indicate an understanding that these idyllic childhood scenes are critical for the dramatic and emotional arc of the film.
- 18 The technique of contrast refers to salient departures in character, texture, tempo, register, harmony, instrumentation, or other musical elements with the deployment of the childhood topic. This technique is less well-defined

12. In this discussion I am indebted to Audissino (2021, 145–147), who also references Bribitzer-Stull (2015) and Schneller (2014).

and discussed in the literature than preparation, but it is palpable in each of the Williams films under examination in this paper. Its dramatic significance derives from a clear impulse, common across these examples, to portray childhood as an entirely separate realm. It is a logical choice when we consider that a key feature of the Romantic child is its inaccessibility. This carefree, naïve time of life can never be returned to or recaptured, fated to be an object of bittersweet memory. Williams employs several techniques to conjure the feeling of departing to a distant world: it might be localized, couching gentle, consonant music within something more dissonant, gloomy, or agitated (*Harry Potter*, *Jurassic Park*, *Jaws*, *A.I.*); or it might be a broader affective contrast relative to the rest of the film (*Jaws*, *Empire of the Sun*, *Hook*). His habitual use of celeste imparts a shimmering, dreamlike sensation, heightening the impression of the moment as a portal to another world.

Childhood as a separate realm: *Hook* and *Harry Potter*

- 19 Efforts to make childhood feel special, magical, and inaccessible can be observed in central scenes in *Hook* and *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. Both films are clearly centered on the theme of magic, but their scores differ in how they musically isolate childhood.
- 20 A broad affective contrast is seen plainly in *Hook*, Spielberg's spiritual sequel to Disney's 1953 animated film *Peter Pan* (Clyde Geronimi, Wilfred Jackson and Hamilton Luske), which envisions a scenario where an adult Peter Pan has forgotten his magical childhood. Discussing the film, Williams describes the world of our imagination as "The one we would like to exist and the one only children have the privilege to dream of or create" (Williams, interviewed in [Fourgiotis 1992](#)). Indeed, the film articulates this dichotomy on a broad scale, with the music playing an important role in doing so. Throughout, Spielberg and Williams engage intensively with the fantastic dimension of childhood—as one reviewer writes, "much of the movie seems wired and over-eager when it ought to be refreshing and relaxed" ([Sterritt 1991](#))—but the idyllic dimension reigns in one long, central scene (01:36:49, [Clip 3](#)) when Peter Banning recalls his past as Peter Pan, and his decision to walk away from eternal life as a child to become a mortal adult.¹³
- 21 The music of this scene has been primed by an earlier statement in the film with slow and dreamy high winds to accompany Wendy's first appearance (10:29). Here it exhibits signals of the idyllic childhood topic: a simple, diatonic, major-mode melody in a high register; sparse orchestration; and prominence of celeste. Furthermore, the regular, rocking nature

13. This cue appears as part of the track titled "Remembering Childhood" on the official release of the *Hook* film soundtrack (track 13, from 05:10).

of the melody and the bass line instills this with a lullaby-like quality, and the use of the Lydian mode heightens the scene's magical feeling.¹⁴ This musically illustrates an uncomplicated naivety that adults ascribe to childhood, with overwhelmingly positive connotations. The marked nature of this music in the context of the film helps privilege this scene among others, representing a critical turning point in the narrative. It is certainly a departure from the jazzy, emotionally flat tune Williams uses to depict Peter as a work-obsessed and emotionally distant father (03:58).¹⁵ This inability to access pure childlike naivety is something Williams consistently represents in his music, often by sharply contrasting depictions of idyllic childhood with surrounding musical material.

22 The score to *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* offers another striking example of how Williams isolates childhood naivety. He uses the twinkling of celeste often in the film to connote "benevolent magic" (Webster 2009, 205), which makes it difficult to manufacture a departure to the childhood realm, given how heavily he relies on the instrument to depict idyllic childhood. Moreover, the film's opening contains a brief but conspicuous instance of the childhood topic via the celeste, which introduces the film's main theme—titled "Hedwig's Theme"—when we see baby Harry's face for the first time (03:44). However, there is a more consequential moment in the film's exploration of childhood innocence. This occurs when Harry gazes into the magical Mirror of Erised, which shows the deepest desire of those who peer into it.

23 When Harry looks into the mirror midway through the film and sees his deceased parents, Williams seeks to highlight the happy childhood Harry longs for, turning to unconventional instrumentation to set this scene apart (01:33:16, **Clip 4**).¹⁶ Williams uses woodwinds to prime this melody in an earlier scene where Harry wishes himself a happy birthday, before Hagrid arrives to take him to Hogwarts (12:38 and 18:18). In the later mirror scene, it features typical tropes of the idyllic childhood topic—major mode, a singable melody (albeit with some chromatic detours), sparse texture, and high register instrumentation—with the added presence of an unusual tinkling sound, made by crotales. They serve a dual function here: they fulfill the childhood topic as a high, bell-like percussion instrument, and their antique sound, lacking exact pitch and being associated with medieval music, enriches the mystical feeling of the scene. Combined with a sudden harmonic shift from dark, modal D natural minor to a lush A-major sound world, the use of the crotales transports viewers to a different plane from the rest of the film; just like Harry is momentarily transported to a childhood in which he knows his parents. This sense of contrast is heightened by the busy strings that immediately follow, as if rousing Harry from a dream.

14. Schneller (2013, 68–71) thoroughly examines the association between the Lydian mode and "flight, magic, and wonder." Richards notes that the melody's initial interval of a falling third mimics the openings of numerous children's songs (2018, 124).

15. Pace considers Spielberg's attitude toward fatherhood and masculinity in *Hook*, suggesting, "For Spielberg in particular, the conflict between emotionality, empathy, idealism (associated with the feminine and the private sphere), and the mythic individualism central to patriarchal public man, finds its imaginative locus in the contemporary family" ([1996] 2002, 160).

16. This cue appears as part of the track titled "The Invisibility Cloak and the Library Scene" on the official release of the *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* film soundtrack (track 13, from 02:06). Crotales can be heard more clearly here than in the film.

24 Other interpretations of this music do not consider it a reflection on Harry's lost childhood. Webster suggests that the melody captures Harry's "love for his family" and the "childlike nature" of his emotions (2009, 372–373); Obluda asserts that, rather than merely "simplicity and sincerity," this scene "reinforce[s] the otherworldliness that looms over Harry as he tries to make sense of his fame and destiny in a world he had previously been unaware of" (2021, 57).¹⁷ Both writers acknowledge Harry's innocence, but their commentary neglects the notion that by using childhood tropes and creating such a sharp contrast with the surrounding musical material, Williams also seems to represent the precious nature of childhood itself. This interpretation becomes more convincing when comparing it to a similar musical moment in *The Chamber of Secrets* (Chris Columbus, 2002), during a quiet, intimate scene when Harry and Ron visit a petrified Hermione in the infirmary (01:51:18). The same melody is heard,¹⁸ but it is now voiced by an oboe (an instrument associated with Hermione in the film), without the orchestrational trappings of the idyllic childhood topic. This is a departure from the parallel scene in the first film, which narratively and musically stands apart as a specific expression of the transience of Harry's childhood innocence, rather than the more generic "love for his family and friends" that is centered in the corresponding moment of *The Chamber of Secrets*.

25 Williams does not return to the idyllic childhood topic after the Mirror of Erised scene in the three films he scored for the franchise. In this he participates in a palpable evolution over the course of the saga, which has been described as traversing "innocence" to "experience," beginning most notably with *The Prisoner of Azkaban* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2004), the third and final film scored by Williams (Webster 2009, 401–402; Behr 2009; White 2018). The young protagonists' connection to childlike naivety erodes as innumerable horrors strip them of the ephemeral innocence that the first two films (directed by Chris Columbus) especially highlight. White observes this evolution represented musically in the post-Williams films (scored by Patrick Doyle, Nicholas Hooper, and Alexandre Desplat) in several ways: for example, striking silence during moments of intense grief "serve to counteract the more childish sense of wonder at the magical world" displayed most prominently in the "Innocence" films scored by Williams (2018, 134); chromaticism representing "evil" rather than "magic," as it does in the earlier films (2018, 134); and diatonicism, most notably through the progressive alteration of Hedwig's theme, that moves the films further from the "benevolent magic" world of the Williams films (2018, 74–81).¹⁹ The absence of idyllic childhood scenes in films 2–8—perhaps inevitable as the characters grow older—is another factor in this disconnection from naivety. As for Williams, the score for *The Prisoner of Azkaban* goes beyond merely avoiding the idyllic childhood

17. See Webster (2009, 371–374) for an exploration of the "mirror" metaphor in the melody's construction.

18. Obluda characterizes this as "Harry's Theme," noting, "In all of these scenes, Harry is discovering and cherishing the places, people, and events that constitute his identity" (2021, 55).

19. White (2024) expands on these ideas.

topic, using techniques such as emphasis on strings to channel “a growing awareness of loss in Harry’s emotional world” (Webster 2009, 401–402).

Childhood and safety: *Empire of the Sun* and *Jurassic Park*

26 In creating a sharp distinction between childhood and adulthood, Williams makes a statement that these are fundamentally different elements of the human condition. Fulfilling the idyllic childhood topic to create a distinct aural experience offers a natural way for Williams to convey the message that childhood is a safe place in a dangerous world. Consider the straightforward musical representation of childhood in *Empire of the Sun*, which follows a young boy named Jim in a Japanese internment camp in China during the second World War. His youthful innocence and enthusiasm represent a ray of hope in miserable, oppressive conditions, and distinguish him from the others from the moment he arrives at the POW camp (01:06:53, [Clip 5](#)).²⁰

27 Upon his arrival Jim walks through the sea of toiling laborers, transfixed by an airplane, almost oblivious to the suffering around him. Amidst this cacophony, a celeste intones a melody heard earlier in the film: when Jim’s parents wish him goodnight in the comfort of his own home (08:36).²¹ Again we can observe an aurally offset deployment of the childhood topic: both by the diegetic cacophony, as well as the fact that the score has been silent for nearly a half hour at this point. This brief phrase contains several tropes associated with the childhood topic: high instrumentation (celeste), sparse texture, and a singable, diatonic, major-mode melody. The music quickly shifts from the childhood topic to something more lush and romantic, but by recalling a time of peace and security with his parents, the message of the music is clear: Jim’s childlike naivety might allow him to cope with the harshness of his environment in a way that sets him apart from his elder peers. It also enables him to transcend the language barrier and the power imbalance between him and his captors, resulting in what Frank Lehman terms a cinematic “holy moment” (2018, 200). Childlike naivety thus serves as a common denominator, appearing powerful enough to bring peace in war. Yet the film explores the fragility of this power: Spielberg relates that *Empire of the Sun* is about “a very cruel death of innocence” (Johnston 1988, 13, quoted in Sinyard 2017, 240). This scene of pure idyllic childhood therefore serves a key emotional and dramatic role by sharpening the loss of Jim’s naivety, and placing it in clear relief against the horrors he experiences.

28 Childlike naivety as an oasis of peace amidst violence and trauma is an important theme of *Jurassic Park*, which contains one of Williams’s most

20. This cue appears as part of the track titled “Toy Planes, Home and Hearth,” on the official release of the *Empire of the Sun* film soundtrack (track 9, from beginning).

21. Williams also primes this moment with a subtle melodic fragment at 16:10, when Jim gets into the cockpit of a ruined fighter plane that he comes across at a party while playing with his glider.

well-known musical depictions of childhood. Yet rather than the focus being on the preservation of a child's inherent innocence, as observed in *Harry Potter* and *Empire of the Sun*, Spielberg and Williams here consider an adult's epiphanic reconnection to childhood, akin to the approach taken in *Hook*. In this scene (01:23:25, [Clip 6](#)),²² the paleontologist Alan Grant, along with the two grandchildren of the park's owner (John Hammond), have climbed up a tree for safety from a vicious T-Rex. Dr. Grant, who has previously shown disdain for children, now joins them in marveling at the magical dinosaur sounds coming from the forest, and promises to keep watch as they sleep. The typical markers of childhood are exhibited here: a singable, diatonic, major-mode melody, played in a high register by a celeste, and sparse orchestration. We might also note the prominence of the dotted rhythm, giving the cue a strong sense of rocking, reminiscent of a lullaby. Similarly to the "Remembering Childhood" scene in *Hook*, the overall impression is that of a music box, which has associations with childhood and infancy.

22. This cue appears as part of the track titled "A Tree for My Bed" on the official release of the *Jurassic Park* film soundtrack (track 10, from beginning – the melody begins at 00:28).

- 29 What effect does Williams's straightforward musical depiction of childhood have on the film's narrative? A key driver of *Jurassic Park* is Dr. Grant's evolution from a humorless scientist who detests children to a more caring, responsible "family man." Just like Peter Banning's reawakening to his own childhood as Peter Pan allows him to become a better father, Grant's recovery of childlike wonder enables his transformation—this is something the music makes clear.
- 30 We can observe this by comparing the presentation of the melody in the tree scene with the first time we hear it in the film, which appears in the track "Welcome to Jurassic Park" (20:21). In this earlier scene, Williams channels Grant's awe at the miracle of Jurassic Park with a noble, brass hymn that eventually becomes celebratory, marking a triumph of science over nature. Paralleling this are Grant's breathless scientific observations, indicating that much of his awe may be derived from his paleontology background. Conversely, in the "Tree for My Bed" scene, Williams's re-direction of this melody into the intimate, idyllic childhood topic reflects how Grant, who previously disliked children, now regards these dinosaurs with something closer to childlike wonder, in turn enabling him to connect with, and protect, Hammond's grandchildren. The message that Williams conveys with the childhood topic—which feels like an oasis amidst more intense, agitated music—is that childlike innocence is a place to retreat to for peace and safety in a scary adult world, a retreat that must be protected.
- 31 Indeed, the celeste figures prominently in the subsequent scene as Hammond explains how the imagination of his youth inspired the well-intentioned spectacle of Jurassic Park (01:26:00); yet the childhood topic

now yields to something more haunting, perhaps casting the park as an adult perversion of those days of childlike wonder. The celeste gently returns in the closing moments of the film (01:58:55) as the group of survivors flees the island in a helicopter, the children sleeping on Grant's shoulders. Ending the film by visually and aurally recalling the "Tree for My Bed" scene—with the "Welcome to Jurassic Park" melody returning once more—lends prominence to its message about childhood.

Disrupting the childhood topic

Childhood as a "precious refuge": *Jaws* and *A.I.*

- 32 As we have observed, when Williams seeks to portray childlike naivety, he habitually calls on the piano, celeste, and/or harp for a simple, sparsely-orchestrated, singable, major-mode melody. However, there are also instances of Williams disrupting the typical presentation of the childhood topic in a way that adds emotional and narrative nuance and enriches lofty portrayals of childlike naivety. Two moments that exemplify this can be found in *Jaws* and *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*.
- 33 Williams treats one striking wordless scene in *Jaws* with characteristic musical sensitivity. In this scene, Police Chief Martin Brody, grappling with a great white shark terrorizing his small town, shares a touching moment with his toddler-age son, Sean (38:05, [Clip 7](#)).²³ Here, what we have identified as the idyllic childhood topic manifests in the score's simple, high-register, major-mode melody, played by piano, harp, and vibraphone. But it departs from the topic in two ways: the dissonant pedal played by celli and basses that undergirds the scene, and the halting nature of the melody. These disruptions highlight the archetypal relationship of Romantic child and father, in which the Romantic child is, in Matthew Riley's words, "an icon of a domestic realm that offered the husband a precious refuge from the cut and thrust of the competitive world of work" (2007, 119).²⁴
- 34 The bass pedal is an open-string C (the lowest and darkest playable note on celli and basses) against an entirely diatonic D-major melody. The associations forged in *Jaws* between low strings and the lurking danger of the shark, combined with this striking dissonance, serves to underpin Brody bringing the melancholy and darkness of the outside world into his home, to be met by the "precious refuge" of his son Sean's playful unknowingness. Williams makes audible the unattainability of Sean's naivety, as the piano-harp-vibes melody seems to exist in an entirely separate world—in mode and character—from the music that preceded it, and indeed is spatially distant from the low-register bass pedal that

23. This cue appears in the track titled "Father and Son" on the 2000 Decca Records release of the *Jaws* film soundtrack (track 8, from 00:38).

24. Williams's score for Mark Rydell's *The River* (1984) also features a scene with the idyllic childhood topic (01:34:50) that juxtaposes a hardworking father returning home, traumatized from brutal experiences on the job, with a naïve child who cannot understand his despair. The young girl asks her brother in this scene, "Are daddies allowed to cry?"

represents danger. Similarly, Sean is insulated from the burdens faced by his father—he mimics his gestures, but does not understand the torment of the adults around him.

- 35 Unique about this melody among most other iterations of the childhood topic is that it is not particularly singable. Its halting, irregular nature evokes a minuet-like atmosphere, as if Williams were depicting a dance between father and son. They are on a more equal playing field than in the dynamic of the singable lullaby, in which a parent comforts a child; here, the child comforts the parent. This bond offers a measure of peace for Brody as he momentarily adopts his son's naïve worldview. This is a pivotal moment in the film, as well as its emotional center: fresh from being reproached by a mourning mother, Brody looks to Sean's naivety for peace and direction, and leaves this interaction with increased resolve to ensure the shark is killed and to preserve the imperiled naivety that defines the island.
- 36 The "precious refuge" of childhood is treated with more complexity in *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*, which features as its protagonist David, a robot engineered to be the ultimate naïve child. This android character maintains his wide-eyed, exaggerated naivety throughout the film, even as he is abandoned by his mother, survives a robot holocaust, and undertakes an epic journey in a desperate attempt to "become a real boy" so that his mother, Monica, will love him like a human child. Williams reserves his most conspicuous engagement with the idyllic childhood topic for the very end of the film, when David awakens after a 2000-year slumber to find himself back home (02:01:36, **Clip 8**).²⁵
- 37 Williams employs his familiar techniques of preparation and contrast to achieve a remarkable payoff at this juncture. We hear a hint of this melody earlier in the film when Monica "imprints" on David to activate his functionality as her son (23:54), with celeste connoting the magical and supernatural. The later deployment of "Monica's Theme" is furthermore a striking aural contrast to the disorienting, dissonant music heard immediately beforehand, as David opens his eyes and seeks to make sense of his surroundings. This musical fulfillment contributes to a powerful catharsis in the film's closing moments.
- 38 The complex emotions of this scene—joy, wonder, confusion, nostalgia, and trepidation—are represented by a simple, song-like, major-mode, diatonic melody, played alone in a high register by a solo piano. The simplicity and songfulness of Williams's cue evoke a lullaby, just like other instances of the childhood topic we have examined in his scores for *Hook* and *Jurassic Park*. However, several departures from more typical instances of the childhood topic color this scene with remarkable emotional complexity. These departures in orchestration and melodic

25. This cue appears as part of the track titled "Stored Memories and Monica's Theme" on the official release of the *A.I.* film soundtrack (track 8, from 06:08).

treatment eschew the “music box” presentation of the childhood topic that we observed in each of the examples explored in this paper, conferring it with an unusual layer of gravitas and amplifying the impression of this scene as a dream or a memory.

- 39 To begin, the melody is laden with reverb, which heightens the scene’s nostalgic quality: unfocused memories of childhood can feel like they are never as sharp as we might like, eternally elusive, forever slipping through our fingers.²⁶ Yet sometimes we can be gripped by a truly powerful memory—to live in that memory, to experience it as almost real, is to be momentarily suspended in time. Williams captures this sense of timelessness with an undulating accompaniment, which seems to have neither beginning nor end, no clear melodic or rhythmic profile, like an endlessly flowing stream—contrasting the more clearly-metered accompanimental figures of the music box.²⁷
- 40 The melody itself also embodies this sense of flowing, and seems to avoid a clear direction, which broadly contributes to a dreamlike state. Swanson (2018, 382–384) has illustrated that for all its seeming straightforwardness, the melody does have a number of unexpected twists and turns, never quite settling where we might expect. Williams himself has acknowledged the “complexities” of Monica’s theme, which he identifies as a cantilena (Swanson 2018, 381).²⁸
- 41 In complicating the regularity of the childhood topic, these subtleties also endow the theme with more emotional nuance (Figure 2).
- 42 For example, a rising stepwise figure reaches the leading tone but does not resolve upward—this suggests a sense of yearning and unfulfilled desire (Swanson 2018, 383), which is augmented by the deceptive cadence on the following downbeat. Soon afterwards, a pre-dominant progression unexpectedly cuts to the tonic, similarly thwarting an anticipated resolution, but rhyming with the numerous falling figures that straddle most of the theme’s measures. Bottge draws attention to a similar eliding of the dominant-tonic progression in Brahms’s *Wiegenlied*, which she reads as a metaphor: it creates a place of timeless safety, obscuring the separation of “underdeveloped” child (dominant) and “maternal, grounding” mother (tonic) (2005, 206). The small descending leaps here can be heard as sighs—traditionally musical signifiers of melancholy (Taruskin 2013, 291). Such falling figures deflate tension, creating moments of repose that connote David’s achievement of inner peace. We might be reminded here of E.T.A. Hoffmann’s description of Haydn’s naïve music: “A world of love, of bliss, of eternal youth, as though before the Fall; no suffering, no pain; only sweet, melancholy longing for the beloved vision floating far off in the red glow of evening, neither approaching nor receding” (Hoffmann 1989, 97).

26. Casanelles (2016) discusses how “hyperorchestration” techniques such as microphone placement, distortion, etc. can be used to add layers of meaning to a score.

27. Bottge suggests that in Brahms’s *Wiegenlied*, the consistent, inevitable return of the E-flat bass downbeat in each measure evokes “the timeless space of childhood memories” (2005, 206). We might also note that like Brahms’s accompaniment, Williams’s is a type of regular, rocking figure.

28. Williams notes that Monica’s Theme is a cantilena, which “although both simple and direct, has its complexities” (Williams 2002, quoted in Swanson 2018, 381).



FIGURE 2

A.I. Artificial Intelligence, “Monica’s Theme.” Transcription from Swanson (2018, 383).

43 All of these qualities infuse the theme with lyricism and elegance that are unique among the examples considered in this paper thus far.²⁹ The fact that Williams uses only solo piano is in itself a departure, as each of the other scenes relies on some combination of piano, harp, vibraphone, and celeste: a combination that creates a tinkling timbre reminiscent of the childhood topic’s customary music box presentation. We can furthermore contrast Monica’s Theme with the more mechanical and static iterations of the idyllic childhood topic observed in the earlier examples. When Williams fully orchestrates the melody in an ensuing scene showing David reuniting with his mother,³⁰ it seems to reveal a kinship with Mozart’s piano concerto slow movements, with its long melody, expressive songfulness, and prominence of soloistic winds in a chamber orchestration.

44 Williams’s deployment of an English horn countermelody in that context offers an immediate cue to this linkage, as Mozart often relied on solo winds in piano concerto slow movements (Rogerson 2019).³¹ The connections deepen upon further examination of the theme itself. Scott Burnham (2013, 3–36) has discussed at length Mozart’s proclivity for oscillating accompaniments, particularly in concertante movements (for example, the slow movement of the *Piano Concerto in C Major*, K. 467 offers some textural and characteristic resemblance to this setting of Monica’s

29. Swanson (2018, 381, 388) asserts that Williams’s use of long, lyrical, piano melodies here (“orga qualities”) and avoidance of the “artificiality” of electronics implies the transcendence of David’s humanity over his original “mecha” construction.

30. This cue appears as part of the track titled “The Reunion” on the official release of the *A.I.* film soundtrack (track 12, from 01:28). In the film, this occurs at 02:12:31.

31. For example, in the second movements of: *Piano Concerto No. 21 in C Major*, K. 467; *Piano Concerto No. 22 in E-flat Major*, K. 482; *Piano Concerto No. 23 in A Major*, K. 488; *Piano Concerto No. 24 in C Minor*, K. 491.

Theme). In such passages, “the rhythmic relation between pulsating accompaniment and slower moving melody creates an animated stillness” (Burnham 2013, 10). More specifically, in the Adagio of the *Clarinet Concerto*, K. 622, which like Monica’s Theme is supported by an undulating figure, Burnham observes a passage that “hums with the exquisite tension of keeping things in suspension” (2013, 10). This imagery of “animated stillness” and “suspension” elicits a clear connection to Monica’s Theme, which was described above as keeping us “suspended in time.” Burnham also helps us draw a connection between the two passages by noting how subtle swerves in harmony and melody yield “the effect of a floating, suspended tonic” (2013, 10). Finally, we can also observe that several of Mozart’s best-known soloistic movements open with a measure or two for the accompaniment to be heard on its own before the melody’s entrance, as Williams does in Monica’s Theme.³²

- 45 Taken together, these elements suggest a possible allusion to, or inspiration by—consciously or not—the most famous child wunderkind in Western culture. There may be significance in this, as Mozart was someone whose true naivety, it was held, enabled human artistry to reach a divine peak (Wagner 1850, 40). David’s enduring naivety also grants humanity another kind of timeless legacy at the end of the film. In opting against a music-box presentation in favor of Mozartian elegance, Williams contributes solemnity and grace to the eternal longing of a child for his mother, to a robot’s poignant, innermost wish to become a human, simply so he can experience the sweet joys of childhood.³³ That Williams treats this theme with such weight seems to suggest that this deep desire to return to childhood is not a trifling wish, but a fundamental feature of the human condition that bonds us all.

How unique are these depictions of childhood?

- 46 How does Williams’s approach to childhood differ from other composers? On a very basic level, the existence of a “childhood topic” implies that many others have used similar musical techniques to depict idyllic childhood. Williams is therefore not alone in using major modes, high-register instrumentation, sparse texture, and singable, simple melodies to foreground childlike wonder and innocence. Williams does separate himself from other composers in several ways: his customary use of preparation and contrast, the dramatic significance of these moments in many of his films, and the frequency with which he engages with this topic throughout his oeuvre.³⁴ To contextualize Williams’s approach, we will consider several examples of other composers engaging with the

32. Examples include “Soavi sia il vento” from *Così fan tutte*; *Piano Concerto No. 20 in D Minor*, K. 466, I. Allegro; *Piano Concerto No. 21 in C Major*, K. 467, II. Andante; *Piano Concerto No. 27 in B-flat Major*, K. 595, I. Allegro; *Serenade for Twelve Winds and String Bass*, K. 361, III. Adagio.

33. This solemnity and grace is not unlike the example in *Empire of the Sun* examined earlier. In *A.I.*, however, the long and songful melody, the centrality of the solo piano, and the eventual wind-forward accompaniment lend gracefulness distinct from *Empire of the Sun* and the other idyllic childhood examples.

34. To this I would also add his frequent utilization of celeste.

childhood topic, before taking up Spielberg's role in Williams's frequent interactions with this theme.

47 While Williams often takes special care to prepare and contrast his depictions of idyllic childhood, for many composers the childhood topic alone suffices for the purpose of emphasizing the childlike on screen. In an early scene in *Jack* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1996, 14:45),³⁵ composer Michael Kamen features the idyllic childhood topic prominently as Jack's tutor argues that, despite an aging disorder causing 10-year-old Jack to appear 40 years old, he is still a child deserving of a true childhood. With a simple, lullaby-like solo piano line, the music serves quite plainly to highlight that Jack, though middle-aged in appearance, is truly a child—an essential function considering the film's fanciful premise. However, this scene is sandwiched by music that is already playful and childlike in spirit, and it comes at an early, dramatically unmarked point in the film. This is not to suggest that an early appearance of the childhood topic is necessarily without consequence: the aforementioned idyllic childhood moment in *The BFG* appears early and is critical to the narrative and emotional core of the film, as it marks the building of trust between Sophie and the giant. Also unlike *The BFG*, the idyllic topic in *Jack* is not primed or sharply contrasted with the surrounding sonic landscape. Lacking preparation and contrast, and dramatic weight, it therefore does not possess the same emotional and dramatic effect that we observe in other examples in Williams's oeuvre, notwithstanding its very clear, positive message about childlike naivety.

48 One characteristic of Williams's forays into idyllic childhood is that he rarely presents it more than once in a film, using this scarcity to craft dramatically unique and significant moments.³⁶ While this approach is not unusual, there are numerous counterexamples from other composers: *The Secret Garden* (Agnieszka Holland, 1993), with a score by Zbigniew Preisner, contains six distinct instances of the idyllic childhood topic in just the second half of the film³⁷; Peter Martin's score for *Hope and Glory* (John Boorman, 1987)³⁸ and Thomas Newman's scores to *Finding Nemo* (Andrew Stanton and Lee Unkrich, 2003)³⁹ and *A Series of Unfortunate Events* (Brad Silberling, 2004)⁴⁰ include mirror versions of an idyllic childhood theme near the beginning and ending of their respective films. *A Series of Unfortunate Events* is a particularly relevant example due to its explicit thematic engagement with the "precious refuge" of childlike naivety. Chronicling the misadventures of three newly-orphaned siblings who must contend with malicious and incompetent adults as they seek a place to call home, the film offers stark contrasts between the innocence of children and the cynicism of the adult world. Newman musically highlights this thematic contrast with the idyllic childhood topic twice during the film, with the same music both times (21:28 and 01:32:17).⁴¹

35. This cue appears as part of the track titled "Butterfly" on the official release of the *Jack* film soundtrack (track 4, from 00:26). It may be worth mentioning that both *Hook* and *Jack* feature Robin Williams as an "adult" character with whom the childhood topic is associated: Peter Pan as "the boy won't grow up" and Jack as the boy who grew too quickly.

36. One notable exception to this is in *E.T.*, where this topic can be heard three distinct times in the film's first hour.

37. At 42:56; 01:13:25; 01:31:52; 01:34:15; 01:36:14; 01:37:53.

38. At 14:03; 01:21:28.

39. At 04:36; 01:32:00.

40. At 21:28; 01:32:17.

41. The first cue appears as part of the track titled "Resilience" on the official release of the *A Series of Unfortunate Events* film soundtrack (track 5, from 01:01). The second is part of the track titled "The Letter That Never Came" (track 28, from 00:12).

A gentle, sparsely-orchestrated piano line characteristic of Newman underscores these scenes (Audissino 2017, 222). Narratively, recycling the music makes sense: both scenes reference a trip by the late parents to Europe, and the children's related sense of abandonment.⁴² Although there is thematic and emotional meaning in these moments, Newman does not engage in the kind of subtle preparation or contrast that we have seen in Williams's work. There is, of course, a form of preparation in the verbatim reuse of music. This contributes a special poignancy because there is a dual return: a musical return complements the physical, as the children revisit their destroyed childhood home.

49 It may also be worth acknowledging that the possibility for a sense of departure is also diminished by Newman's trademark style: whereas Williams is something of a "musical chameleon" (Audissino 2017, 225), Newman features a brand of "non-symphonic minimalism," which blends "acoustic instruments, light, high-pitched percussion, and electronics in a sparse and terse orchestral texture" (Audissino 2017, 222). The similarities between Newman's style and the childhood topic are apparent in this description, and may be expressively limiting in terms of drawing contrasts between the childhood topic and the surrounding music or the film's aural landscape. On the other hand, Williams's stylistic diversity even within a film can add additional layers of contrast.

50 Williams is not, however, the only composer to use techniques of preparation and contrast to offset an idyllic childhood moment. Danny Elfman's score to *Edward Scissorhands* (Tim Burton, 1990) offers a useful point of comparison as another non-Williams project that uses familiar musical techniques and clearly subscribes to a Romantic notion of childhood: as Walling observes, director Tim Burton "hopes to show that it is not the naïve, natural artist who needs to grow up; rather, the fault lies with a society that has matured into a world that is intolerant and vicious because it gave up the broader consciousness of trust, honesty, and make-believe exhibited by Edward" (2014, 76–77). Yet we can still note subtle differences in the musical handling of childlike naivety between Elfman's score and the examples examined thus far by Williams.

51 There are a number of Williams-esque techniques in Elfman's treatment of the childhood topic in *Edward Scissorhands*: a timeless idyllic childhood moment at the midpoint of the film (53:17, **Clip 9**)⁴³ features celeste, contrasts conspicuously with the preceding music (a bombastic passage evocative of Aram Khachaturian's "Sabre Dance," and later a pompous tango),⁴⁴ and is prepared by subtle motivic hints during a child's bedtime story at the outset of the film (02:53).⁴⁵ But beyond this sharp aural payoff, the narrative message is a bit muddled: the childhood topic (and this very theme) permeates the score, with celeste featured in many scenes.

42. The virtues of childlike naivety are extolled in the earlier scene, as the narrator describes the "sanctuary" the children built together as "a small safe place in a troubled world." In the later scene, a more optimistic view of the adult world is adopted: the narrator declares, "At times the world can seem like an unfriendly or sinister place, but believe us when we say there is much more good in it than bad."

43. The cue appears on the track "Kim at the Mall" on the *Edward Scissorhands* original soundtrack (track 2, from 00:20).

44. This "Sabre Dance" cue appears as part of the track "Edwardo the Barber" on the *Edward Scissorhands* original soundtrack (track 9 – the "Sabre Dance" allusion appears at the beginning, and the tango at 01:04).

45. The bedtime story cue appears on the track "Storytime" on the *Edward Scissorhands* original soundtrack (track 2, from beginning).

This scene could therefore reference the fact that Edward is a childlike character, experiencing a moment of childlike wonder as he sees Kim out with her friends; the music also hints at the identity of the elderly bedtime storyteller from the film's opening (Kim), and could be considered Kim's theme, or a love theme; it is also heard later (01:25:00) when Edward has a flashback to being presented with prosthetic hands by his "inventor," and again moments thereafter when The Inventor collapses (01:26:20).⁴⁶ With these myriad associations, one reviewer identifies two functions: as both a love theme, and a "Story-Telling Theme" (Lysy 2019). While the central scene that features this theme does serve to highlight a contrast between a "vicious" world and "trust, honesty, and make-believe," these are not coded as the binary of "child" and "adult" in the same way that we observe so clearly in Williams's scores.

46. These can be heard on the track titled "Death!" on the *Edward Scissorhands* original soundtrack (track 11, at 01:17 and 02:40).

52 We might wonder how much of the subtle differences between Williams and other composers is the result of varying compositional approaches, instead of reflecting a director's vision. This is especially relevant when we consider that the incidence of childhood themes in Spielberg films is objectively higher than in the average director's body of work (Schober and Olson 2016), and Williams has scored nearly all of Spielberg's films.⁴⁷ It is worthwhile, then, to consider how Spielberg fits into this discussion of Williams's glorification of childlike naivety.

47. It is worth noting that Spielberg's *The Color Purple* (1985), scored by Quincy Jones, features a scene with the idyllic childhood topic at 36:49.

53 Numerous commentators have argued that Spielberg does not offer particularly rosy portrayals of childhood. As Schober observes, while Spielberg has a reputation for envisioning childhood as "all sweetness and light," there are nonetheless "darker underpinnings, increasingly fraught with tensions, conflicts, and anxieties" in Spielberg's children (2016, 1). Lester Friedman also contends that Spielberg's "portraits of children rarely dissolve into maudlin paeans to some idyllic existence" (2006, 32) thereby contradicting assumptions that Spielberg solely concerns himself with Romantic ideals of childhood. Yet as we have seen, a "paeon to some idyllic existence" is exactly how Williams's music treats childhood in the particular scenes at the heart of this paper's investigation, reflecting Romantic ideals of childhood and naivety.

54 Consider *A.I.* as an example. Spielberg's treatment of childlike naivety in *A.I.* is rather ambivalent—in this film, childhood can at times feel less like a "precious refuge" than a lens through which to see the ills of the modern world. Indeed, David's mother is forced to abandon him when his everlasting naivety proves potentially harmful to their real biological child. Yet notwithstanding a considerable number of dark, haunting moments in his score that reflect this threat, Williams leaves viewers with music that elevates and refines the child's extreme naivety, complementing or suppressing, rather than expressing, the film's nihilistic themes. This is not

to suggest that his approach is some kind of dissent with Spielberg's vision, who indeed sought to craft a "bleak film about human nature disguised as a sentimental science-fiction fairytale" (Tobias 2021). As A.O. Scott (2001) writes in his review of the film, "The very end somehow fuses the cathartic comfort of infantile wish fulfillment—the dream that the first perfect love whose loss we experience as the fall from Eden might be restored—with a feeling almost too terrible to acknowledge or to name." Williams's music plays a prominent role in supplying the naïve fairytale of "infantile wish fulfillment," contrasting mightily with the "darker underpinnings" that permeate Spielberg's film.

- 55 The score to *Empire of the Sun* has been understood as exhibiting a similar duality (Schober 2016, 9; Hinson 1987). Schober (2016, 9) describes it as "two films joined at the hip": one, representing Spielberg's "Romanticism, with its emotional uplift apropos a boy's obsession with the wonders of flight and gung-ho of war," is "underscored by John Williams's score"; the other "chronicles the brutalities of life in a Japanese internment camp."⁴⁸ Schober does not describe the relationship between Williams's score to the second "film," but multiple reviews of *Empire of the Sun* and its soundtrack have used terms such as "ghostly" (Broxton 2018; ClassicFM s.d.) and "haunting" (Broxton 2018; Barsanti 2020). It is therefore reductive to describe Williams's role in *Empire of the Sun* or *A.I.* as merely the film's conduit or representative of childlike naivety, but the fact that Schober only discusses Williams in this one "Romantic" sense indicates a particular vein of reception: that Williams's music, in these films and others, often serves to channel the naïve aspects of Spielberg's films.
- 56 This discussion of *Empire of the Sun* and *A.I.* indicates the complex role Williams's portrayals of idyllic childhood can play within Spielberg's emotionally layered films, suggesting that these portrayals may not map on exactly to the films' overall message about childhood. A composer, however, cannot manufacture an ideal moment in a plot or narrative for idyllic childhood; they are only truly in control of the music with which they treat such moments. The fact that Williams uses the techniques of preparation and contrast for idyllic childhood in his scores for other directors (such as Mark Rydell, George Miller, and Chris Columbus) suggests that independent of Spielberg, Williams views these junctures as dramatically and thematically critical.⁴⁹ The frequency of this topic's appearance in Williams's oeuvre is likely a result of his collaborations with Spielberg, but Williams has nonetheless forged a distinctive path in representing these moments.

48. Hal Hinson (1987) echoes this notion of a duality in the film in a review for the Washington Post, writing, "In 'Empire' and his other films too, adults carry a kind of taint: They're outside the hallowed circle of innocence. And with this picture, Spielberg signals his realization that to grow as an artist he must venture outside that circle as well. But the movie is also a symbol of his reluctance; it leaves him caught between the two worlds, with one foot in the circle and one foot out."

49. For Mark Rydell: *The Reivers* (1969) and *The River* (1984). For George Miller: *The Witches of Eastwick* (1987). For Chris Columbus: *Home Alone* (1990) and *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (2001).

Conclusion

- 57 For many composers, the function of the childhood topic is often to emphasize a child onscreen, or a memory of childhood. One senses that there is more at stake for Williams, as his fleeting forays into childhood consistently elevate the dramatic significance of these moments. The plot of *Hook* hinges on Peter finally remembering his past; the heartbreaking sadness that drives Harry Potter is revealed in the Mirror of Erised; David's 2000-year journey home movingly culminates in profound wish fulfillment. Ultimately, childhood is often represented as another realm entirely in Williams's oeuvre, idealized in the way it was in the eighteenth century.
- 58 Future research stemming from this paper might explore in more detail how musical approaches to childhood differ by director, or the role gender and race play in representations of childhood. Exploring further how other composers treat childhood would provide more context for this investigation.
- 59 It is not my contention that Williams's depictions of childhood are conspicuously different from those of other composers, despite his occasional subversion of its expected tropes. As mentioned, the fact that we can speak of a childhood "topic" requires many to return to the same well countless times. What is remarkable about Williams's intimate portrayals of childhood is how often they appear in his work; how we can regularly count on Williams to uphold childlike naivety as a timeless, glimmering refuge from the gloom and grind of existing in the world; and how indispensable these brief departures are to the drama and artistry of each film in which they appear. His oft-acknowledged abilities as a melodist and orchestrator, combined with an impeccable sense of pacing, instill striking poignancy into these moments in a way that sets him apart as a valuable case study for exploring depictions of childhood in film. It is intriguing to consider that, compared with those composers who memorably depicted childhood in their music before him, it is likely none match the frequency and reach of Williams. Over his long career he has crafted a musical representation of our deeply human, collective yearning for this lost Eden.

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Curiosity Killed the Mecha: Connection and Conflict in John Williams's Score to *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*

La curiosité a tué la machine : connexion et conflit dans la musique
de John Williams pour *A.I. Intelligence artificielle*

Stefan Swanson

Keywords: Williams (John), Spielberg (Steven), artificial intelligence,
music theory

Mots clés : Williams (John), Spielberg (Steven), intelligence artificielle,
théorie musicale

ABSTRACT

Steven Spielberg's 2001 film *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* is a futuristic reworking of the Pinocchio story in which the robot boy David is given advanced artificial intelligence that enables him to love, causing him endless conflict in a human world. The film addresses complex themes about humanity, love, and creation, and the conflicts these themes create between orga (humans) and mecha (lifelike, human-created robots).

"Curiosity Killed the Mecha" explores an important turning point in the film where Monica, David's adopted mother, begins to accept David. A comprehensive analysis of the score by John Williams, focusing on thematic and timbral elements, reveals this change in the interplay between the "Curiosity" theme and the "Bonding" theme. The usage of electronics along with ever-growing acoustic accompaniments further demonstrate Monica's orga acceptance of the mecha David. However, the subtle complexities and various interruptions scattered throughout the cue indicate Monica's uncertainty.

RÉSUMÉ

Sorti en 2001, le film de Steven Spielberg *A.I. Intelligence Artificielle* est une réinterprétation futuriste du conte de Pinocchio. Le jeune robot David y est doté d'une intelligence artificielle avancée qui lui permet d'aimer, ce qui engendre en lui un conflit permanent au sein du monde des humains. Le film aborde des thèmes complexes tels que l'humanité, l'amour et la création, ainsi que les conflits que ces thèmes suscitent entre les orga (les humains) et les mécha (des robots réalistes créés par l'homme).

Cet article explore un tournant important du film : le moment où Monica, la mère adoptive de David, commence à l'accepter. Une analyse approfondie de la partition de John Williams, centrée sur les éléments thématiques et timbraux, révèle que le compositeur souligne ce changement dans l'interaction entre le thème de la « curiosité » (« Curiosity ») et celui du « lien » (« Bonding »). L'utilisation de l'électronique, associée à des accompagnements acoustiques de plus en plus présents, illustre l'acceptation progressive de David (mécha) par Monica (orga). Cependant, des complexités subtiles et diverses interruptions disséminées tout au long du morceau témoignent de l'incertitude de Monica.

- 1 Steven Spielberg's 2001 film *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* is a futuristic reworking of the Pinocchio story that substitutes a robot boy (David) for the wooden puppet as the protagonist¹. David is given advanced artificial intelligence that enables him to love, but this causes him endless conflict in a human world. While the conflict is present from his very first appearance, the "Hide and Seek" scene is an important turning point as it shows the first suggestion that his adopted mother Monica is starting to accept him. The film overall addresses complex themes about humanity, love, and creation, and the conflicts these themes create between *orga* (humans) and *mecha* (lifelike, human-created robots), and one of the most important factors in this exploration is the score composed by John Williams. A comprehensive analysis, focused on harmony, rhythm, orchestration, and leitmotifs, of his score to the "Hide and Seek" scene reveals this exploration in the interplay between the "Curiosity" theme and the "Bonding" theme. The usage of electronics along with ever-growing acoustic accompaniments further demonstrate Monica's orga acceptance of the mecha David. However, the subtle complexities and various interruptions scattered throughout the cue indicate Monica's uncertainty.

1. Some of the content in this article has been adapted from my doctoral dissertation *Becoming Human : The Signifying Elements of "Orga" and "Mecha" in John Williams' Score to A.I.: Artificial Intelligence (2001)*, successfully defended at Rutgers University in 2017.

Signifier Dichotomy

- 2 Because the score explores the dichotomy of orga and mecha elements in the film, this paper uses a methodology that differentiates between musical representations of orga and mecha. The following table (**Table 1**)

shows the main signifiers and their counterparts that I have explored in my research for the entire *A.I.* film, with orga signifiers relating to a general “Late-Romantic style,” while mecha signifiers exhibit an avoidance of that Romantic style. One finds the usage of lyrical melody with long, sustained phrases for orga subjects, while its mecha counterpart overtly uses repetition, including minimalism. Acoustic instrumentation often signifies orga subjects, while electronic instrumentation is reserved for mecha subjects. The usage of Khachaturian’s “Adagio” and Ligeti’s micropolyphony will not be discussed in this paper because they play no role in the specific scene to be discussed later, but is prominent throughout the rest of the score, therefore is worth including in the table.

Orga Signifiers <i>Late-Romantic style</i>	Mecha Signifiers <i>Avoidance of Romanticism</i>
Lyrical melody with long, sustained phrases	Overt use of repetition, including minimalism
Khachaturian’s “Adagio” (from <i>Spartacus</i> [Спартак])	Ligeti’s micropolyphony
Acoustic instrumentation	Electronic instrumentation

TABLE 1
Signifier Dichotomy in *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*.

- 3 The late-Romantic style associated with Wagner and Strauss has been a primary influence on film music composers since Golden Age Hollywood, despite the style’s being “several decades out of date in the concert hall” (Cooke 2008, 78). Several reasons for this association have been offered including the immigration of European composers at that time (Cooke 2008, 78), the studios’ assumption that “the public would refuse to tolerate any music more modern-sounding than a Liszt symphonic poem” (Palmer 1990, 25), and film scoring’s connection to opera. Prendergast writes, “When confronted with the kind of dramatic problems films presented to them, Steiner, Korngold, and Newman merely looked [...] to those composers who had, for the most part, solved almost identical problems in their operas” (Prendergast [1977] 1992, 39). Christopher Palmer presents the connection as a product of musical escapism, with the marriage of such anachronistic music to modern story-telling stemming from Hollywood functioning as a “dream factory” and Romanticism being the music of fantasy, dream, and illusion (Palmer 2008, 23).
- 4 Caryl Flinn suggests the tradition of using Romantic styles in film music has to do with a “utopian function,” or “an impression of perfection and integrity in an otherwise imperfect, unintegrated world,” and that “has been assigned to [...] film music of the 1930s and 1940s in particular”

(1992, 9). This music supplies something missing as “a result of a fundamental ontological deficiency of the cinema” (Flinn 1992, 44), or as Herrmann suggests, “a piece of film, by its nature, lacks a certain ability to convey emotional overtones” (Herrmann, quoted in Manvel 1957, 244). Susan McClary critiques this relationship, stating, “Romanticism also offered spectators a means of escape into a mythologized and culturally elite past” (2007, 50).

- 5 Williams’s connection to this Romantic style is deeply rooted in his own work. His main model for the music to *Star Wars*, the score that ushered in a “Modern” Hollywood Style, was the prominent Golden Age composer Erich Wolfgang Korngold (Audissino 2014, 72). Using Palmer’s, Flinn’s, and McClary’s critiques of this association, this paper examines the usage of Romantic influences in this score as critical signifiers of “human” concepts, ranging from emotions to failures and shortcomings to the “utopian” function of David’s need to be loved.
- 6 The usage of leitmotif in film comes from the same late-Romantic operatic tradition of Wagner and Strauss that Prendergast discussed before. Adorno critiques the early usage of leitmotif in film music when he says the sole function “is to announce heroes and situations so as to help the audience to orient itself more easily” (Adorno 1989, 36). In Buhler’s article “*Star Wars*, Music, and Myth,” he counters Adorno’s notion with John Williams’s use of leitmotifs in the original *Star Wars* trilogy “com[ing] as close as any film music to the tone of Wagner” (2000, 44), whose primary purpose “is the production of myth not signification” (2000, 43). This is important when looking at the usage of themes as leitmotifs in *A.I.* because themes are sometimes brought back in situations in which the obvious signification makes little sense.
- 7 Another signifier for orga subjects in this score is Williams’s use of lyrical melodies with long, sustained phrases. As demonstrated by Stefani, melody is a difficult term to define, but he proposes “melody’ is a notion belonging essentially to everyday culture, to popular culture” (1987, 21). In other words, its recognition stems from a gathered human experience. Stefani often uses the word “singable” in his exploration for a definition of melody. According to Rowell, Wagner viewed melody as being able to “articulate expressions of inarticulate human feeling” (2004, 28). One of the many elements Williams utilizes in the score to *A.I.* is lyrical melody with long, sustained phrases, an approach to melody often associated with Romantic music (Szabolcsi 1970, 278). These are in direct contrast with the other elements such as minimalism and repetitive phrasing that feature so prominently in the score. Furthermore, the melodies are mostly associated with situations in the film relating to Monica, an orga subject.

- 8 Acoustic instrumentation, more specifically the usage of traditional orchestral elements, being a signifier of orga has roots in the overall history of film scoring, as well as in Williams's previous scores. From the earliest days of film scoring, the symphony orchestra played an integral role. Much of the music came from the late-romantic tradition, and the predominant medium of expression was the orchestra. Kalinak notes that over the decades numerous challenges to the classical orchestra in film music developed, such as jazz, rock, pop, synthesizers, etc. (1992, 185–188). Despite these challenges, the traditional orchestra continued “to function in Hollywood as a primary determinant on the construction of the film score” (Kalinak 1992, 188). In his score for *Star Wars: Episode V – Empire Strikes Back* (Irvin Kershner, 1980), Williams used the orchestra because “music should have a familiar emotional ring so that as you looked at these strange robots and other unearthly creatures, at sights hitherto unseen, the music would be rooted in familiar traditions” (Williams, quoted in Arnold 1980, 265). Similarly, in the case of *A.I.*, Williams is able to focus the audience on orga elements through the usage of the familiar sounds of the traditional, acoustic orchestra.
- 9 If late-Romantic associations signify orga elements, then the conspicuous use of styles and techniques not related to those found in late-Romantic music signifies mecha elements. Rebecca Eaton notes that the use of minimalism to signify the mechanical is common, and this association can be traced back to early reviews of minimalist works in the 70s (2014, 5). She lists dozens of examples of multimedia works that all use minimalism in conjunction with machines or technology, including Glass' score to *Koyaanisqatsi* (Godfrey Reggio, 1982), an Audi commercial whose music was so close to Glass stylistically that a lawsuit ensued (1996), and Williams's score to *A.I.* Her reasoning for this connection is that minimalism “features a regular, steady pulse. It is not melodically based, but repetition-based. It typically displays limited dynamic contrast. All of these musical attributes are also characteristics of the working of machines, be they manifested in sound, visually observed motion, or internal process” (Eaton 2014, 5). This is in direct contrast with the Romantic idiom signifying human emotion. For instance, in cues dominated by minimalism, the emotion from the scene is controlled by Romantic procedures such as varying the dynamic range, expanding the range of the instruments, and frequent harmonic shifts, as is the case with the “Abandoned in the Woods” cue. This paper, in line with Eaton's analysis, concludes that the usage of minimalism is customarily a signifier of the mecha.
- 10 I further this notion to include several examples of conspicuous repetition on larger structural levels. For instance, while minimalism generally features a repeated pattern of just a few notes or measures, *A.I.* features examples of phrase and structural repetitions that are sometimes separated

by several dozen measures. Arved Ashby discusses how the mechanical repetition in the context of recorded music changes the way we form musical memories since the listener is able to hear an exact replica of a given piece of music countless times (Ashby 2010, 62). While not as immediately obvious as repetitions of specific phrases/gestures (e.g. a four-note chordal arpeggio repeated twenty times in a row), these higher-level repetitions are still easily recognizable, and in the case of *A.I.* usually come in conflict with orga music such as lyrical melodies.

- 11 One obvious way music can evoke artificiality is through the use of electronics or synthesizers. Williams is mainly known for his orchestral scores, however, he himself has used synthesizers on several notable occasions, including a pivotal moment in *Empire Strikes Back* when Luke Skywalker ventures off to the Magic Tree to face his greatest fears, along with films depicting such inhuman acts as murder and rape, such as *Presumed Innocent* (Alan J. Pakula, 1990), *Sleepers* (Barry Levinson, 1996), and *Munich* (Steven Spielberg, 2005). Interestingly, the example that best matches his usage of electronics in *A.I.* actually comes from the lesser-known film *Heartbeeps* (Allan Arkush, 1981) in which Williams uses a plethora of electronic sounds, in combination with the usual orchestra, to underscore the love story between two robots.
- 12 Because these signifiers are not always black and white in the score and often blend into each other, making a definitive statement is sometimes difficult. For instance, in the “Escape from Rouge City” cue, a pervasive minimalist style runs throughout, however it is scored with a large, Romantic-sized orchestra with little to no electronics. I will explore these issues and how their very existence augments Williams’s musical exploration of the orga vs. the mecha.
- 13 The link between the music and the content of *A.I.* is paramount, therefore my analyses and reductions/transcriptions are based on the soundtrack found on the 2002 Dreamworks Video DVD release. For his soundtracks, Williams records separate cues specifically written for the album and “tries to arrange the tracks in a more interesting way than just in the order they are heard in the film” (Kenneth Wannberg, quoted in Thaxton n.d.). Because of this rearranging, soundtracks often differ from the material found in the final cut of the film. Even the cues written for the film are sometimes edited and rearranged after recording so the written score does not coincide with the music as heard in the finished film. Any discrepancies between the music as presented in this paper and the music found on the original soundtrack album or the final versions of the scores as prepared by Conrad Pope and John Neufeld will be due to changes made during the post-recording editing process. Because film music is a collaborative effort between the filmmaker and the composer, it is important to analyze the music in its final form.

“Hide and Seek”

- 14 The “Hide and Seek” scene is an important turning point in the film because it shows the first time Monica bonds with David. However, it never eschews the conflict between the two characters and within Monica herself. In order for her to imprint him, she needs to bond with him and accept him as part of the family. Up to this point in the film, the only interactions between them are 1) her introduction to him, a confusing moment that ultimately led to a small argument with her husband Henry, and 2) her awkward response to him asking her to dress him, abruptly leaving him alone in the room with Henry. This scene shows the beginnings of Monica’s acceptance of David, albeit minimal and still surrounded by doubt and discomfort. Williams’s music for the scene shows this gradual bond with his mixing of two primary themes, “Curiosity” and “Bonding,” along with the mixing of both mecha and orga signifiers, while also suggesting the underlying conflicts.
- 15 This scene also marks the beginning of an important musical transition from Monica’s point-of-view to David’s. Up to this point in the film, the score has supported Monica’s emotional state. The melancholy strings of the Khachaturian-esque “Cryogenics” theme capture the loneliness and sorrow of Monica as she futilely reads to her frozen biological son. When Monica is first introduced to David, the music moves through several distinct moods from the eerie, high electronics when she’s unsure of him at their first meeting, to the warmer, but harmonically unsettled strings for Monica and Henry’s argument, to the lyrical English horn solo when she starts to reconsider. These shifting musical moods match Monica’s own emotional uncertainty.
- 16 The “Hide and Seek” scene is the first time the score offers hints at David’s perspective. The scene starts with a shot of David peeking over the edge of the table, making him look almost alien-like (15:34). He stares intently at the pouring of the coffee. Right from the beginning, Williams establishes two of the most important stylistic components of the whole cue: a persistent dotted quarter C drone in the pizzicato strings, and a repetitive figure in the harp consisting of wide leaps both ascending and descending, a precursor to the “Curiosity” theme (**Figure 1**). These are important because the C drone sets up what will ultimately be the near-constant devotion to the tonality of C, effectively devoid of any modulation over the course of three minutes.² With this the persistent harp figure introduces the idea of repetition that is so prominent throughout. While Monica is present, for the first time in the film, the music supports David’s experience.

2. The only other cues with such slavish devotion to one key for that long of time are “Finding the Blue Fairy” and the string/choir hymn-like section of “Stored Memories,” both involving David talking to the “mecha-created” Blue Fairy.



FIGURE 1

A.I. Artificial Intelligence, “Curiosity” theme precursor.

All musical reductions were created by Stefan Swanson from music as presented in the 2002 DreamWorks Home Entertainment DVD release of the film.

- 17 The music does not however leave Monica’s perspective for long. After four repetitions of the harp figure, the “Curiosity” theme is stated in a bell-like electronic sound with a tinny, artificial attack that contrasts greatly with the softer, warmer sustained notes of the surrounding acoustic instruments (**Figure 2**). The first two notes of the motive, C and D, coincide with the established C tonic. The next five notes, F#, G#, B, G# and D#, break from that and suggest the key of E major, B major, or even A Lydian, creating what Royal Brown refers to as a “mildly unsettling bitonality” in his analysis of this scene ([Brown 2001, 330](#)). Underneath the repeating motive, the strings never waver from their Lydian infused C Major chord. Already two seemingly clashing ideas, a “standing one’s ground” tonic in C and an unrelated key with at least four accidentals, are simultaneously evident in the music. This might be David’s first major experience, as presented in the film, but Monica has not warmed to him and his presence is noticeably clashing with her sensibilities.

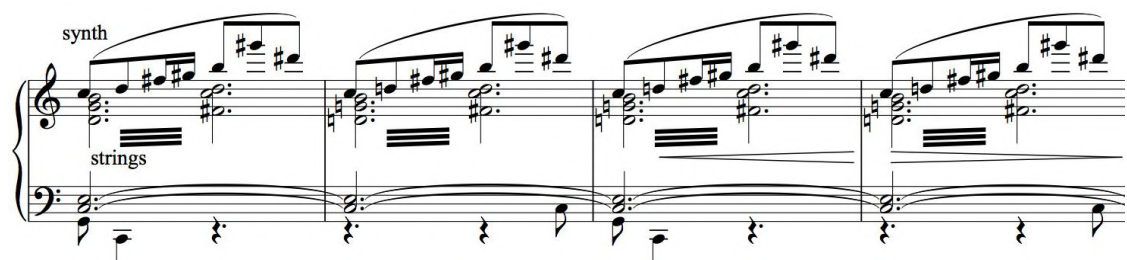


FIGURE 2

A.I. Artificial Intelligence, “Curiosity” theme.

- 18 The “Curiosity” theme throughout the film is notable for its lack of evolution. The first statement is in the Introduction to David when Monica and Henry are discussing David. Despite her obvious reservations about the situation, Monica is somewhat taken by David’s realism. Henry notes that although he seems real, David is in fact a mecha child (12:22) and

the “Curiosity” theme is heard repeated three times as the camera lingers on Monica’s confused face. The music serves the dual purpose of reminding the audience that David is artificial and hinting that Monica herself is curious about the potential of adopting David. After the “Hide and Seek” scene, the only other instance of the theme is in the Perfume scene, when David first notices Monica’s favorite, and scarce, perfume (25:08). When he sees this is her favorite fragrance, he puts the rest of the bottle on himself, erroneously thinking this will make her happy. The theme’s usage here reinforces David’s inability to fit in with the humans, despite his best efforts. What is notable about all of these instances, including those in the “Hide and Seek” scene, is the similarity between them. The theme never grows or develops. Each statement is voiced in the same bell-like electronic sound in the same register and always repeats at least once, matching David’s lack of “human” understanding.

- 19 The “Hide and Seek” cue initially focuses on the discord between Monica and David, but the music eventually offers hints at Monica’s gradual acceptance of him. While other material is introduced and developed (most notably the “Bonding” theme, which will be discussed shortly), the “Curiosity” theme constantly reappears in two to four literal repetitions, never varying or developing. Each time the “Curiosity” theme is presented, the orchestral accompaniment rises in prominence, as if the music is following Monica’s orga approval of the mecha David. As the table shows, what starts out as a simple quiet string tremolo accompaniment of the first statement, gradually adds instruments, reaching its zenith by the fourth statement with a fuller complement of winds, harp, and piano along with more active string figures. While the fifth statement reduces down to a similar level as the first statement, this is only a temporary pause in the pattern to set up the dramatic sixth and final statement that reaches a similar height as the fourth statement. Because the “Curiosity” theme is always voiced in the same electronic sound, the constantly changing and growing accompaniment grab the attention and mirror Monica’s drama unfolding on the screen. The scene starts with the unsettling appearance of David while she drinks coffee and progresses to them actually playing a game together.
- 20 Along with the changing orchestration, Monica’s bonding with David is also expressed through Williams’s usage of the “Bonding” theme, however this theme suggests the bonding is more complicated than her simply progressing from “not accepting” to “accepting.” The theme itself starts firmly in C major but soon hints at bitonality with the B $\flat$, A $\flat$, and E $\flat$ in the third measure (also the A $\flat$ and B $\flat$ in the fifth measure) over the continuing C major accompaniment, eventually settling back into C major. While the orchestration of flute and horn melody over C major triads

Statement	Accompaniment
1	– quiet violin, viola, cello tremolo chords – light bass pizzicato
2	– quiet violin, viola, cello tremolo chords – more prominent bass pizzicato – harp accents
3*	– violin, viola tremolo chords – arpeggiated cello line – bass pizzicato drone – horns play a new melody
4	– active violin flourishes – arpeggiated cello line – arco bass drone – harp accents – piano accents – bassoon drones
5	– quiet violin tremolo chords – viola pizzicato figure (doubled with harp) – clarinet flourish
6	– active violin flourishes – arpeggiated cello line – arco bass drone – harp glissandi – piano accents

TABLE 2

Changing orchestration.

* “Curiosity” theme becomes a counter theme to the “Bonding” theme.

in strings is warm and comforting, the deviations from C major in the theme show the underlying complexity of Monica’s feelings toward this interaction with David.

- 21 Even the music that often leads into the “Bonding” theme, acting as its “precursor,” has a mix of elements that similarly suggest Monica’s internal conflict. Played entirely on piano, it contains a simple, tonal melody that is firmly entrenched in C major, accompanied by a repeated middle C drone (**Figure 3**). While the melodic rhythm is comprised of only eighth notes, it dances between 6/8 and 5/8 meters, giving a subtly disjointed feel to the rhythm. Also of note is how the intervallic size gradually increases as the melody moves forward. The music is simultaneously grounded and disjointed.



FIGURE 3
A.I. Artificial Intelligence, “Curiosity” theme precursor.

- 22 Similarly to the development of the accompaniment to the “Curiosity” theme, the development of the “Bonding” theme over the course of the cue shows the growth of Monica’s acceptance to David. Its first statement occurs when David appears while Monica is making the bed (16:34). Although she is mildly surprised, David is wearing a bright smile. This is also the first time the “Curiosity” theme is interwoven into the “Bonding” theme as a counter theme (**Figure 4**), showing how Monica’s orga world and David’s mecha world are starting to come together.



FIGURE 4
A.I. Artificial Intelligence, “Curiosity” theme with “Bonding” theme.

- 23 The second statement occurs just before David playfully blocks Monica’s way in an attempt to initiate a game with her. The accompanying string C major triad figures return, but the theme is now featured in flutes with a repeated response in horns (**Figure 5**), removing the “Curiosity” theme interruption. The “Bonding” theme has now nearly rid itself of

the mecha elements, the electronics and the bitonality of the “Curiosity” theme, although the B $\flat$, A $\flat$, and E $\flat$ still occur in the theme itself, perhaps suggesting the “artificiality” never fully disappears.

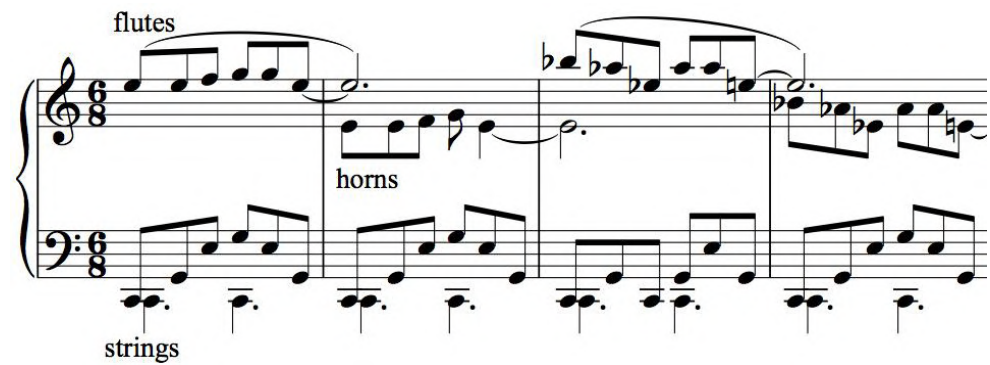


FIGURE 5
A.I. Artificial Intelligence, “Bonding” theme alone.

- 24 The final statement of the “Bonding” theme is similar to the last statement, but now with full woodwinds, including bassoons, carrying the melody while the horns answer imitatively again (Figure 6). Monica is now watching David in his room (17:55). Although she walks away and seems annoyed at her own inability to decide whether she has fully accepted David, the music, with its minimizing of electronic elements and fullest acoustic orchestration yet, suggests this is the warmest she has felt about him so far.



FIGURE 6
A.I. Artificial Intelligence, “Bonding” theme final statement.

- 25 The playfulness, the optimism, and the gradual phasing out of the mecha musical elements certainly suggest Monica's developing acceptance, but the final sequence in the scene punctuates it with uncertainty. The violins play a steady sixteenth note pattern on the close up of the door handle turning (18:10; **Figure 7**). The repetitiveness of the pattern clues the audience into who is opening the door. Indeed it turns out to be David, surprising Monica as she sits on the toilet, and with a noticeably cold smile he says, "I found you," (18:17). Although the music does not take a conspicuously dark turn, it devolves into simple eighth note C's repeated in the vibraphone (**Figure 8**).

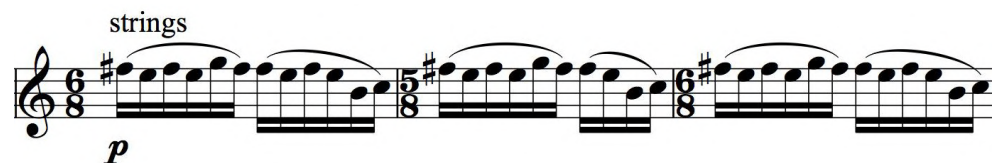


FIGURE 7
A.I. Artificial Intelligence, string flourish (18:10).



FIGURE 8
A.I. Artificial Intelligence, repeated Cs (18:17).

- 26 Interruptions play a significant role in this scene both on the screen and in the music. David's robotic nature has little regard or understanding for human habits and etiquette. The scene includes five instances of David interrupting Monica and although the score plays most of them, it also offers its own interruptions, sometimes unrelated to the visual. In the first instance of the piano "precursor" figure to the "Bonding" theme (see **Figure 1**), the piano plays what sounds like the consequent phrase but is abruptly cut off by the "Curiosity" theme before it can finish. This accompanies David's sudden appearance to Monica when she's drinking her coffee (16:09).
- 27 Williams even employs a recurring motive that acts as a musical "reset button" to stop a certain passage in its tracks and allow for an often unrelated passage to take over. The first instance of this can be found when David studies Monica's cup of coffee. The "precursor" to the "Bonding" theme plays two uninterrupted phrases, but just as it is about to conclude itself it breaks down harmonically and is interrupted by this "reset" motive (**Figure 9**), allowing the "Curiosity" theme to take over. This motive,

that explicitly occurs four times, is yet another way the music shows the robotic essence of David by breaking down and never resolving as he never actually figures out the meaning of the coffee.



FIGURE 9
A.I. Artificial Intelligence, “Reset” motive.

- 28 A subtler interruption can be found just before the first statement of the “Bonding” theme. Up to that point, there have been two occurrences of the “Curiosity” theme and each time the theme is stated four times. In this third occurrence, the theme is only stated twice before it is interrupted by the “reset” motive and followed by the “Bonding” theme. Interestingly, the “missing” two instances of the “Curiosity” theme are found just a few measures later as the counter theme to the “Bonding” theme. Despite Monica’s warming attitude, David is still an awkward interruption in her life at this point.
- 29 A notable interruption in the rhythm/meter/key occurs after Monica opens the closet door to let David out (17:34). The music starts with the ‘precursor’ to the “Bonding” theme but is soon interfered with by a recurring, two sixteenth note figure in electronics with almost no relation to the underlying music. Harmonically this figure, an E $\flat$ triad to D $\flat$ triad in quick succession, has no relation to C major. It also occurs in a register not occupied by any other voice. Finally, this figure, rhythmically speaking, operates on a separate Roederian pulse stream from the rest of the music (Figure 10) (Roeder 2004, 45). The 6/8 to 5/8 back and forth along with the unexpected accents (the melodic peaks and the horn attacks) give the music an unsteady pulse. However, the figure in electronics operates on a regular pulse stream that has no relation to meter or pulse of the rest of the music. All of these aspects draw a great deal of attention to this little figure, emphasizing that once again David’s artificiality is still on Monica’s mind.

Conclusion

- 30 The film *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* is filled with complex ideas such as love, human connection, and the ethical implications of actions taken



FIGURE 10
A.I. Artificial Intelligence, Roederian pulse stream (17:34).

against artificial beings, that are not always answered or resolved. The ending exemplifies this as “David’s Oedipal fixation remains utterly static throughout two thousand years, in spite of the fact that no human being—including his mother—ever shows him any reciprocal affection. The fact that his devotion is fixed, helpless, and arbitrary ultimately makes his heroism empty and the happy ending hollow” (Kreider 2002, 33–34). Even the fate of Gigolo Joe, who was last seen being slowly drawn away from David towards the police aircraft, is never revealed to the audience, despite his being David’s closest companion throughout the film.

- 31 Williams’s score helps drive this as the music draws from a wide variety of influences and styles, from the Khachaturian “Adagio,” to Ligeti’s micropolyphony, to minimalism, even to a techno/rock hybrid. All of these various styles help explore the subjects of orga and mecha in the film, and moreover how those subjects separate from each other and come together. From these subjects come the musical signifiers this paper uses to explore each theme and scene.
- 32 Right from the beginning of the film, the music evokes orga with the loneliness of the Khachaturian-esque “Cryogenics” theme. As the film progresses this theme absorbs the Ligeti-esque influences in the “Other Davids / Suicide” scene and transforms into a mix of signifiers that sets up the ambiguity of the final act. Other scenes such as “Hide and Seek” also combine the signifiers but in more humorously jarring ways to show the development of the orga Monica’s acceptance of the mecha David. Even melody, designated as one of the orga signifiers, is blended with more subtle mecha signifiers such as large-scale repetition. Just as further exploration of the film itself can reveal deeper meanings that sometimes break from the initial interpretation, so too does Williams’s score.

- 33 Over the course of the entire “Hide and Seek” cue, there seems to be a battle between the “Curiosity” and “Bonding” themes. At times the two themes try to connect with each other, but they always remain in conflict. Even the form itself, a mix of elements of a Rondo with blocked sections, suggests that although Monica is beginning to see David in a new light, she is still constantly wavering back and forth. In just a few minutes of music, this cue has outlined the growth of Monica’s feelings toward David from near revulsion to genuine interest, along with showing how his artificiality is still both present and potentially detrimental to their relationship.
- 34 Ultimately, Monica’s curiosity gets the best of her. Despite the “Curiosity” theme being associated with David’s mecha curiosity, it is hers that starts them both on a path leading to her imprinting David and eventually abandoning him in the woods. Williams’s score gives the audience the appropriate warmth on the surface but never allows the listener to forget the underlying conflict present in the drama. The use of leitmotifs in this cue goes deeper than Adorno’s notion that the main purpose of the Hollywood leitmotif is to “help the audience to orient itself more easily” (Adorno 1989, 36). If anything the usage here disorients the audience as the deeper relationships between the characters are slowly revealed. This scene is the turning point in Monica and David’s relationship and Williams’s intricately planned cue lets the audience in on its darker secrets.

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John Williams for Piano, from Memorabilia to the Concert Hall

John Williams pour piano, du souvenir à la salle de concert

Tristan Paré-Morin

Keywords: piano arrangements, music publishing, material culture, performance practice, domestic music-making

Mots clés : arrangements pour piano, édition musicale, culture matérielle, interprétation, pratique musicale domestique

ABSTRACT

This article surveys the arrangement and publication of piano excerpts from John Williams's film scores across his career. Situating them in the context of a longer tradition of domestic music-making, it assesses their suitability as musical texts for study and their artistic and technical value as pieces for private and public performance, arguing for the complementarity of these two functions. This article also examines the material value of these publications as promotional objects and collectibles, showing how their production style, content, and technical difficulty reflect the ups and downs of music publishing and of public interest in film music over the past half-century. Despite having offered amateur musicians alternate ways of engaging with John Williams's music, these arrangements have not yet received scholarly attention.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article examine les arrangements et publications pour piano d'extraits de musiques de film de John Williams tout au long de sa carrière. En les replaçant dans le contexte d'une longue tradition de pratique musicale domestique, il évalue leur pertinence en tant que textes musicaux à étudier ainsi que leur

valeur artistique et technique en tant que pièces à interpréter en privé ou en public, en soulignant la complémentarité de ces deux fonctions. Cet article analyse également la valeur matérielle de ces publications comme objets promotionnels et de collection, montrant comment leur style de production, leur contenu et leur difficulté technique reflètent les fluctuations de l'édition musicale et de l'intérêt du public pour la musique de film au cours du dernier demi-siècle. Bien qu'ayant offert aux musiciens amateurs des façons différentes d'aborder la musique de John Williams, ces arrangements n'ont pas encore suscité d'attention académique.

- 1 Despite being known primarily for the brilliance of his orchestral scores, John Williams's career has actually featured quite a lot of piano. From the early jazz recordings of the mid-1950s that display his virtuosic skills all the way up to his piano-filled score for Steven Spielberg's *The Fabelmans* (2022), the instrument remained a familiar presence. We could also consider the many statements about his habit of composing from the piano multiple hours per day, or the several photos and videos showing him at his instrument, as further evidence of the piano's prominence in his work.¹ These aspects of his career all deserve attention in their own right. This article, however, will address yet another aspect of symphonism that has long been sidelined in scholarship, despite its ubiquity throughout John Williams's career: the piano arrangements of his film and concert works.
- 2 During the nineteenth century, and until the early twentieth century, the vast majority of orchestral, vocal, and chamber music in all genres was published in piano arrangements. The works of Haydn, Beethoven, Mahler, Debussy, even Stravinsky, along with hundreds of others, found their way to the pianos of amateur musicians who would play them in a domestic setting, either for their private enjoyment or for their friends and family. Professional pianists also introduced arrangements in their public concerts. Sources show, for instance, that Franz Liszt performed Beethoven's symphonies at the piano far more often than his actual piano sonatas (Christensen 1999, 289).
- 3 A century later, John Williams did not escape this enduring practice. Even if, strictly speaking, he only composed a single work for solo piano, *Conversations* (2013, still unpublished at the time of this writing), piano arrangements of his music have appeared regularly since his early screen work in the 1960s, making him by far the most published and widely available film composer of any generation. While John Williams's name alone is a major selling point in today's sheet music market, there is a lot more at stake in these arrangements than mere opportunism from music publishers to sell easy and popular pieces to young piano students. The release in recent years of several albums of his music performed by

1. Mike Matessino described the composer's work process in a recent foreword: "Indeed, no film director has ever been sent a synthetic mock-up of a John Williams score. All of them [...] have instead been invited, like Lucas and Spielberg before them, to the Maestro's piano [...] to hear the thematic material that would soon grace a film they'd just made. Only weeks later on a scoring stage would anyone else hear what the composer heard in his head when he sat at a piano and wrote it." (2023)

talented pianists has shown that there is real interest in bringing such arrangements out of the domestic sphere of amateur music-making.² At the very least, they provoke a different kind of response to his music, and to film music in general.

- 4 In this article, I examine the piano arrangements of John Williams's music in order to explain their types and significance, how they relate to the symphonic tradition, and how they can be used by musicians and scholars. I focus exclusively on arrangements published and distributed by major companies, usually marketed at the general public shortly after a film's release. The vast majority of these arrangements are not credited, and while publishers will occasionally advertise them as "approved by John Williams," the composer's involvement remains uncertain (with two exceptions discussed below)³. I thus leave aside for instance the work of musicians and fans who create their own arrangements and perform them on digital platforms like YouTube. Starting with a very brief history of film music arrangements for piano, I situate John Williams as a publishing artist in the context of a longer tradition of domestic music-making, drawing comparisons with prior forms of symphonic arrangements while assessing the distinct issues raised by the film music repertoire. Although I refer to studies of nineteenth-century arrangements as a way to gain insight into the functions, techniques, and reception of this longstanding practice, I refrain from discussing the work of specific arrangers of the past, mostly because I look at Williams as *arranged* (by others, who usually remain anonymous) rather than as *arranger* (of others)—an important distinction to be made with studies of Liszt, for instance (see [Kregor 2010](#); [Kim 2019](#)). I then approach these piano arrangements from two different angles to examine their suitability as musical texts for study, and their qualities as pieces for private and public audition. This double function of the repertoire of film music arrangements, wavering between scholarship and performance, underlines much of the dispute over its value. I follow Hyun Joo Kim's argument about Liszt's reworkings that "the two aspects [of fidelity and creativity] are actually complementary and mutually motivating, and interact in a dynamic way" (2019, 3).

2. The most prominent of these albums is Simone Pedroni's *Themes and Transcriptions for Piano* (2017), along with albums by Dan Redfeld (2016), David Helbock, and Enguerrand-Friedrich Lühl (both 2019).

3. The anonymity of arrangements is not new, nor is it only the case in film music. Nancy November makes the same observation in her study of the Classical era: "Performance and enjoyment were the focus, not authorship. So, many people made musical arrangements around 1800. They ranged from the composer to the music publisher; from the skilled musician to the amateur; and from the well-known and canonised icon to the unknown and unknowable 'anonymous'." (2023, 11)

A very brief history of film music arrangements for piano, from 1900 to John Williams

- 5 The publication of piano arrangements of film music can be seen as an extension of the market for arrangements of orchestral music, which was at its most lucrative in the second half of the nineteenth century. As Thomas Christensen put it: "no other medium was arguably so important

to nineteenth-century musicians [than piano transcriptions] for the dissemination and iterability of concert repertoire” (1999, 256). Numerous arrangements were sold for every genre—from the symphony to the opera, from the chamber sonata to the choral hymn—and by every major or minor composer. Four-hand piano arrangements were the primary medium through which people heard symphonic music, especially in cities where orchestral concerts did not happen regularly, if ever at all. Playing these arrangements at home blended musical education, sociability, and entertainment.

6 Arrangements of large-scale symphonic music fell in popularity in the early 1900s, as did piano sales and domestic music-making as an activity. The radio and phonograph recordings gave unprecedented access to musical performances in their original form, reducing the need to rely on arrangements to hear the concert repertoire. Yet, as Peter Szendy argued, the function of the arrangement was not merely to replace the original as a means of transmission, but rather to be complementary to it, to foster a “critical, active relationship with *works*” ([2001] 2008, 39).⁴ And therefore, the advent of recordings did not render arrangements entirely useless. As we will see, their commercial viability became increasingly tied to the promotion of audio (or audiovisual) products, while the arrangers could now better assume their distinct yet complementary functions. Publications of arrangements of popular music, especially of songs, which had long coexisted with the concert music repertoire, continued to thrive, eventually largely replacing the latter. In the United States, publishers based around New York’s so-called Tin Pan Alley now relied heavily on Broadway musicals, and eventually on the cinema, to provide them with a continuous flow of new hits to sell as sheet music (Garofalo 1999).

7 A decade before the advent of synchronized film sound, publications of music to accompany specific films or inspired by them were already part of publishers’ catalogues. The music that was sold may not even have been heard by moviegoers, but that was beside the point since they both served to promote one another. As the status and presence of music in film increased in the 1930s, so did sheet music publications (Smith 1998, 31). Interest resided mostly in songs taken either from movie musicals or adapted from movie themes with added lyrics. *Gone with the Wind* (Victor Fleming, 1939) was among the earliest movies for which several piano solo selections were published together in a folio, the term given to such collections.⁵ In the 1950s, as movies reached epic scales and soundtrack albums became more frequent, so too did piano folios, which ranged from 20 pages of music to over 50 pages—as in the case of Miklós Rózsa’s *Quo Vadis* (Mervyn LeRoy, 1951)—even as the overall sales of sheet music were declining. By the 1990s, Donald Stubblebine’s

4. Szendy’s central thesis in *Listen. A History of Our Ears* is to reconsider the practice of arranging as the “writing down of listening.” ([2001] 2008, 56)

5. Max Steiner, *Piano Miniatures by Max Steiner from David O. Selznick’s Production of Gone with the Wind*. New York: Remick Music Corp., 1941.

imposing catalogue of *Cinema Sheet Music* listed publications for a staggering 6200 films (1991, 10).

- 8 While sheet music publications had largely turned toward popular songs, arrangements of non-vocal film music for piano revived and preserved an older tradition of symphonic music made available for domestic music-making—and this despite the availability of soundtrack recordings. During the 1960s (John Williams’s first decade as a film composer), a regular stream of piano folios presented generous excerpts of film scores including, among several others, such classics as Alex North’s *Cleopatra* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz and Rouben Mamoulian, 1963), Henry Mancini’s *The Pink Panther* (Blake Edwards, 1963), and Maurice Jarre’s *Doctor Zhivago* (David Lean, 1965). Although the context of their production and reception differed markedly from nineteenth-century piano arrangements of symphonic music, they both, each in their own ways, encouraged the circulation of orchestral scores outside of their original settings and promoted the participation of amateur musicians in the recreation of orchestral sounds at the piano.
- 9 It is in this context that arrangements of John Williams’s music were initially published. His first 25 or so publications fit squarely in the sheet music format established in previous decades for either title songs or movie themes: most pieces are brief enough to be printed on a single sheet of folded paper, and they serve to promote both the movie and its soundtrack. The sheet music for *Jaws* (Steven Spielberg, 1975) can serve to illustrate how these three products—film, soundtrack, and sheet music—were interconnected. The front cover reproduced the movie poster, including the small print listing the co-stars, director, screenplay writer, producer, and composer (at the end of the second line, after the name of the novel’s author). It also showed information about the availability of the original soundtrack on MCA Records & Tapes. Only the words “Theme from” before the title, and “Piano Solo” after it, marked the cover as sheet music. Likewise, listings of the record, such as those found in the *Billboard* Hot 100 charts, included information about the sheet music supplier (in this case, MCA Music).⁶ This example shows that sheet music was—and largely remains—enmeshed in a larger market of promotional items, tie-ins, and merchandise. The ephemeral nature of this kind of movie memorabilia also means that these publications are not generally reprinted after their initial run, turning them into rare collectible items, and consequently leaving a lot of music inaccessible to new generations of musicians, collectors, and movie fans. Although the format of single sheet music did not change much after the early 1900s, its sales declined sharply after the 1950s (Smith 1998, 32). Its use for the publication of film music, however, practically disappeared in the early 2000s as it was gradually replaced by digital sheet music services,

6. Unexpected symptom of the movie’s blockbuster appeal, the “Theme from *Jaws*” charted on the *Billboard* Hot 100 from August 9 to October 11 (10 weeks), peaking at #32. The film itself had been released on June 20, 1975.

which left the folio as the only printed manifestation of most of John Williams's scores on piano.⁷

- 10 After almost two decades of songs and themes printed as sheet music, John Williams's first movie folio was published in 1977. According to Stephen Wright, *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977) marked "a resurgence of film music publication" (2003, v). We have seen that film music publication was in no such need of a resurgence in 1977, and as we will see below, the *Star Wars* folio did not provide the generous musical content that was common in the 1960s.⁸ Nonetheless, the impact this movie had on soundtrack album sales, and Hollywood music in general, helped guarantee that John Williams's following scores would almost all be published in piano arrangements. Since *Star Wars*, only 10 of his 66 scores have not received dedicated piano arrangements.⁹ In total, there are over 80 films and TV shows scored by John Williams for which music has been published, including 34 folios, far more than any other composer (for a complete listing, see [Paré-Morin 2023](#)).
- 11 Throughout the years, however, the criteria of this "resurgence" and the priorities of publishers evolved and did not always go together with the needs of pianists. We can trace the evolution of the publication format, style, and content of film music folios since the 1970s by comparing the first folio in each of the three *Star Wars* trilogies (1977, 1999, and 2015).
- 12 The original *Star Wars* folio contained only two arrangements for solo piano: the "Main Title" and "Princess Leia's Theme", totaling a mere four pages of music. 24 pages were dedicated to pictures, credits, and descriptions of all major characters from the movie. The remaining 36 pages were sketch scores of two cues reduced on four staves: the complete "Main Title" as it appears in the movie, and "Cantina Band" (I will return to these in the next section). Far from being a "resurgence of film music publication", this folio did not mark a return to the format of the 1950s and '60s. In fact, whereas Miklós Rózsa's folios, for instance, were clearly titled "Musical Highlights from...", and Henry Mancini's folios boasted the labeling of "Complete Score", the purpose of the first *Star Wars* folio is rather ambiguous. The book's heading suggested that this was much more (or much else) than just a piano music book: this was a "Deluxe Souvenir Folio of Music Selections, Photos and Stories." The two brief piano solo arrangements here seem secondary. The oversimplified "Main Title" is immensely disappointing when the tantalizing orchestral reduction in sketch score appears just a few pages later. With so many pages of photos and texts, this folio certainly looks more like a souvenir product than an actual music book, something that could be collected along with the other toys, posters, books, and objects of all types that flooded the stores in the months following the movie's release. Even more so than

7. "For Always," from *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (Steven Spielberg, 2001), was John Williams's last piece originally published exclusively as single sheet music.

8. Even a few months before *Star Wars*, the publication of *Musical Selections from Rocky* included arrangements of every single track on the album. The *Star Wars* folio pales in comparison.

9. Williams's latest score, *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny* (James Mangold, 2023), did not receive a dedicated piano folio (a first in almost twenty years for a John Williams score), but two excerpts were published by Hal Leonard in an *Indiana Jones Piano Solo Collection* in 2024.

sheet music, folios thus acted, at least in part, as memorabilia since their illustrations and texts allowed the reader to revisit key scenes from the movie that they might otherwise be unable to rewatch.

13 Even in the Internet age, when pictures and videos from movies are just a click away, promotional material regularly includes references to the inclusion of “full-color artwork from the film” as a selling point (for example: on the Hal Leonard website or in the monthly *Hal Leonard Herald*). However, these pages make up for a much smaller portion of the more recent publications (see **Table 1**). On the other hand, the significant increase of music pages over the course of the three trilogies clearly indicates that publishers have gradually responded to a growing interest in film music and a rising demand for its piano arrangements. Furthermore, as the current digital market for sheet music splits folios into pieces that can be purchased separately, the former collectability of these publications matters far less, and their function as music rather than memorabilia is reinforced.

	<i>Star Wars</i> (1977)	<i>The Phantom Menace</i> (George Lucas, 1999)	<i>The Force Awakens</i> (J.J. Abrams, 2015)
Piano solo pieces	2	7	12
Transcriptions of complete album tracks	0	1 (+3 full cues within longer tracks)	8
Approx. duration	4 min.	13 min.	34 min.
Non-music pages	24 (37.5 %)	13 (32.5 %)	13 (18 %)

TABLE 1
Comparison of the folio contents of the first film of each *Star Wars* trilogy.

Studying film music through arrangements

14 The inclusion of sketch scores in the original *Star Wars* folio indicates that the publishers considered a variety of functions when publishing film music arrangements, with playability at the keyboard just one among others. What was referred to as sketch scores were faithful reductions of cues as heard in the film (or on the soundtrack album) on three to six staves of music, with occasional indications of instrumentation. The format originated in the early 1970s in some folios of rock albums, enabling amateur bands to perform covers more easily than by relying on a standard piano/vocal layout.¹⁰ The editorial decision to include “Cantina Band” from *Star Wars* as a sketch score rather than as a piano arrangement follows the

10. Some of these folios were lavishly produced. Among the most remarkable is *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* (1976) by The Alan Parsons Project, which presented the whole album in both sketch scores and piano/vocal arrangements, along with the Edgar Allan Poe stories that inspired each song, illustrations, and photographs, totalling 110 pages. Most exceptional is the inclusion of the full handwritten orchestral score for the finale of “The Fall of the House of Usher.”

same principle. However, the presentation of the film’s “Main Title” as a sketch score can hardly be played with any combination of instrument. Instead, it could serve to study the composition and to discover details in the orchestration that would otherwise be lost in a piano arrangement.

15 Only five sketch scores by John Williams were published between *Star Wars* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Steven Spielberg, 1981) four years later (see **Table 2**).¹¹ Their value cannot be underestimated, especially at a time when orchestral scores of these movies were not available to the public. To this day, the sketch score included in the folio of *The Empire Strikes Back* (Irvin Kershner, 1980) constitutes the only available publication of the entire six-minute-long end credits suite. This score contains the only published arrangement of “The Imperial March” that preserves its original rhythmic ostinato, as opposed to the bland quarter-note accompaniment available in all other piano arrangements ever since.

11. The theme from Leonard Rosenman’s score for *The Lord of the Rings* (Ralph Bakshi, 1978) was, to my knowledge, the only other film music publication in sketch score.

<i>Star Wars</i> (1977) • “Main Title”: 4-staves transcription of the entire first cue, 98 bars • “Cantina Band”: 4-staves transcription, 100 bars
<i>Close Encounters of the Third Kind</i> (Steven Spielberg, 1977) • “The Mother Ship and the Mountain (Resolution and End Title)”: 5- to 6-staves transcription of the first 52 bars of the end titles cue
<i>The Empire Strikes Back</i> (1980) • “Finale”: 3- to 4-staves transcription of the entire finale and end credits cues, 156 bars
<i>Raiders of the Lost Ark</i> (1981) • “Raiders March”: 3-staves transcription, 71 bars

TABLE 2
Complete list of John Williams sketch scores published in folios.

16 Although sketch scores were dropped after 1981, the gradual increase in pages dedicated to piano solo arrangements in the following decades means that a greater amount of music per film is now available in print and can be studied. Comparing again the first folio of each *Star Wars* trilogy is revealing. The number of piano pieces has gone up from two to seven to twelve by the time of *The Force Awakens*, eight of which present arrangements of complete album tracks (see **Table 1**). The folio for that movie provides the transcription of almost half of the album, or roughly 34 minutes of music, significantly more than the 13 minutes of music printed in *The Phantom Menace* folio, or the mere 4 minutes of piano arrangements in the original *Star Wars* folio. These arrangements provide the film music scholar as well as the fans an unprecedented access to John

Williams's music for study, all the more important since film scores are otherwise very rarely published. Thus, even though piano arrangements cannot replace a full orchestral score, they can provide more than a helpful guide to the study of these scores, and can serve as the basis for thematic, formal, and harmonic analysis.

- 17 Beyond John Williams's film and TV work, thirteen of his celebration fanfares have been published as sheet music or in piano anthologies, including a handful of pieces from the late 1980s that have never been available on recordings: *Celebration Fanfare* (1986), *We're Lookin' Good* (1987), *Fanfare for Ten Year Olds* (1987), and *Fanfare for Michael Dukakis* (1988). For scholars or musicians interested in this aspect of the composer's career, these long-out-of-print publications offer a rare opportunity to study or learn this music.
- 18 All this considered, one could be quite enthusiastic at the amount of printed material that can be used to study John Williams's music. On *The John Williams Piano Collection* website, I have catalogued about 300 distinct pieces (Paré-Morin 2023), which is almost three times as much as published in full orchestral scores by Hal Leonard in their John Williams Signature Edition.
- 19 Unfortunately, several problems hinder the reliability of these arrangements as study material. Since the arrangements do not aim to provide a faithful recreation of the orchestral originals, many details are lost, such as contrapuntal lines, complex rhythmic figures, articulations, dynamics, and even melody notes. These arrangements are very far from the nineteenth-century ideals of music transcriptions that aimed to provide more or less accurate reductions of symphonic works. This is why Enguerrand-Friedrich Lühl, a pianist who recorded several albums of his own virtuosic arrangements of John Williams's music, writes:

These arrangements, conceived for amateur pianists, sever the pieces dramatically and simplify them to the point that one barely recognizes the original score. This horribly weak adaptation destroys the work's genuine character and reduces it to the slight minimum—the main theme and a primitive accompaniment! A work of nine minutes for orchestra is accordingly compressed into a one-minute piece of two piano pages—just for the pleasure of the amateur performer claiming that he is capable of playing the “E.T. theme.”¹²

- 20 Recent publications have tended to avoid the excesses that Lühl complains about by including longer excerpts of film cues or full album tracks that preserve, as much as possible, the “genuine character” of the music. In the three folios of the *Star Wars* sequel trilogy, half of the pieces present full album tracks, including all major themes. Nonetheless, among the 37 arrangements published in these folios, about one third are shorter than

12. See the introduction text for the album *John Williams: Piano Solo* on the Polymnie label: <https://www.polymnie.net/pages/cds/williams.html> (accessed January 17, 2026).

two minutes. It is worth asking, however, whether this is the fault of the arrangers or of the fragmented nature of film cues. Regardless of length, it is undeniable that no single piano arrangement can come anywhere close to the textural and contrapuntal complexity of the symphonic scores. However, as I argue below, I believe that this is beside the point.

- 21 The most significant obstacle to the use of arrangements as study material is arguably the errors that permeate these publications and that often blur the line between technical simplification for the amateur pianists and misreading of the actual music. There is not much exaggeration in stating that there are musical errors in every single folio, severely limiting their usefulness as study scores.
- 22 Since Enguerrand-Friedrich Lühl highlights the “E.T. Theme” (also known as the “Flying Theme”) from *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (Steven Spielberg, 1982) in his criticism cited above, let’s have a closer look at a two-measure excerpt as a striking example of the kind of misreading found in film music arrangements. After the grand opening statement of the main theme, a secondary theme in a much leaner texture is introduced in measures 25–26. The three flutes and two oboes play the melody in unison while the violins and violas provide a pulsating accompaniment on major 7th chords. A faithful transcription of this passage—one that renders the full orchestral score as closely as possible—should look like this (**Figure 1**):

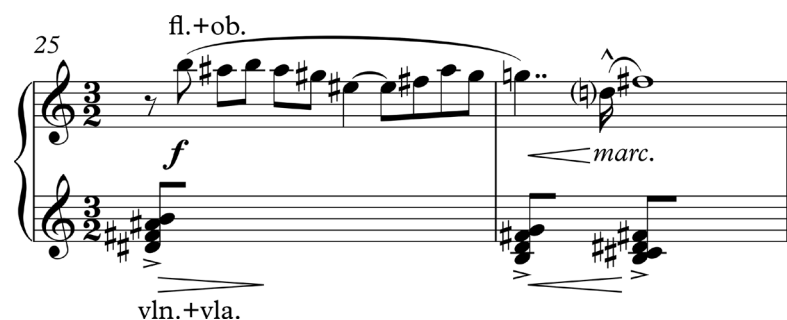


FIGURE 1
E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial, transcription of “Flying Theme” (mm. 25–26)
based on the published orchestral score.
I am using a shorthand for the pulsating chords only for clarity.

- 23 The first piano arrangement published in the original folio made two important changes: it removed the major 7th from the chords and replaced the energetic pulsation of the strings with sustained chords (**Figure 2**):

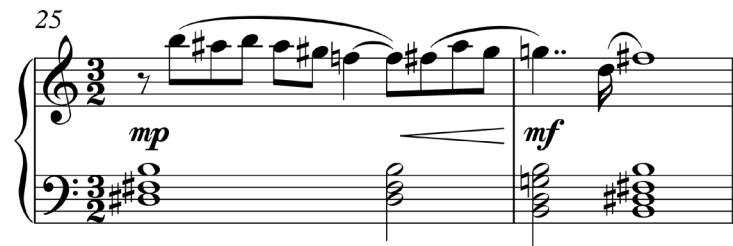


FIGURE 2
E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial, arrangement of “Flying Theme” (mm. 25–26)
as published in the original piano folio.¹³

- 24 Both changes might have been made to provide pianists with a simpler version, but a more accurate arrangement (as seen in **Figure 1**) would not have been much more difficult to perform and would still have been easier than several other passages in this folio. Consequently, the published arrangement is less rich harmonically and less active rhythmically than the original. Furthermore, the accompaniment is transposed down by an octave, which—along with the other changes—replaces the lightness of the orchestral strings by a slightly heavier and fuller sound. Finally, notice how the change from E-sharp to F-natural as the sixth note of the melody, perhaps again to simplify the readability, muddles the note’s function as a lower neighbour tone to the F-sharp. Together, all these minor changes—while far from the “horrible” and “primitive” adaptation described by Lühl—greatly affect the tone of the arrangement and, more crucially for us here, its usability for study.
- 25 But the story of the “Flying Theme” does not stop here. The original folio arrangement has quietly been replaced in the latest anthologies and in digital stores by a slightly different version (**Figure 3**):

13. The following musical examples have been copied from the original publications as faithfully as possible. See bibliography for detailed references.



FIGURE 3
E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial, arrangement of “Flying Theme” (mm. 25–26)
as published in current anthologies and digital stores.

- 26 The changes are highly questionable. In the first measure, the last four notes of the melody are now unjustifiably read in the unrelated key of G-flat, while the left hand, instead of playing a B-major chord, is distorted

into a diminished chord on F-natural! Whatever the reasons behind this “horrible” misreading,¹⁴ it departs so much from the score as written by John Williams that it fails to represent his music accurately, and for reasons that seem completely independent from the often-challenging process of arranging orchestral music for piano. In this case, we are lucky that the published orchestral score can be used for comparison and study, but for the vast majority of piano arrangements—for which orchestral scores have never been published—we can only rely on our ears to fix the errors, or else blindly trust the (usually uncredited) arrangers.

14. This misreading also finds its way in the Phillip Keveren Series published by Hal Leonard: Keveren sensibly reinstates the left-hand pulsation—but on the wrong chord! In other words, no arrangement currently available for purchase gives the correct chord.

- 27 So, in short, as material for study, these publications provide an incredible amount of music that remains unavailable in any other form, and even a few pieces that have never been properly recorded. They should be highly valued as such. As Stephen Wright put it: “These published arrangements are significant because, in most cases, they are the *only* readily available printed manifestation of the score, thus the only published notation of what the composer wrote” (2003, vi). But the simplification and unreliability must be taken into account if they are to be used for study, especially for musical analysis.

Playing arrangements at home and in concert

- 28 For these reasons it is perhaps best to view piano arrangements of film music primarily as pieces to be played, either for private enjoyment or in recitals, rather than scores to be studied. Unlike nineteenth-century arrangements published as a means to hear large-scale works that would otherwise be impossible to hear, film music arrangements do not need to stand as substitutes for the orchestral sounds, allowing for much more deviation from the compositions as heard on screen. For Mike Matessino, the reason to value such arrangements is because they grant direct contact with the music: “Playing *Star Wars* music on [piano] is, in fact, a close encounter with the composer who created this indelible, galaxy-spanning odyssey, unfathomable in both its scope and in its rewards to performer and listener alike” (2023). Performing film music on piano allows the musician to develop a new relation to the composer, one that is almost intimate, and therefore personal or individual¹⁵. This is the experience that some listeners have shared with regards to the performance of John Williams’s music on piano, as I discuss at the end of this article. For the moment, it is essential to stress that piano arrangements *as repertoire* must be valued on their own, and not for how well they approximate the orchestra.

15. The argument that an arrangement can provide a meaningful perspective on a composition has also been made about the performance of arrangements of much earlier repertoire. See for instance Wiebke Thormählen’s study of musical arrangements as educational tools in the 18th century (2010).

- 29 Despite the substantial differences between the production context of film music and that of symphonic music of previous centuries, I would argue that the criteria for a good piano arrangement do not differ much between them. Here is how Thomas Christensen discussed the quality of nineteenth-century arrangements: “The key to a successful piano transcription [...] was knowing what to leave out as much as what to put in. The most effective ones were naturally those that were sensitive to the sounds of the piano and the idiom of keyboard realization. Finding appropriate substitutions for orchestral sonorities and textures [...] taxed the most inventive of arrangers” (Christensen 1999, 270). On the one hand, arrangements that follow too closely the orchestral versions will be either difficult or clumsy to play. This is why, for example, the ostinato of “The Imperial March” must be simplified at the piano. But on the other hand, arrangements that oversimplify the orchestral texture will present little interest for both the pianist and the listener.
- 30 Most arrangements, especially in recent folios and anthologies, fall neatly somewhere in between these two extremes. But this has not always been the case with John Williams’s music. Over the years, many challenging or even technically unplayable arrangements were published. One of the most fiendishly difficult pieces is “The Devil’s Dance” from *The Witches of Eastwick* (George Miller, 1987), which contains some sections that are among the most exciting and rewarding to play alongside others that require virtuosic skills, such as frequent large jumps, fast octatonic scales, and alternating thirds (Figure 4). This example departs from mass-market arrangements of moderate difficulty and veers closer to Liszt’s concert approach, which, according to Jonathan Kregor, “privileges the foreign over the common, meaning that, say, typical left-hand accompanimental patterns or comfortable hand positions should not be expected” (2010, 30). It is perhaps because of its unusual length and demanding technique that this arrangement has never been reprinted despite the popularity of the piece itself.
- 31 A recurring problem is the transcription of Williams’s characteristic rapid brass figures in his more ecstatic passages, especially in his celebration fanfares. For example, the following excerpt (Figure 5) taken from the end of the *Liberty Fanfare* (1986) shows the rendition of brilliant trumpet flourishes even though they are practically impossible to play on piano at the regular speed. Musicians (especially amateurs) who want to play these recurring figures will quickly realize that a more adequate alternative would be to perform only the top note of each chord as a quick scale in order to preserve the flow of the music.

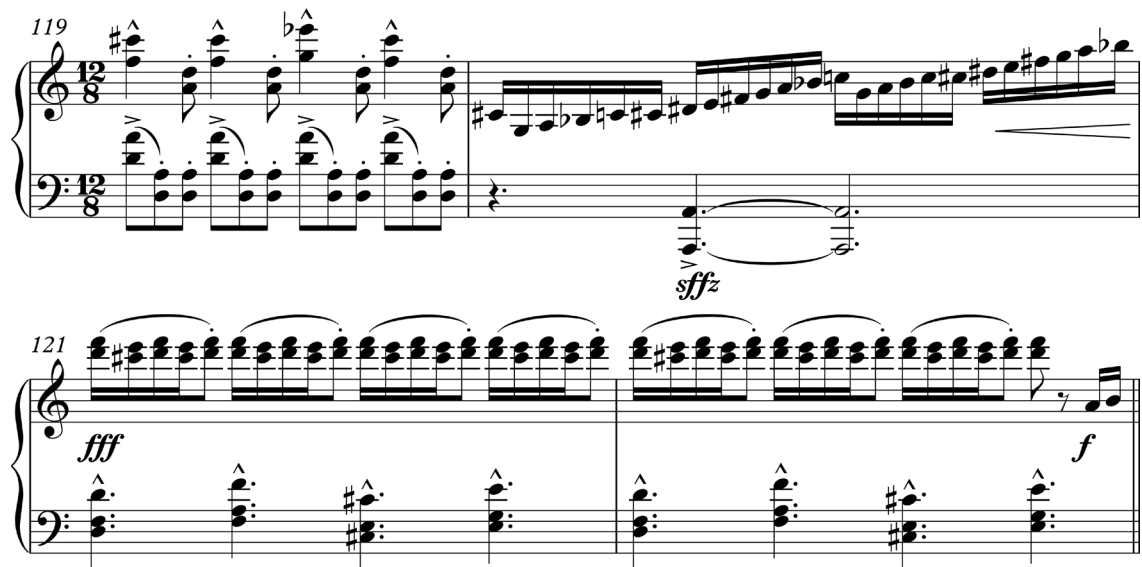


FIGURE 4

The Witches of Eastwick, excerpt from the published piano arrangement of “The Devil’s Dance.”¹⁶

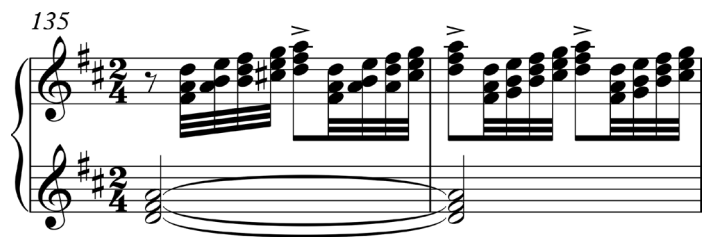


FIGURE 5

Liberty Fanfare, excerpt from the published arrangement.¹⁷

32 There are even rare instances where a published piano piece includes a sort of ossia line, or third staff of music, which cannot be played simultaneously, yet cannot be used as a substitute for any other line. Such is the case of the most non-idiomatic arrangement of all, the season 2 main title of *Land of the Giants* (ABC, 1969–1970), arguably a sketch score more than an actual piano arrangement (despite being published in a piano anthology). In the *Fanfare for Michael Dukakis*, the entire middle section expands the piano score to three staves, giving us a glimpse of the exciting countermelody of this unrecorded miniature masterpiece (Figure 6). We could read such passages as instances of what Peter Szendy identified in Liszt’s versions of Beethoven’s symphonies as “the inscription of the absence of or desire for the original in the hollow of the transcription,” which “create[s] longing [...] for its many instruments” ([2001] 2008, 57), or else as what Jonathan Kregor more succinctly refers to as a “multi-perspectival reading of the piece” that “remains an open work” (2010, 33).

16. This excerpt also exemplifies the kinds of errors (which I corrected in this figure) that plague film music publications. In measure 119, the right hand’s third beat stays on F-C# in the printed sheet music instead of moving up a tone; in measure 121, the right hand’s entire first beat is printed a third too low; and in measures 121–122, the left hand’s fourth beat erroneously prints the chord E-G-D instead of E-G-E.

17. I have copied this excerpt as it appeared in the published piano arrangement. The



FIGURE 6

Fanfare for Michael Dukakis, excerpt from the published arrangement.

33 Even if these technical (and conceptual) difficulties are not the norm, they happen frequently enough to disprove the kind of oft-repeated generalization that arrangements reduce the work “to the slight minimum” (as quoted above). They also attest to the varying approaches that arrangers have adopted throughout the years. As a result, navigating this repertoire to find an adequate arrangement can be challenging for both intermediate and advanced pianists. But a lack of standard quality or difficulty should not prompt musicians to dismiss the entire repertoire as trivial. At best, piano arrangements are artfully made, and can be exciting pieces to perform. However, like many nineteenth-century arrangements of orchestral works, their suitability for public performance is not unambiguous, and the distinction between music destined for private enjoyment or for the concert hall remains a disputed matter.

34 The performance of film music in concert has attracted some scholarly attention lately, but articles on the topic always assume that the music is performed by orchestral forces. If piano arrangements are mentioned at all, it is to exclude them (see, for instance, [Lehman 2018, 21](#)).¹⁸ Otherwise, the assumed limited purpose of piano arrangements in the musical landscape is clearly stated. When Emilio Audissino introduces the three “main manifestations of the external life of film music,” he opposes “piano reductions for home performance” from “adaptations for concert performance” (the third type being “disc records”). He thus clearly delineates the divide between private and public settings that nineteenth-century musicians were familiar with, as well as the distinction between the somewhat diminutive term of *reduction* versus the more proper *adaptation* ([Audissino 2021, 10](#)). Yet, scholars are not to blame for dismissing a type of concert that remains extremely rare, in large part due to the limited availability of adequate and reliable material for solo performance, as I have shown above. There is no denying that, despite some noteworthy exceptions,

actual trumpet flourishes in the orchestral score repeat four times the pattern used here only on the first beat. It is unclear why the arranger altered the notes.

18. It is worth pointing out here a rare examination of piano arrangements of video game music presented by Matthew Thompson at the North American Conference on Video Game Music on January 14, 2018 ([Thompson 2018](#); on arrangements of video game music, see [Greenfield-Casas 2022](#)).

the difficulty level of most available publications is not high enough for professional musicians. Thus, apart from a few student recitals and YouTube videos, professional musicians have ignored these arrangements, preferring instead to create and record their own versions. The recordings mentioned in this article's introduction all include new and unique arrangements, except for about half of the album by Simone Pedroni, to which I will return below.

35 Over the years, only one piano publication explicitly attempted to bring John Williams's music to the concert stage. The *Star Wars: Suite for Piano*, arranged by Tony Esposito, was the second volume in the Classic Film Scores series from Warner Brothers Publications, which issued fifteen suites between 1986 and 1990, two-thirds of which were for scores by Erich Wolfgang Korngold, Max Steiner, and John Williams.¹⁹ In a foreword, Jeff Sultanof, one of the series' arrangers, explained the double purpose of this series: "We felt that if there was a large public that loved to hear film scores, then there must be many musicians who want to play and study them. [...] We are finding that, in addition to learning these arrangements, pianists are programming them for recitals" (Sultanof 1989). The back cover of each volume reiterated that it was "perfect for study and concert performances." On the front cover, a facsimile of the first page of the orchestral score unified the series with a more serious and refined design, which seemed to promise that each book offered a faithful rendition of the music, indeed suitable for both study and concert, and thus at a safe distance from movie memorabilia.

36 The *Star Wars: Suite for Piano* comprises five of the seven movements included in the *Symphonic Suite* originally published by Fox Fanfare Music in the months following the film's release. The first three movements are faithful transcriptions of the original album's "Main Title" (similar to the standard concert version that includes the end credit material and incorporates "Princess Leia's Theme"), "Princess Leia's Theme," and "Cantina Band." The music is technically difficult, but highly rewarding to perform. The fourth movement, "The Battle," adopts a different strategy. Instead of presenting a full album track, it attempts to merge together snippets of several action cues in order to retell the movie's third act inside the Death Star, from the tense "Inner City" all the way to the pounding and victorious finale of the "Battle of Yavin."²⁰ The result is both musically and technically awkward: contrasts of tempos, registers, and textures abound without building up musical tension, the famous "Here They Come" section is absent, and a long passage is made up of repetitive *étude*-like chromatic scales that may work in the film's context, but not in a piano solo version (Figure 7). This movement alone supports Christensen's statement that "not even the most creative arrangers could make some compositions sound good on the keyboard" (1999, 272). The

19. The other John Williams volumes were *Superman: Suite for Piano* (in fact a medley of the film's original folio arrangements with some added transitional material) and *The Cowboys: Overture for Piano*, arguably among the better arrangements in the Classic Film Scores series. Both arrangements were credited to Tony Esposito.

20. This movement is not included in the *Star Wars* suites currently published by Hal Leonard in the Signature Edition.

last movement, “The Throne Room and End Title,” is more satisfactory but relies too heavily on wide chords in the left hand (spanning up to two octaves!) that disrupt the flow of the march.



FIGURE 7

Excerpt from the “The Battle”, the fourth movement of Tony Esposito’s *Star Wars: Suite for Piano*. This pattern spans a total of 33 measures, more than two full pages.

- 37 Despite some surprisingly effective arrangements in its earlier movements, this suite—like all others in the Classic Film Scores series—failed to attract professional performers. It simply became another instance of domestic music-making, albeit a more advanced one. Nonetheless, it was a laudable attempt at creating a concert suite of a high pianistic level that could be as faithful to the orchestral score as possible.²¹
- 38 Concerns about the public performance of arrangements—even those of the highest quality—were already vividly highlighted by Robert Schumann in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* of April 10, 1840, when he reacted to a performance of Beethoven’s Pastoral Symphony by Liszt:

When performed at home in an intimate atmosphere, it is possible to forget the otherwise masterly and conscientiously made transcription from the orchestra. But in a large concert hall, in the same place where we have so often heard the symphony played perfectly by an orchestra, the lack of instrumentation stands out perceptibly, all the more so when the transcription vainly attempts to convey the orchestral mass in its full strength. A simpler arrangement, a mere intimation, would perhaps have far greater effect. (translated by Christensen 1999, 289)

- 39 In short, Schumann suggests that it is not the most accurate, faithful, or technically difficult arrangements that work best in concert, since they remind us of the orchestra’s absence. This idea is echoed by some contemporary pianists who renounce trying to match the orchestral score, like Dan Redfeld, who explains: “It’s difficult to translate [John Williams’s] counterpoint on the piano and also capture all that color on one instrument. So it’s distilling it down to the basic melody we hear as an audience, and then filling in to get some approximation of the counter-line or harmonies.” (quoted in Larson 2016)²²

21. Much has changed in the appreciation of film music in concert since the publication of this suite in the late 1980s. It is perhaps time to give it another chance.

22. Dan Redfeld’s album, *Across the Stars: The Film Music of John Williams for Solo Piano*, includes insightful liner notes by Randall D. Larson with track-by-track commentary that indicates how each arrangement was made.

40 A good example of this simpler approach is found in the folios for *Lincoln* (Steven Spielberg, 2012) and *The Book Thief* (Brian Percival, 2013), coincidentally the only folios with arrangements credited to John Williams himself. The music does not attempt to precisely match the album tracks: it is reduced to its essential components and is idiomatic of Williams's late piano writing, which also occupies a prominent place in these scores. Simone Pedroni compares them to Prokofiev's piano version of *Romeo and Juliet*, saying: "It's an essential, almost austere writing, like a pencil drawing that however reveals the essential truth on which the orchestral version is based" (Caschetto 2018, 412). Pedroni's album, *John Williams: Themes and Transcriptions for Piano*, includes recordings of these two folios mostly as published. It was a revelation for many reviewers, one of whom wrote that "these familiar scores performed by solo piano reveal a clarity and simple purity often lost in a full orchestral reading" (Siegel 2017).²³ I believe a case could be made to consider these two folios as actual "works" by John Williams rather than as "mere" arrangements (after all, Prokofiev gave separate opus numbers to his transcriptions of pieces from *Romeo and Juliet* and *Cinderella*).²⁴ They further challenge the view that piano arrangements of film music must be both technically difficult and faithful to the orchestral brilliance to have any merit in concert—and hence they confirm Schumann's advice. If we are willing to be "amazed", like pianist Dan Redfeld, by the simplicity of John Williams's own piano writing, perhaps we can reconsider how we approach and evaluate other piano arrangements of his music.

Conclusion

41 In this article, I signalled multiple reasons that could deter scholars, professionals, and even amateur musicians from taking these publications seriously, despite the popularity of film music concerts and piano arrangements of film music. The regular inclusion of several pages of illustrations can very well attract movie fans but might as well deter other pianists used to the sober design of classical music publications, which usually ensures quality, regardless of level. The frequent errors reveal a lack of attention to detail, corners cut short to meet tight release schedules. Older or less familiar titles have long been out of print (and remain unavailable even on digital platforms), drastically reducing the diversity of music one can hope to perform or study. To avoid these shortcomings, pianists—in concerts, but especially online—usually perform their own rewritings of their favorite film themes, largely independently from the print and digital markets for sheet music. Hence, there is a noticeable gap between the material that musicians perform (or find worthy of performance) and the material that is available publicly to those who do not

23. That same reviewer maintained that the theme from Sabrina "would certainly feel at home in any classical pianist's repertoire." Dan Redfeld also included on his album suites from these two movies as written or arranged by John Williams.

24. Likewise, Peter Szendy argues—citing Schumann's appraisal of Liszt's reduction of the *Symphonie fantastique* as an "original work"—that arrangements occupy a place "alongside" the original: they are destined "to follow it without being subordinate to it, but also without being completely detached from it: a kind of *alliance*, like a shadow that, while still remaining linked to the body whose silhouette it is, has acquired a certain autonomy in its movements." (Szendy [2001] 2008, 61) Arrangements of film music for piano acquire another layer of autonomy by being diverted from their initial relation to visual media (just like Prokofiev's ballet transcriptions are no longer tied to the movements of dancers on a stage). On the other hand, as long as they remain uncredited (with few exceptions), their devaluation is likely to persist. Qualifying anonymous arrangements as "approved by John Williams" does not, in my opinion, solve the issue of anonymity.

necessarily have the skills or the time to create their own arrangements of John Williams's music.

- 42 To respond to these various issues, we must start by reassessing the value and functions of piano arrangements of film music. After all, they have been part of publishers' catalogues for over a hundred years. The sheer number of publications is evidence of their lasting impact on musicians in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and confirms the need for scholars to look at recent and current repertoires in their examinations of this practice. In her study of the arrangements of Beethoven's symphonies, Nancy November wrote that "chamber arrangements of large-scale works were so prevalent in the nineteenth century that to ignore them, as has often been done, is to miss an essential part of the reception or 'life history' of the works in question" (November 2021, 3). The same could be said of John Williams's works. For the past sixty years, countless people have engaged with his music outside of the movies, soundtrack albums, or orchestral concerts. Despite their shortcomings, piano arrangements have allowed musicians to appreciate film music with a hands-on approach and to get to explore the works from the inside, or else to simply hear new takes on familiar themes. These alternate ways of engaging with John Williams's music, despite all their intricacies and complexities, deserve to be taken into account when studying the broader reception of his work.

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John Williams: Serendipitous Concert Conductor

John Williams : un chef d'orchestre inattendu

Emilio Audissino

Keywords: Williams (John), film music, film music in concert, Boston Pops Orchestra, Fiedler (Arthur)

Mots clés : Williams (John), musique de film, ciné-concert, Boston Pops Orchestra, Fiedler (Arthur)

ABSTRACT

John Williams is widely recognized as one of the greatest film composers, celebrated for reviving the symphonic idiom in film scoring, especially with works like *Star Wars*. However, his significant contributions as a concert conductor are often overlooked. Williams's leadership of the Boston Pops played a crucial role in legitimizing film music as a respected part of symphonic concert programs. His influence has been acknowledged by prestigious invitations to conduct world-class orchestras, such as the Wiener Philharmoniker, Berliner Philharmoniker, and Orchestra Filarmonica de La Scala, and by receiving the Gold Medal of the Royal Philharmonic Society. Although conducting was not his original plan, it became an essential and complementary aspect of his career, helping to bring symphonic film music into the spotlight and ensuring its continued relevance and appreciation worldwide.

RÉSUMÉ

John Williams est largement reconnu comme l'un des plus grands compositeurs de musiques de film, célébré pour avoir fait revivre l'idiome symphonique dans ce domaine, notamment à travers des œuvres telles que *Star Wars*. Cependant, ses contributions en tant que chef d'orchestre sont souvent négligées. La direction de Williams des Boston Pops a joué un rôle crucial dans

la légitimation de la musique de film comme partie intégrante et respectée des programmes symphoniques de concert. Son influence a été reconnue par des invitations prestigieuses à diriger des orchestres de renommée mondiale, tels que le Wiener Philharmoniker, le Berliner Philharmoniker et l'Orchestre Filarmonica della Scala, ainsi que par l'attribution de la Médaille d'or de la Royal Philharmonic Society. Bien que la direction d'orchestre n'ait pas été son intention première, elle est devenue un aspect essentiel et complémentaire de sa carrière, contribuant à promouvoir la musique symphonique de film et à garantir sa reconnaissance et son appréciation à l'échelle mondiale.

- 1 "I never intended to conduct in public." This was the candid confession that, in April 1980, John Williams disclosed in one of his first interviews as newly appointed Principal Conductor of the Boston Pops Orchestra (Pfeifer 1980). At the time, the Boston Pops—the “light symphonic music” branch of the Boston Symphony Orchestra—was one of the oldest musical ensembles in the US and the first of its kind, having as a mission the popularisation of the symphonic concert-going experience. It was also the most visible, with an intense and best-selling presence in the record market, radio waves, and TV screens—with the regular show *Evening at Pops* having been aired continuously since 1969, it made the Boston Pops arguably the only orchestra with such wide-audience fame at that time. The confession from the newly appointed conductor about him having never thought about a career as a concert conductor seems rather puzzling and paradoxical. Taking the move from this apparent paradox, in this article I reflect on the importance of John Williams's other career, as a conductor, building on and reframing my previous research on the topic (Audissino 2012, 2021a, and 2016).

A Serendipitous Start

- 2 In the summer of 1979, the Boston Pops Orchestra was in crisis mode. Arthur Fiedler, the orchestra's Principal Conductor and, in a way, the second founder of the orchestra, had just died, after a trailblazing tenure of fifty years. The Boston Pops had been created by Henry Lee Higginson in 1885 but it was with the start of Fiedler's “reign” in 1929 that the ensemble acquired their name, as an entity separate from the mother-orchestra Boston Symphony. It gradually expanded their reputation, to become the widely known “America's Orchestra” they had become by Fiedler's death (on the Boston Pops, see Adler 2023). Replacing Arthur Fiedler was a major life-or-death decision for the Boston Symphony Orchestra's management, as the very future of the orchestra was at stake. After a year-long selection process—already set in motion when Fiedler's

health had dramatically declined—amongst the five shortlisted finalists, John Williams was offered the job. Fiedler was a “classical” musician with a penchant for show-business theatrics—famous are the covers of his LP albums, in which he posed in glamorous pictures or in parodies of pop culture icons, for example, his Tony Manero impersonation for his final album *Saturday Night Fiedler* (Midsong International, MSI 011, 1979). After this flamboyant leader, the BSO management offered the job to an introverted and professorial-looking composer with admittedly no experience in concert conducting. And a *film* composer—from Hollywood. Williams’s appointment left some people in the business a bit perplexed, on the grounds of his limited experience as a conductor, as well as for inveterate prejudices against film composers, which were still rampant at the time (Audissino 2021a, 4–9), influenced by such Adornian postulates as “no serious composer writes for the motion pictures for any other reason than money” (Adorno and Eisler 2007, 37).

- 3 What led to Williams’s appointment as Fiedler’s successor can be examined from two sides: the BSO’s and Williams’s. As to the former, the decision was the result of various factors. Though very different from the Fiedler persona, Williams had strong connections not only in the records market but also in the film and television markets, thus making him able to guarantee the continuation of the Pops’ media visibility. Williams was also attractive for his skills as an arranger, and the Boston Pops is an orchestra that needed to produce new arrangements each season. Williams’s classical conservatory training also made him a *tasteful* arranger suitable for the symphonic medium—a much sought-after change after Fiedler’s last period, which many observers deemed to have been plagued by “trashy arrangements” (Dyer 1980a) and treatments of music that would make the orchestra players frustrated if not irate (Audissino 2021a, 30). This last point is an important one, given the balance that the Boston Pops—in its programmes that mixed staples from the concert repertoire and symphonic arrangements from the more popular and mass-audience repertoires—was being called to maintain. This balance was always liable to be a precarious one, oscillating between the categories of the so-called “high-brow” (the “art-music” symphonic repertoire) and the “low-brow” (popular music). The Boston Pops has been indeed indicated as an example of “middle-brow” (Adler 2017), those cultural institutions or operations that aim at mediating between the two opposite poles. In its history, the Boston Pops has seen moments where this balance has tipped, in either direction. During Alfredo Casella’s tenure (1927–1929), he would programme too many pieces from the “art-music” repertoire, including some new modernistic music, to the dissatisfaction of the audience members (Audissino 2021a, 18). Fiedler was brought in to rebalance the programming towards the “low-brow” side, bringing in

Tin Pan Alley tunes and Broadway musicals in the mix. Yet, in his last decade, Fiedler had perhaps ventured too far in the opposite direction, dishing out symphonic arrangements of the Bee Gees songs ([Clip 1](#)) or programming disco-music versions of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* ([Clip 2](#))—in this case, to the dissatisfaction (and outrage) of the orchestra members. Williams could once again rebalance the Pops' programming with more "high-brow" traits. This latter aspect was reflected in the orchestra's evaluation questionnaires, one important assessment tool that the selecting committee had used to select the new conductor. After their performance, each guest conductor in the 1979 season was ranked by the orchestra according to their responses to a battery of questions, relating to the technical hard skills as well as their individual characteristic soft skills. Williams was ranked first by the orchestra members in such questionnaires ([Audissino 2021a, 22](#)). Particularly appreciated were his efficient professionalism (honed by years of experience of the "time-is-money" pressure typical of studio recording sessions), his straight-to-the-point no-nonsense attitude (some concert conductors are raconteurs prone to "waste" rehearsal time with aesthetic or philosophical musings), and his musical taste (at the time, Williams had just single-handedly brought back the symphonic sound to film screens, with *Star Wars* becoming the best-selling album of symphonic music). All these aspects led to the apparently least experienced of the candidates to be appointed to succeed what, at the time, was perhaps the most popular orchestra conductor in the US. The paradox, though, can be dissipated when all the above criteria are considered. What ensured continuity, though, was the one thing that Williams and Fiedler did have in common: the commitment to bringing the sound of a symphony orchestra to the masses, Williams with his film compositions, Fiedler with his concerts.

- 4 From Williams's side, landing the Boston Pops job—"greatest honor in the profession" ([Dyer 1980b](#))—looks perfectly suited to be called "serendipitous," the quality of "finding valuable or agreeable things not sought for" (Merriam-Webster). Here we can better understand his apparently paradoxical, and to some perhaps alarming, statement "I never intended to conduct in public." Though lacking the initial intention, Williams soon demonstrated that he did have the required skills and stage presence to follow in Fiedler's footsteps: in his very first 1980 season he soon moved from "I never intended to conduct in public" to conducting in front of an audience totalling more than one hundred thousand at the Fourth of July outdoor concert at Boston's Hatch Shell. Though limited, Williams's experience as a conductor was not negligible. He had been conducting the recording sessions of his own scores since at least the mid-1960s—"out of self defense" in order to protect his musical ideas from uncaring studio conductors, he explained ([Dyer 1980c](#))—and though such sessions lacked

the typical elements of live concerts, at the time of the Pops appointment he had already matured a fifteen-year experience in how to lead an orchestra, and at least a few public appearances.

- 5 The debut in public conducting, as far as I know, took place with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra on Saturday, October 30, 1976, in London at the 7th edition of the FilmHarmonic “Festival of Film and T.V. Music,” at the Royal Albert Hall.¹ Williams presented a programme of his own film music as well as a selection of Bernard Herrmann’s, as the composer had passed away the previous December:

- *The Cowboys* (Mark Rydell, 1972), arguably what is now known as “*The Cowboy Overture*.”
- A Suite called “The Romantic Themes” that included music from *Heidi* (Delbert Mann, 1968); *The Paper Chase* (James Bridges, 1973), with a solo piano listed in the programme; *The Eiger Sanction* (Clint Eastwood, 1975), with a solo trumpet listed in the programme; “Dream Away” from *The Man Who Loved Cat Dancing* (Richard C. Sarafian, 1973), with a solo mouth organ listed in the programme; *Cinderella Liberty* (Mark Rydell, 1973); “Make Me Rainbow” from *Fitzwilly Strikes Back* [sic] (Delbert Mann, 1967); *The Reivers* (Mark Rydell, 1969); *Jane Eyre* (Delbert Mann, 1970).
- “A Tribute to the Music of Bernard Herrmann,” including “The Death Hunt” from *On Dangerous Ground* (Nicholas Ray and Ida Lupino, 1951) and a selection from *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941).
- The “Overture” and “Cadenza and Variations for Violin” from *Fiddler on the Roof* (Norman Jewison, 1971), Williams’s own cinematic adaptation of the Jerry Bock musical, for which Williams had won the 1971 Oscar for Best Musical Direction and Adaptation.
- “Suite – The Disasters,” devoted to excerpts from the Williams scores to such “disaster movies” as *The Poseidon Adventure* (Ronald Neame, 1972); *The Towering Inferno* (John Guillermin, 1974); *Earthquake* (Mark Robson, 1974); *Jaws* (Steven Spielberg, 1975).

- 6 The programme is of additional interest because it shows the pre-*Star Wars* John Williams, the film having been a massive watershed that changed Williams’s status radically. Interestingly, the film is passingly mentioned in the programme notes of this concert, before anyone could fathom the degree of importance it would have in the history of film music: “At present he is working on a new British-made film, *Star Wars*.”²

- 7 This Albert Hall appearance was an exception, and in some mail correspondence afterwards he confirmed that concert-conducting was not his job: “I don’t concertize, it’s just not part of what I do professionally,

1. Archival materials were retrieved from http://www.jw-collection.de/print/print_index.html. Accessed October 15, 2023.

2. Excerpts from the concert booklet were retrieved from http://www.jw-collection.de/print/print_index.html. Accessed October 15, 2023.

whereas Mancini and Elmer Bernstein and Michel Legrand and some of these other chaps do that as a way of earning money” (Caps 1982, 4). Yet, after *Star Wars* (then retitled *Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope*, George Lucas, 1977) invitations to guest conduct increased in number. Ernest Fleischmann, General Manager of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, asked Williams to compile a suite from the film score for space-themed concerts at the historic Hollywood Bowl, a spacious outdoor concert venue on the Hollywood hills. Williams the composer obliged, but Williams the conductor was not ready to step onto the podium: “I just said to Ernest, ‘You have one of the world’s great conductors in Zubin Mehta. It would be better if he did it, and I’ll come as a guest’” (Burlingame 1998). Mehta, then Music Director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, did the honours, on November 20, 1977, in front of a sold-out 17 000-seat venue. Fleischmann, undaunted, kept offering guest conducting gigs to Williams, who kept politely declining the invitations (Burlingame 1998). In the meantime, on March 26, 1978, Williams appeared as a guest—alongside the revered veteran Miklós Rózsa—on the TV show *Previn and the Pittsburgh* (Clips 3 and 4) on PBS (the US Public Broadcasting Service), in an episode entirely devoted to film music, where the Music Director of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Andre Previn, also “conducted” conversations with Williams and Rózsa. On the show, Williams conducted the “March from Superman” (from the film *Superman: The Movie*, Richard Donner, 1978), a suite from *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (Steven Spielberg, 1977)—similar to the *Excerpts from Close Encounters of the Third Kind* currently distributed in print by Hal Leonard—and two pieces from *Star Wars* (“Princess Leia” and “Throne Room and Finale”). In the summer of the same year, Williams finally gave in to Fleischmann’s courting and accepted to cover as a last-minute replacement in a couple of Hollywood Bowl concerts: “So finally in ‘78 I went in and conducted a weekend, or possibly two. [...] Ernest called me to do those concerts [...] mostly, I thought, because all of the practicing conductors would have been booked during the busy summer season. I was working in the studios, and he assumed, rightly, that I would have been free on those weekends” (Burlingame 1998). The conductor who had to be replaced at the very last moment was Arthur Fiedler himself. Williams further reminisces, “Then he wanted to have me there [at the Hollywood Bowl] every year; so, really, without Fleischmann I don’t think I would have ever stepped in front of the public to conduct. I certainly never had any intention of doing so” (Beek 2021). The Hollywood Bowl debut on July 28, 1978 marked for Williams both the beginning of forty-five years of regular appearances with the Los Angeles Philharmonic—the most recent was in July 2023, Williams being 91 years old—and the beginning of the similarly long association between Williams and the

Boston Symphony Orchestra family—at the time of writing, Williams still holds the title of Boston Pops Laureate Conductor.

- 8 As an effect of the combination of the *Star Wars* success, his TV appearance with the Pittsburgh Symphony, and his “Pops at the Bowl” weekend of concerts with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the following year Williams was invited to guest conduct the Boston Pops at Boston’s Symphony Hall, in two concerts on May 25 and 26 (**Figure 1**).

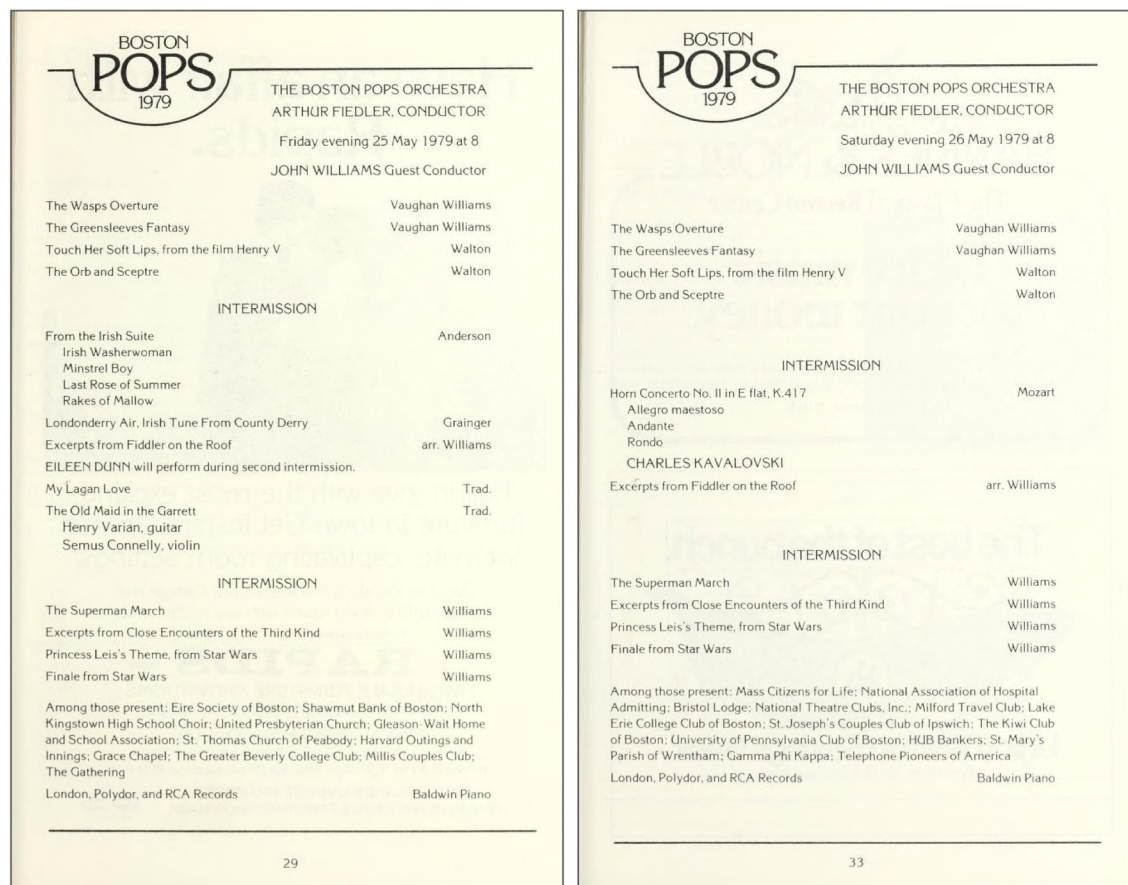


FIGURE 1
Concert programs from the Boston Pops Orchestra, May 25 and 26, 1978.
Boston Pops. May–July 1979. Arthur Fiedler Conductor.
Boston: Boston Symphony Orchestra, 1979, 29 and 33.

- 9 Those appearances demonstrated the solid symphonic substance of his film compositions, the tastefulness and musical inventiveness of his arranger’s skills, and his good handling of the concert repertoire as a conductor (Mozart, Vaughan Williams, and Walton were the “higher-brow” elements in the programme).³ The guest appearances, as we have seen, happened to take place in the year in which Fiedler’s successor was being

3. The programmes are discussed more extensively in Audiisino (2021a, 23–25).

recruited—the ailing Pops conductor would die on July 11, 1979—and Williams thus found himself amongst the “papable” names: at the time of the search, the election of the new Pops conductor was comparatively given in Boston the same gravitas as the pontifical election in Rome (Swan *et al.* 1980, 85). Williams accepted the job on January 9, 1980 and the announcement was given at a press conference in London, where Williams was currently recording the score to *Star Wars: Episode V – The Empire Strikes Back* (Irvin Kershner, 1980).

BSO Manager Tom Morris came to London [...] and asked me if I'd like to be the director of the Boston Pops. It was the most flattering thing one could think of—to be offered the directorship of an American institution as venerable, prominent, and successful as the Pops. So, naturally, I found it hard to resist, though I didn't agree immediately. I told Morris that I had very little experience conducting in public. He said, “I think you can do it, and André Previn has convinced us you can do it, and the players committee has elected you as the person of their choice.” So I promised to think about it. I spoke to my wife and my friends, to André Previn, and they all said, “You really should do this. It's a very important thing because, although it couldn't be more different than Hollywood, it's bound to enrich your life.” So with some trepidation and a lot of excitement, I rang him up and said, “I'll try it.” (Burlingame 2000, 20)

- 10 His debut concert as newly-appointed Pops conductor was at New York's Carnegie Hall, for a special concert on January 22: the programme included Williams's “Cowboys Overture,” Gabriel Fauré's *Pavane*, Op. 50, Camille Saint-Saëns's *Concerto No. 3 in B minor for Violin and Orchestra*, Op. 61, a selection from the musical *Gigi* (music by Frederick Loewe), and four Williams pieces, “Superman March,” *Excerpts from Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, “Princess Leia” and “Finale [Throne Room and Finale]” from *Star Wars*. The debut in the orchestra's home-town took place on April 29, 1980 (**Figure 2**)—in front of the cameras taping the first Williams episode of *Evening at Pops*. Besides featuring world-renowned violinist Isaac Stern performing the *Concerto no. 2 in D minor*, Op. 22 by Henryk Wieniawski, it should be remembered as the world premiere of “The Imperial March,” the concert version of Williams's “Darth Vader's Theme” from *Star Wars: Episode V – The Empire Strikes Back*. Williams, the reluctant conductor, thus reminisced about his arrival in Boston:

I knew that he [Arthur Fiedler] had built and maintained an extraordinary musical institution, but I had no conception of the enormity of what he did until I was invited to conduct in Boston. When I arrived there, I learned that the Pops played not two times each week, as I had thought, but performed six concerts a week, each week, for the duration of the Pops season. Considering that Arthur Fiedler maintained this pace for fifty seasons, this is a staggering achievement. [...] One was instantly aware that this was a man of extraordinary

energy, who possessed a breadth of knowledge in the field of light music repertoire that was unique. And his success was truly unique. As far as I know, he was the only person in the history of music who held a major conducting post for fifty years. Not even Johann Strauss, the waltz king, in his great days in Vienna, could have claimed to have had a greater success with his concerts, both musically and as a social event, than Arthur Fiedler had in Boston. [...] Bearing all of this in mind, you can imagine the trepidation with which I arrived in Boston to start my first series of concerts as successor to this great man. I was the “new boy in town,” being scrutinized by Arthur Fiedler’s loving audience. I needn’t have worried—everyone, the orchestra, management, and the Boston public made me feel instantly welcome. One could immediately sense the overriding sentiment of all present. There was an undying affection for the institution that he served so well and so long. Added to this were the wishes of everyone for the brightest possible future of the Pops. (Williams 1981, 172–173)



**BOSTON
POPS
1980**

THE BOSTON POPS ORCHESTRA
JOHN WILLIAMS CONDUCTOR
Tuesday evening 29 April 1980 at 8

JUNIOR COUNCIL OF THE BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Cowboys Overture	Williams
Fugue a la Gigue	Bach-Holst
Concerto No. 2 in d minor for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 22:	Wieniawski
II Romance (Andante non troppo)	
III Allegro con fuoco—Allegro moderato	
ISAAC STERN	

INTERMISSION

Prelude and Fugue (The “Spitfire”)	Walton
The Reivers (an old man reminisces)	Williams
World Premiere	
BURGESS MEREDITH	

INTERMISSION

Selections from A Little Night Music	Sondheim-Tunick
Night Waltz—Send in the Clowns	
After the Love Has Gone	Foster/Graydon/Champlin-Byers
Yoda’s Theme and the Imperial March, from The Empire Strikes Back	Williams
Intergalactic visitors may be expected to join the festivities at any time.	
London, Polydor, and RCA Records	Baldwin Piano

Part of this evening’s concert is being recorded by WGBH-TV for later telecast. Occasional scenes of the audience may be used.

17

FIGURE 2

Concert program from the Boston Pops Orchestra, April 29, 1978.
Boston Pops. May–July 1980. John Williams Conductor.
Boston: Boston Symphony Orchestra, 1980, 17.

- 11 Williams's successor, Keith Lockhart, acutely noted an aspect that should be taken into consideration when considering John Williams's appointment at the Pops:

For John this job must have been a huge challenge and a huge responsibility, because parts of this job that I [as a trained conductor] don't have to think about are the symphonic warhorses. When we have violinists coming and they're doing Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto, or pianists coming and they're doing the last movement of the "Rach 2", this is my bread and butter, this is the stuff I have been studying since I was twenty-one. By the time I came here I had fifteen years of that sort of work under my belt. The reason I can concentrate on all the new things, the commissions and things like that, is because I already know all that standard repertoire. But imagine if that stuff had been new to learn, which was the case with John! All John had conducted was his own work in the studio, basically. Like a lot of the studio composers, he conducted his own recording sessions. But it's a different thing when you have to start interpreting everybody else's work too. So, my hat's off to him. I'm sure he was a very busy boy! And at the same time composing film scores... (Audissino and Lehman 2018, 407–408)

- 12 Being appointed Principal Conductor not only entailed conducting the majority of the concerts and designing the season's programmes, but also setting the agenda, artistic policies, and objectives for the longer term. In the first press conferences, Williams tackled his plans for the Pops. The first point was the renewal of the repertoire:

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. [...] The first part 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 percent 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. (Dyer 1980c)

- 13 In Williams's debut season, one third of the circa sixty pieces presented consisted of new material that had never been performed by the Pops before (Pfeifer 1980). As regards the "trashy arrangements" of rock and disco music, Williams clearly sided against those:

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. (Dyer 1980c)

- 14 Another goal was the recovery of the "Great American Songbook":

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 composers were very lucky: I think of Richard Rodgers, who had Robert Russell Bennett working for him throughout most of his career. [...] But most of our songwriters were not as lucky as that, and most of their work is in very poor shape. Gershwin is in pretty good shape, because Ferde Grofé was around, but most of the work of his contemporaries is in unspeakable condition. 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, [...] 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. [...] The Pops is supposed to be the custodian of American popular music, and this is part of its job. (Dyer 1980c)

- 15 Finally, film music could be an essential ingredient of these innovations that Williams wanted to bring in:

It is possible that I can bring prestige to the best film music by presenting it in a concert format. Only one half of one percent of the music written in the 19th century is anything we ever hear today; surely there must be at least that percentage of good music written for films. (Dyer 1980d)

- 16 Fiedler had already programmed film music, and in order to give film music a better recognition, the mere presence of this repertoire in the concert programmes was not enough. The key operation was to increase the qualitative consideration of film music, not so much the quantitative presence. The original format of the Boston Pops programmes, discontinued in 2010, used to be a tripartite one. The first section was devoted to a selection of the “war horses” from the symphonic repertoire: opera overtures, selections from ballets, single movements of famous symphonies—Fiedler’s favourites were Gioachino Rossini’s Overture to *William Tell*, Franz von Suppe’s “Light Cavalry Overture,” or Aram Khachaturian’s “Sabre Dance” from the *Gayane* ballet suite.⁴ After an intermission, the second section would have a soloist in the spotlight, either from the “classical” or the “popular” arenas—examples are the pianist Earl Wild playing George Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue* or Ella Fitzgerald singing selections from Broadway showtunes. After another intermission, the closing section would provide the audience with the lighter treats in the programmes, what Fiedler called “gumdrops” (AAVV 2000, 36), in the form of symphonic arrangements of the most popular tunes, or symphonic marches, or humorous symphonic miniatures. It was in this third section that film music would be accommodated, and Fiedler used to choose film music in a pop language, something akin to the pop-song repertoire.

4. These pieces were also popular as stock music repeatedly used in films, and this might have made them familiar to the wider audience and consequently have facilitated the transition into more middlebrow territories. My thanks to the anonymous reviewer for having provided this suggestion.

17 A survey of the list of film-music pieces programmed by Fiedler during his tenure (Audissino 2016, 149–151) reveals the criteria at the base of his selections. Fiedler would choose new releases that had been hits in the easy-listening record charts—for example, “Lara’s Theme” from *Doctor Zhivago* (David Lean, 1965, music by Maurice Jarre), the theme from *Love Story* (Arthur Hiller, 1970, music by Francis Lai), “Gonna Fly Now” from *Rocky* (John G. Avildsen, 1976, music by Bill Conti), the sirtaki from *Zorba the Greek* (Michael Cacoyannis, 1964, music by Mikis Theodorakis)—or songs that had been featured in prominent recent films—“Raindrops Keep Falling on my Head” from *Butch Cassidy* (George Roy Hill, 1969, music by Burt Bacharach), for example. Fiedler did not consider film music as a potential new source to renovate the symphonic repertoire in the first part of the programmes—the Overture to *Gone with the Wind* (Victor Fleming, 1939, music by Max Steiner) instead of Rossini’s Overture to *The Barber of Seville*, for example—but as a type of popular music akin to showtunes. Williams’s innovative approach to the film-music repertoire consisted in a different *qualitative* consideration of film music. Since the performing medium was a symphony orchestra, Williams would choose film music written in a symphonic idiom and treat it as “classical music,” with the same philological respect due to any other symphonic piece. Fiedler, on the contrary, when featuring symphonic film music that had reached the hit status in the charts, would commission arrangements to make it sound “pop.” Examples include the “Main Title” from *Exodus* (Otto Preminger, 1960, music by Ernest Gold), which in the Fiedler version (Clip 5) sounds more “pop” than Gold’s original version (Clip 6), or the Jack Mason’s medley from *Fiddler on the Roof* (Clip 7) from the Fiedler era compared to Williams’s own “Excerpts for Violin and Orchestra” (Clip 8). Despite the wide availability of the original score for concert performances (Wessel 1983), Fiedler also had the “Main Title” from *Star Wars* turned into a less symphonic work, and a comparison between Williams’s original (Clip 9) and Newton Wayland and Richard Hayman’s arrangement, retitled “Theme and Dance from *Star Wars*” (Clip 10), is enlightening as to the widely divergent consideration that the two conductors had for film music.⁵

18 Williams also broke barriers in the concert programmes. The tripartite format used to relegate film music in the third part (the “pop” hits), while Williams began to include film-music pieces in the first part too, traditionally reserved for art-music classics popular with the wider audience. In one of his first concerts as the new Pops conductor (May 7, 1980; Figure 3), Williams opened the programme with Erich Wolfgang Korngold’s overture from the film *The Sea Hawk* (Michael Curtiz, 1940), an honour position usually reserved for traditional overtures from operas. I have already mentioned Williams’s attention for philological

5. “Theme and Dance from *Star Wars*” was released for the first time in the CD *The Arthur Fiedler Legacy. From Fabulous Broadway to Hollywood’s Reel Thing*, Deutsche Grammophon, 2007, 477 6124, with the deceptive title “*Star Wars*: Main Title” and without any mention of the arrangers’ names, thus passing it off as the original version.

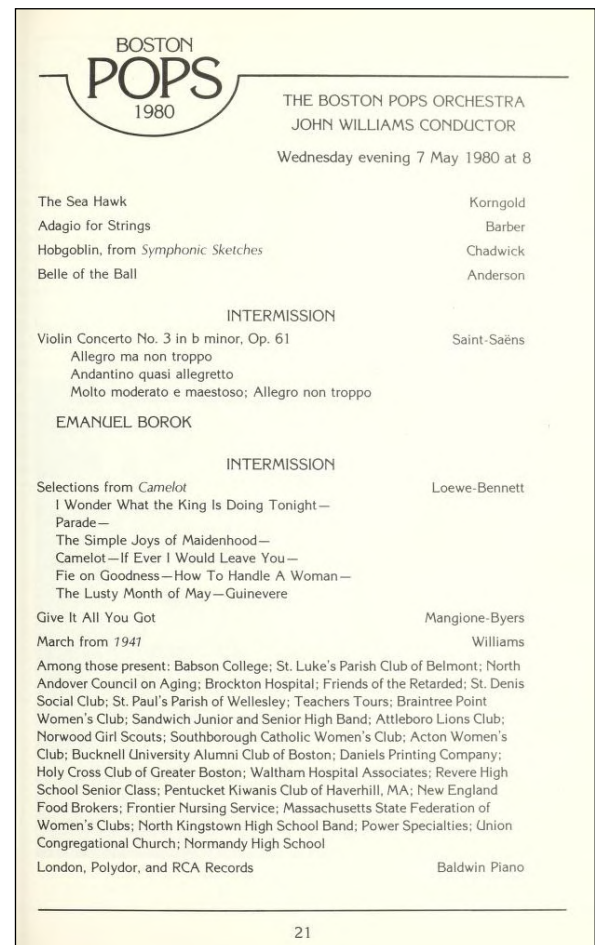


FIGURE 3
Concert program from the Boston Pops Orchestra, May 7, 1978.
Boston Pops. May–July 1980. John Williams Conductor.
Boston: Boston Symphony Orchestra, 1980, 21.

presentations and his commissions of faithful reconstruction in case the originals were inaccessible:

He [Williams] has also commissioned new orchestrations of Broadway tunes and hewed to a generally higher standard than prevailed in the last Fiedler years—Williams likes to have older music, and current music, orchestrated in the style of its own period rather than gussied up into an omnipresent and rootless “Pops” style. (Dyer 1983, 43)

- 19 Some of such reconstructed arrangements included “Singin’ in the Rain” (Nacho Herb Brown, Arthur Freed, Conrad Salinger) from *Singin’ in the Rain* (Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen, 1952) and “The Trolley Song” by Hugh Martin and Ralph Blaine from *Meet Me in St. Louis* (Vincente Minnelli, 1944, music adapted by Roger Edens) both based on Conrad Salinger’s original orchestrations.

20 The better quality and philological care of the arrangements were central ingredients in Williams's success in rebalancing the Pops to the centrum of the low-brow/high-brow spectrum. This rebalancing was a subtle adjustment that introduced inner changes, not a drastic change liable to upset the tradition and the time-honed exterior format—in Williams' words, "We have to reinvent the Pops, but think about it in terms of change that is evolutionary and not revolutionary, because we have a responsibility to our enormous audience as well" ("[Williams Returns to the Pops with His Evolutionary Plans](#)" 1984).⁶

21 What was expected by many observers in 1980 to be just a temporary and short-lived occupation for the Hollywood composer ([Pfeifer 1982](#)), on the contrary, ended up lasting for a fourteen-season tenure. At the time of Williams's retirement in 1993, the *Boston Globe* music critic Richard Dyer described the conductor's overall contribution in these terms:

Williams succeeded because it simply didn't occur to him to try to imitate Arthur Fiedler, any more than it occurred to him to remake the Pops in his own image. [...] He brought his own missionary zeal to the cause of film music, and not just his own. [...] His ear told him when an arrangement was dated and needed to be replaced; he and his team were as alert as Fiedler was to what was going on around him and what the Pops could use. He could also clean an arrangement up in less time than it would take someone else just to rehearse. He believed that serious composers should be encouraged to write light music, so the Pops commissioned new pieces nearly every year. [...] Williams conducts Pops music because he honestly believes in its value and its role in American life. [...] John Williams once said that he has spent his life as a working musician, and he has. It has been a life that has made a difference, that still makes a difference, because everything he does is always just a little bit better than it needs to be. That's just the way John Williams is. ([Dyer 1993a](#), 33–37)

22 The Boston Symphony Orchestra music historian Steven Ledbetter also stressed Williams's success in increasing the international visibility of the Boston Pops:

In addition to leading the Pops at home and on a lengthy series of best-selling recordings, John Williams has brought Boston to the world, both on widely televised appearances such as the Statue of Liberty Centennial in 1986 and on extraordinarily successful tours with the Boston Pops Orchestra and the Boston Pops Esplanade Orchestra, including appearances in Japan in 1987 and 1990. The orchestra celebrated its centennial in 1985, with various activities led by Mr. Williams to affirm its position as the preeminent ensemble for pops repertory. ([Ledbetter 1993](#), 30–31)

23 Williams's achievements at the end of his tenure have been summarised as follows:

6. A famous incident happened in 1984: Williams abruptly resigned from the post, a decision that was the result of "creative differences" between his serious views of popular (and film) music and the prejudices that still lingered with some orchestra members. Pressed to reconsider, Williams withdrew the resignation after two months, on the condition that work routines for the orchestra be ameliorated ([Audissino 2021a](#), 44–51).

13 seasons [14, actually], more than 300 concerts, six national or international tours, 24 premieres and commissions, 28 CDs and nearly 50 television shows. Along the way, Williams has brought some of the leading artists of several musical worlds to the Pops [...] Williams took from Fiedler what worked: the shape of the program, the mix of music, putting the spotlight not only on celebrities but on members of the orchestra and young musicians. Williams improved discipline and morale and raised the standard of performance. (Dyer 1993b)⁷

- 24 Williams's other career as a conductor did not end when he resigned from his Boston post, because he was given the title of "Boston Pops Laureate Conductor" and has continued to be an active part of the Boston Symphony family—for example, with his annual presence at the Tanglewood Music Festival, the BSO's summer headquarters, as "Artist in Residence"—and to give concerts with the orchestra regularly, in what became the much-awaited "John Williams Film Night" concerts. Nor was his conductor's career limited to the Boston Pops. Once he accepted the Pops conductorship, Williams received a mounting number of invitations as guest conductor from other orchestras, which included such top institutions as the New York Philharmonic, the Cleveland Orchestra, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the National Symphony Orchestra. He made further appearances at the Royal Albert Hall for those FilmHarmonic concerts that had seen him debuting as a concert conductor (for example, in 1980 with the National Philharmonic Orchestra). He also gave concerts with the *Star Wars* orchestra, the London Symphony, starting in 1978. Williams guest-conducted in the US, in Japan, and in the UK, while he had never given concerts in continental Europe, until his nineties. After a two-year delay due to health issues, he debuted with the Wiener Philharmoniker, perhaps the epitome of European art-music protectionism, on January 18, 2020, at the age of 87. This was a concert of truly historic significance, because the Wiener Philharmoniker had never given an entire film-music concert before, led by a Hollywood composer, in their prestigious Musikverein hall in Vienna. The presence of the world-renowned classical violin virtuoso Anne-Sophie Mutter as the concert's soloist added further lustre to the event, an ulterior attestation of acceptance of the film-music repertoire from the "classical" circles. The Vienna concert was followed by two other historic debuts for Williams and for Hollywood film music: the Berlin concerts with the Berliner Philharmoniker in October 2021 and Williams's debut, at 90, with the Filarmonica de La Scala in Milan, in December 2022, in the temple of Italian opera, La Scala theatre. On that occasion, Italian reviewers praised the orchestra for having invited the veteran composer and lauded the event, which managed to finally bring into the venerable theatre younger and more vital patrons than those who typically are to be seen at La Scala (Giacomotti 2022). The recent European concerts

7. Later, Dyer corrected his estimate and brought the number of concerts to 600 units (Dyer 1993c). These are Williams' tours with the Pops: July 7 – August 1, 1985, USA; November 23 – December 8, 1987, Japan; July 23 – August 6, 1989, USA; June 4–19, 1990, Japan; July 28 – August 9, 1992, USA; June 10–21, 1993, Japan.

were yet another step in that mission of bringing symphonic music to the masses that Williams had started with his film-composer work and had continued with his job at the Pops, and then as an indefatigable guest conductor—in September 2023, at 91, he travelled to Japan for two concerts with the Saito Kinen Orchestra.

Composer as a Conductor / Conductor as a Composer

- 25 From the above survey, it is clear that Williams's activity as a conductor cannot simply be considered a part-time sporadic diversion. His conductor's career was so substantial and continuative as to prompt one to consider it *parallel*, not secondary, to his much more studied composer's career. The two career paths can be seen not only as parallel but also as integrated and interdependent, at least from *Star Wars* onwards, when Williams's "neoclassical" (Audissino 2021b, 135–147) revival of symphonic film music had been successfully established. Around that time, Williams was increasingly showing a remarkable preoccupation for the concert adaptation of his film scores, the first instances being identifiable in the concert adaptations of *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* encouraged by the Los Angeles Philharmonic in 1977. The *Star Wars* suite published by Warner Bros. Music—running approximately thirty minutes and featuring, as written on the score's table of contents, the "Main Title," "The Little People," "Here They Come," "Princess Leia's Theme," "The Cantina Band" (optional, scored for a small jazz combo), "The Battle," "The Throne Room and End Titles"—enjoyed a wide success and, between 1977 and 1979, the rental numbers tallied around 400 performances (Livingstone 1980, 76). Williams's film music was gradually entering the symphonic repertoire, at least that of Pops orchestras—like the Cincinnati Pops Orchestra—or of Pops programmes, like those with the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Williams's appointment at the Boston Pops provided a timely and compellingly visible rostrum from which to showcase film music's viability as a concert repertoire.
- 26 It can be said that Williams acted as an advocate for the legitimacy and viability of the film-music repertoire as a source for new concert pieces. Though, similarly to the statement about not having intended to conduct in public, Williams has also been characteristically anticlimactic in his downplaying of the matter of concert adaptations of his film score:

If I can take the music out of the soundtrack and have it almost resemble music, this is a minor miracle, and a double asset. [...] If I write a 100-minute score, there may be 20 minutes that could be extracted and played. The other 80 minutes is functional accompani-

ment that could never stand on its own and was never intended to.
(Stearns 1993, 22)

- 27 The statement, though, can be contrasted with Jack Sullivan's correct annotation that "Williams envisions his projects as cinematic concerts" (Sullivan 2017, 186). Indeed, even before the *Star Wars* concert presentations and at least since *Jaws*—which featured the "Preparing the Cage" fugato and the "One Barrel Chase" Korngoldian symphonic scherzo—Williams had clearly shown an awareness of the concert-performance potentials of his film scores. Three attitudes betray such undeniable interest in the future concert life of selections—often many selections—from his film scores.
- 28 First, we have the use of classical forms from the art-music practice, an aspect that challenges the general opinion that film music's fragmentary nature makes it necessarily refractory to traditional musical forms (Pren-dergast 1977, 215–233). Williams often mobilises musical forms that are akin to those of art music: mentioning only a few examples, the *scherzo* in *Jane Eyre*, in *Dracula* (John Badham, 1979), in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (Steven Spielberg, 1989), in *Star Wars: Episode VII – The Force Awakens* (J. J. Abrams, 2015); the *fugato* in *Jaws*, in *Black Sunday* (John Frankenheimer, 1977), in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2004); stand-alone pieces for chorus and orchestra, like the carols in *Home Alone* (Chris Columbus, 1990), the "Gloria" in *Monsignor* (Frank Perry, 1982), "Exsultate Justi" in *Empire of the Sun* (Steven Spielberg, 1987), and "Hymn to the Fallen" in *Saving Private Ryan* (Steven Spielberg, 1998); action scenes scored like ballet numbers, for example in *Jurassic Park* (Steven Spielberg, 1993) or in *Hook* (Steven Spielberg, 1991). Williams employs traditional forms in some cues in his film scores that are almost ready as they are for a concert presentation: if a coda is added to close a passage left open in the film score, we have "The Asteroid Field" concert piece from *Star Wars: Episode V – The Empire Strikes Back* or "The Lost Boys Ballet" from *Hook*. From the finale cues for *E.T. The Extraterrestrial* (Steven Spielberg, 1982) Williams adapted—with the mere deletion of a few central measures—what is known in concert programmes as *Adventures on Earth*. The musicologist Sergio Miceli—characteristically stern in his judgement of Hollywood music—singled out the merits of this concert version: "Thanks to its thematic concatenations, the piece alludes convincingly to the musical macro-forms of the Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries [...] showing a musical legitimacy rarely to be found in film-music adaptations" (Miceli 2009, 249–250).
- 29 A second sign of Williams's concern for the stand-alone life of his film works is the simultaneous composition of the film score *and* a set of expanded or reworked cues that are recorded specifically for the related LP albums, a practice in which Henry Mancini excelled (although in

his case this applied to the creation of easy-listening pop albums). With Williams, the results are sorts of suites of adapted cues from the film score, as in the case of the *Jaws* or the *Star Wars* albums, or symphonic poems, as is the case for the *E.T. The Extraterrestrial* album. A significant example is *The Fury* (Brian De Palma, 1978): the film music track (23 cues and 55 minutes of music) was recorded with a studio orchestra in Los Angeles, while for the album Williams decided to record the nine entries of the forty-minute suite with the London Symphony Orchestra in the UK. Selections from the film score would be expressly expanded and re-arranged for the albums, in order to provide a better musical solidity and closure; but the track list would also be re-arranged in a different order than the cues' appearance in the film, to pursue criteria of musical variety and balance aimed at an autonomous music experience. The LP album of *Star Wars* constitutes a good illustration: the "The Little People Work" track follows "Ben's Death and TIE Fighter Attack," in reverse order than they appear in the film; The "Main Title" in the album is the combination of the cue that opens the film, over the crawling titles, with the cue that plays over the end credits—Williams explained, in the album's liner notes: "I combined part of the end title with the opening music to give the beginning of the record the feeling of an overture" (Williams 1977). A comparison of the 1982 LP album of *E.T. The Extraterrestrial* (MCA Records 1982, CD, MCLD 19021) with the cues written for the film provides some examples of such adaptation procedures. The film cue for the Halloween sequence and the following bicycle flight over the moon ("The Magic of Halloween") lasts 02:53, while the album track titled "E.T.'s Halloween" lasts 04:07. The album version expands the opening staccato march for oboes, bassoons, and muted trumpets by lengthening the trumpets phrase and repeating the comically faltering opening motif for oboes and bassoons, now backed by Prokofievian staccato strings; then the majestic horns motif heard as the bicycle runs through the forest is enriched with a counterpoint by the flutes that anticipates the motivic material of the next section, unlike in the film cue; the crescendo section that leads to the flying theme is coloured by a more foregrounded piano part; the music for the flying scene is expanded through a double statement of the flying theme, and closed by a prolonged finale by the flutes that leads to a gradual deflation to the piece, unlike the more abrupt closure of the film track, in which the flying theme is interrupted as the bicycle hits the ground.

- 30 The third indicator of Williams's concern for film music's concert potentials is the recurrent presence of world-class "classical" soloists invited to record the film scores and albums. Their presence entails the inclusion in the film compositions of parts that are musically interesting and challenging enough to cater to the virtuosic and interpretive skills of the guest soloists.

Examples of such esteemed musicians are the violinist Isaac Stern for *Fiddler on the Roof*, the percussionist Stomu Yamash'ta for *Images* (Robert Altman, 1972); the harmonicist Toots Thielemans for *The Sugarland Express* (Steven Spielberg, 1974); the trumpeter Tim Morrison for *Born on the Fourth of July* (Oliver Stone, 1989) and *JFK* (Oliver Stone, 1991); the violinist Itzhak Perlman for *Schindler's List* (Steven Spielberg, 1994) and *Memoirs of a Geisha* (Rob Marshall, 2005); the cellist Yo-Yo Ma for *Seven Years in Tibet* (Jean-Jacques Annaud, 1997) and *Memoirs of a Geisha*; the guitarist Christopher Parkening for *Stepmom* (Chris Columbus, 1998); the Chicago Symphony Orchestra—in their first, and so far only, foray into film scoring—for *Lincoln* (Steven Spielberg, 2012); the star conductor Gustavo Dudamel as a guest-conductor for selected cues in *Star Wars: Episode VII – The Force Awakens*; the violinist Anne-Sophie Mutter for *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny* (James Mangold, 2023). The involvement of these illustrious performers has generated a wealth of film-music pieces for solo and orchestra which are ready to become concert pieces for soloist and orchestra—Williams's eight-minute-long *Elegy*, a concert piece for cello and orchestra, originated from the one-minute cue “Regaining a Son” from *Seven Years in Tibet*, which had the cellist Yo-Yo Ma as guest soloist.⁸

- 31 From his appointment as Boston Pops conductor, we can say that Williams has further developed such attention to the concert viability of his film scores: being a composer was still his principal occupation and preoccupation, but he would make sure that the film score should serve the film's need while at the same time provide substantial musical materials, and in the proper formal coherence, as to offer suitable excerpts for concert presentations. The vast majority of the scores that Williams composed since 1980 originated some concert piece that was premiered with the Boston Pops, from single pieces—for example, “Theme” from *The Accidental Tourist* (Lawrence Kasdan, 1988) or “Dry Your Tears, Afrika” from *Amistad* (Steven Spielberg, 1997)—to suites of various length, for example, one from *The Witches of Eastwick* (George Miller, 1987) that includes “The Tennis Game,” “Balloon Sequence,” “Devil's Dance,”⁹ or the one from *Hook*, consisting of “The Flight to Neverland,” “The Face of Pan,” “Smee's Plan,” “The Banquet Scene”), and one from *Schindler's List* (“Theme,” “Jewish Town (Krakow Ghetto – Winter '41),” “Remembrances”).
- 32 Williams has retained this attention to the extrafilmic life of film music up to the present day, despite the current dominant film-music style. After the year 2000, Hollywood saw radical changes in its workflow, moving from the old-school analogue and linear post-production processes to digital and non-linear ones, and such changes impacted on the post-2000 style of film music, as I have examined elsewhere ([Audissino](#)

8. The film cue “Regaining a Son” does not feature Ma at the cello: the theme is presented by the string orchestra and it only occurs in that one scene. The concert version—itsself adapted from a 2002 piece for piano and cello—has the cello presenting the theme over a restrained background of harp and sustained strings, and then the piece develops into a series of variations for solo and orchestra.

9. In the film the “Balloon Sequence” is interspersed with Pavarotti's rendition of “Nessun Dorma” from Giacomo Puccini's *Turandot* (1924) and only the head and ending of the piece can be heard. The full version was released on the album *Hooray for Hollywood* (Philip Records, 1987) along with the “Devil's Dance”. The other piece, “The Tennis Game,” was premiered during a 1996 Boston Symphony televised fund-raising concert, with Seiji Ozawa on the podium and Williams himself playing the piano parts ([Clip 11](#)).

2022). Post-production executed on Avid Media Composer, or similar editing software, and Digital Audio Workstations had the effect of requiring film music to be more compatible with the resulting thicker sound design and more flexible for the more hectic editing pace. This meant that music has been increasingly less melodic and polyphonic, and more percussion-based and visceral. The frequent re-editing of the film and the changes that could now happen until the very last moment necessitate a type of music that can also be as easily and swiftly modified at the last moment: a more modular and non-structured type of composition, eschewing longer patterns, developments, or forms (Audissino 2022). One of Williams's characteristic compositional techniques is the "gradual disclosure of the main theme" (Audissino 2021b, 145–147, 293), a way in which a musical theme is at first presented fragmentarily and then in increasingly larger chunks—so as to make the audience familiar with it across the film—and finally presented in its entirety during some emotionally strong moment in the film. The "pleasure of recognition" (Meyer 1996, 210, n. 185) of finally hearing the entire theme that had previously been only foreshadowed triggers a satisfying reaction that is liable to boost the emotional moment in the film. A textbook example is the "Flying Theme" in *E.T. The Extraterrestrial*, which is presented in its full form during the flying-over-the-moon sequence (Audissino 2017a, 206–207). Such extended design of the film score—the "teleological genesis" (Schneller 2014, 99) that makes Williams's film scores singular in their formal cohesiveness—requires the composer to watch the film in its entirety, so as to be able to map such extended thematic revelation across the narrative, and it also requires the film's cut to remain relatively unchanged from the moment in which the composer "spots" the rough cut to write down the timings, to when the score is recorded, to when the recorded music is dubbed onto the final cut of the film. This completeness and stability of the working cut is no longer the case in contemporary Hollywood cinema.

- 33 Williams had already modified his idiom in the second *Star Wars* trilogy to better fit the music within the now thicker sound-effects stems, making the music more percussive and with an emphasis on the high and low range, instead of the more melodic and middle-range writing of the first trilogy (Audissino 2017b). With the third trilogy, it is clear that Williams also had to discard his "gradual disclosure of the main theme" approach, not only because with such thick sound design it would be pointless to write extended melodies as in the first trilogy, but more importantly because Williams never got to see an entire cut of the whole film, as he was compelled to work only on disconnected chunks of the films. Fragmentariness has come in hand with unstableness, as these films have typically also been liable to be recut and changed dramatically, also

involving reshoots of the ending—as happened also with *Indiana Jones and The Dial of Destiny*, an information that was disclosed by Williams himself during his concert at La Scala in Milan (December 12, 2022). If the composer lacks a complete view of the film, and if the film is highly unstable and liable to change until the very last minute, it is inevitable that the film score cannot be designed in a developmental and extended-design manner, as happened before.

- 34 A consequence of this forced adaptation to the new more fluid workflow, Williams has increased the amount of “recycled” materials in the third *Star Wars* trilogy and the fifth *Indiana Jones* instalment—for example, the cue “Auction at Hotel L’Atlantique” in *Indiana Jones V* sounds as if repurposing parts of the cue “The Duel” from *The Adventures of Tintin* (Steven Spielberg, 2011). This might be interpreted as a way to, resignedly, face the new demands of the industry, a sort of autopilot coping mechanism. Yet, to counter this interpretation, Williams has kept producing concert pieces out of these latest scores, perhaps redirecting, under such novel working conditions, the bulk of his attention from the music as featured in the film to the music as playable on the concert stage. An entire new suite was derived from *Star Wars: Episode VII – The Force Awakens*, also including an intricate fugato march (“The March of the Resistance”) and a virtuoso showcase for the brass (“Scherzo for X Wings”). For *Star Wars: Episode VIII – The Last Jedi* (Rian Johnson, 2017) he created a theme for Rose, a secondary character, on which is built a five-minute-long concert piece titled “The Rebellion Is Reborn.” His collaboration with John Powell for the *Star Wars* spin-off *Solo: A Star Wars Story* (Ron Howard, 2018) produced the Han Solo theme at the basis of the concert work “The Adventures of Han,” another virtuoso action scherzo. If the score to *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny* is not as rich as the previous instalments in thematic material, it is nevertheless dominated by “Helena’s Theme,” a richly “old-school” romantic piece which Williams conceived at the same time as a concert piece written expressly for Anne-Sophie Mutter, showcased over the end credits. Some of the aforementioned pieces were brought to Europe in Williams’s tour of some of the top continental orchestras. “The Rebellion Is Reborn” was featured in the Vienna and Milan concerts; “The Adventures of Han” in the Berlin and Milan concerts; “Helena’s Theme” was played at La Scala, in Milan. Despite the changed working conditions for film composers in Hollywood and the adaptation of his own work routines to adjust to the new demands, Williams has managed to sustain his interest in the concert performability of film music and to carry on with the fruitful integration and interaction of his parallel careers. Williams the composer wrote a theme for the film and at the same time Williams the conductor

saw the potential, or made sure there was the potential, for a concert piece in some part of the score.

Conclusions

- 35 Williams the conductor had begun his tenure at the Pops with personal hesitation and with some people's concern about his lack of concert-conducting experience, something which some critics had questioned, if not openly and vitriolically condemned ([Audissino 2014, 141–142](#)). Yet, the final assessment of the reluctant conductor who had never intended to conduct in public was positive. A 1984 review of a Williams concert in Los Angeles already noted:

The orchestra offered [...] a program of four traditional Russian works played about as splendidly as one could hope to hear them. Clearly John Williams, the much-maligned composer-conductor, deserves a hefty portion of the credit. He led the whole program with musical assurance, rhythmic incision and a welcome absence of indulgence. Indeed, Williams is much underrated as a serious conductor. He may or may not have revelatory insights into Beethoven, but he is certainly a solid musician who can keep an orchestra not only together, but also in the service of his soundly musical ideas. ([Moss 1984](#))

- 36 Later on, in 1991, more praise was added:

When he conducted the current concertmaster Tamara Smirnova-Sajfar in the Tchaikovsky Concerto a few years back, he did a better job than some Boston Symphony guest conductors who come to mind, and there's more than one celebrity recording of a popular concerto that would have been better if John Williams had conducted it. ([Dyer 1991b](#))

- 37 The entirely positive review of Williams's début in 1993 as guest conductor of the Boston Symphony in a programme of "serious" music pointed out: "Of course he could have had a career as a symphonic conductor if he had wanted it" ([Dyer 1993c](#)).
- 38 More importantly, Williams's second career, one that blossomed serendipitously and unintendedly in the 1980s, proved to be the apt extension of what Williams had already been doing in the 1970s in his film works: the revival of symphonic film music and the presentation to the large audience of how engrossing and exciting the sound of an acoustic symphony orchestra can be. The conductorship of the Boston Pops allowed Williams to extend this mission from the film theatres to America's most visible concert hall, Boston's Symphony Hall. From the privileged

Boston Pops podium, Williams was able to demonstrate the potentials of the film-music repertoire as a lively repository from which symphonic programmes could be freshened up.

- 39 It is amply evident that Williams's conductorship of the Boston Pops had a seminal impact on the legitimisation of film music as concert music (Audissino 2021a, 58–65), and the latest stamps of approval have been the invitation to conduct top orchestras such as the Wiener Philharmoniker, the Berliner Philharmoniker, or the Filarmonica de La Scala, which only a few years ago would have not even touched this repertoire. The Vienna concert was particularly meaningful and symbolic. If Erich Wolfgang Korngold had brought European art music "From Vienna to Hollywood" (Taruskin 2005, 549), and then that late-Romantic idiom was discarded because it had become antiquated to the ears of the dominant Darmstadt modernists, Williams brought back "Hollywood to Vienna" in return. This, through Williams's conducting activities, has given the almost century-old history of Hollywood music a neat sense of closure and circularity. Once vilified and disdained, film music has now come to be (more) accepted in the temples of art music. Within the tension between high-brow and low-brow, Williams has managed to achieve a rare balance, if not to contribute to discarding such passé categories altogether: "Williams' importance is that he has constantly reminded us that lasting popular success is not incompatible with high artistic standards" (Dyer 1991b).
- 40 Consistent academic study on John Williams has started only too recently (Audissino 2018) and has tended to focus on John Williams the composer. More study is needed of the other facet of his artistic life, John Williams the conductor, a facet that should be neither ignored nor underestimated if one wishes to understand and appreciate his work to the fullest extent. The synergy between the composer and the conductor is demonstrably an essential drive of Williams's artistry.

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Fanfares pour les athlètes exceptionnelles : John Williams et la mise en musique du mythe olympique, 1984–2002

Fanfares for the Exceptional Athletes: John Williams's Fanfares and the Olympic Myth, 1984–2002

Yann Descamps

Mots clés : Williams (John), Jeux olympiques, cérémonies d'ouverture, mythe, performance

Keywords: Williams (John), Olympic Games, opening ceremonies, myth, performance

RÉSUMÉ

Mêlant histoire culturelle du sport, sémiologie, musicologie et études communicationnelles, cet article envisage dans quelle mesure les musiques olympiques de John Williams participent de la construction d'un mythe politique transmédiatique autour de l'olympisme et du spectacle sportif de la fin du xx^e et du début du xxi^e siècles. Tout d'abord, il aborde la corporéité de ces pièces et de leurs performances, traçant un parallèle entre l'athlète et le·a musicien·ne. Ensuite, il en souligne la dimension mythologique plurielle, jusqu'à la question du mythe politique. Enfin, il évoque ces projets artistiques et philosophiques sous l'angle des tensions et des limites inhérentes au spectacle sportif de l'époque. En somme, il s'agit d'étudier le discours musical de John Williams sur et dans le spectacle sportif transmédiatique des Jeux olympiques pour en déceler la dimension politique et corporelle.

ABSTRACT

Calling on cultural history of sport, semiotics, musicology, and communication studies, this article examines the extent to which John Williams's Olympic music contributes to the construction of a transmedia political myth around Olympism and sporting events in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. First, it addresses the physicality of these pieces and their performances, drawing a parallel between athletes and musicians. Next, it highlights their plural mythological dimension, and the potential consolidation of a political myth. Finally, it discusses these artistic and philosophical projects in relation to the tensions and limitations of the sporting spectacle of the time. In a nutshell, this paper studies John Williams' musical discourse on and within the transmedia sporting spectacle of the Olympic Games in order to identify its political and physical/bodily dimensions.

- 1 Les musiques de film de John Williams ont accompagné les exploits de nombreux héros du cinéma américain et suscité les passions d'un public international, comme l'intérêt de chercheur-euses du monde entier (Tylski 2011 ; Audissino 2021 ; Huvet 2022). Or d'autres compositions héroïques, à savoir les fanfares olympiques que Williams fut invité à composer pour les Jeux d'été de Los Angeles 1984 et Atlanta 1996, et les Jeux d'hiver de Salt Lake City 2002, n'ont reçu que peu d'attention. Pourtant, celles-ci permettent de revisiter l'héritage du compositeur. Le choix de Williams par les différents comités organisateurs américains ancre le statut du compositeur comme incarnation contemporaine de l'*Americana* et maître de la bande-son héroïque, deux aspects dont les cérémonies d'ouverture américaines étaient largement empreintes, des tableaux célébrant l'histoire culturelle et musicale du pays au Colisée de Los Angeles à la célébration du courage des pompiers du 11 septembre 2001 à Salt Lake City, en passant par l'héroïsme politique de Martin Luther King Jr. mis en avant dans sa ville d'Atlanta. Ce choix a d'ailleurs été confirmé par les médias américains comme la chaîne NBC, gourmande utilisatrice des sonorités virtuoses de Williams, tirées de ces fanfares olympiques comme de sa composition à destination de la chaîne pour les Jeux de Séoul 1988, *Olympic Spirit*. L'utilisation de Williams à trois reprises (un fait unique dans l'histoire de l'Olympisme), tout comme l'obtention par ce dernier de l'Ordre olympique des mains du CIO en 2003 (IOC News 2003), mettent en lumière un lien conçu comme évident pour les organisateurs entre la musique de Williams et les Jeux olympiques, lien toujours prégnant aujourd'hui alors que les fanfares olympiques du compositeur américain ont dépassé leur statut de bande-son des Jeux de Los Angeles 1984, Atlanta 1996 et Salt Lake City 2002, pour devenir de véritables musiques olympiques réinvesties à chaque Olympiade par les médias et les autres pays-hôtes, et invoquant instantanément au public et aux annonceurs

les idéaux véhiculés par ces événements (John Williams Fan Network JWFFAN 2014 ; Comcast 2016). Il s'agit ici d'interroger ces évidences, et particulièrement leurs enjeux corporels. En effet, les Jeux olympiques et leurs cérémonies d'ouverture sont des spectacles totaux transmédia-tiques producteurs de sens, dont la matière même est le corps sportif et son histoire. Au sein de ces spectacles, la musique de Williams, comme les scénographies déployées autour d'elle, sont signifiantes. Conçues par Williams selon ses dires pour mettre en musique un idéal olympique devenu mythe universel, ses fanfares permettent au final d'interroger ce que Jean-Marie Brohm nomme le « mythe olympique » (1981), idéal en puissance d'apolitisme, de paix et d'égalité non réalisé en actes à travers les différentes Olympiades. Plus encore, ces compositions en viennent à constituer elles-mêmes des récits à dimension mythologique et politique, dans un contexte censé être apolitique et pourtant politisé en tous points et en tous médias, des discours et rituels patriotiques et olympiques aux images et commentaires télévisés (Moragas Spà, Rivenburgh, Larson 1995), en passant par la musique. Il s'agit donc d'étudier le discours musical de John Williams, généralement associé à un héroïsme cinématographique, sur et dans le spectacle sportif transmédiatique des Jeux olympiques, où le spectacle se joue et le sens est transmis de médium en médium en s'adaptant organiquement à ceux-ci et leurs caractéristiques (Jenkins 2006), et ce pour en déceler la dimension politique et corporelle. En effet, dans quelle mesure les fanfares olympiques de John Williams et leur mise en scène lors des cérémonies d'ouverture de 1984, 1996 et 2002 mettent-elles en notes, en tableaux et en corps un mythe politique toujours plus transmédiatique autour de l'olympisme et du spectacle sportif de la fin du xx^e et du début du xxi^e siècles ? Dans un premier temps, il s'agira d'envisager la corporéité des fanfares olympiques de John Williams, puis leur dimension mythologique, avant de déceler dans ces fanfares et leurs « performances » le reflet des tensions inhérentes au spectacle sportif de l'époque.

- 2 La présente étude est donc consacrée aux trois fanfares olympiques composées par John Williams, à savoir *Olympic Fanfare and Theme* (1984), *Summon the Heroes* (1996) et *Call of the Champions* (2002), ainsi qu'aux retransmissions télévisées des cérémonies d'ouverture des Jeux olympiques de 1984, 1996 et 2002 durant lesquelles elles furent jouées¹, et aux prises de parole du compositeur à leur sujet dans les médias ou dans le cadre d'entretiens publiés (Guegold 1996). Mêlant histoire culturelle du sport, sémiologie, musicologie (Grabócz 2007) et études médiatiques, elle consiste en une analyse musicale des fanfares combinée à une analyse iconologique des cérémonies, avec pour objectif de resituer les fanfares et leurs messages à l'aune de l'histoire politique, sociale et culturelle du sport et de l'olympisme, ainsi que des spécificités de la musique de Williams

1. News from the Past. « Games of the XXIII Olympiad, Opening Ceremonies ». *YouTube*. 22 juillet 2021. 02:59:52. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=llCzm7MB-aQ>. Olympics. « Atlanta 1996 Opening Ceremony | Atlanta 1996 Replays ». *YouTube*. 18 mai 2020. 04:02:11. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4n0a-yNO8fE>. Olympics. « Salt Lake City 2002 Opening Ceremony | Salt Lake City 2002 Replays ». *YouTube*. 25 mai 2020. 02:42:25. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ui3vlpG6Ec>.

(Tylski 2011 ; Audissino 2021 ; Huvet 2022). Elle envisage la question d'une sémiologie musicale et du sens possiblement contenu en musique (Meyer 1961), comme la spécificité musicale des fanfares olympiques dans la lignée des travaux musicologiques de Nicholas Attfield (2017). Plus encore, elle envisage la musique comme un « langage » permettant de « produire et de faire circuler du sens » (Hall 1997, 1), en d'autres termes de produire une représentation, notamment des idéaux olympiques ici interrogés. Cette représentation, à la fois en musique et en tableaux chorégraphiés mis en scène lors des cérémonies, s'insère dans une généalogie des images et des motifs musicaux, et donc dans une « intericonicité » (Barthes 1964 ; Courtine 2011) ou une intersonorité à prendre en compte au moment d'envisager ce fameux sens partagé. Autre élément à prendre en compte, la dimension mythologique des compositions de John Williams, soulignée par le compositeur lui-même (cité dans Guegold 1996, xi). Les travaux de Joseph Campbell sur le monomythe ([1949] 2008) et de Raoul Girardet sur les mythes et mythologies politiques (1986) permettent un autre éclairage sur le sens dénoté et connoté par ces fanfares. Enfin, cette étude porte un regard ancré dans le champ des STAPS, afin de donner à ces fanfares leur corporéité propre, elle-même resituée au sein d'un « mythe olympique » (Brohm 1981) ayant le corps-même pour objet, et au sein d'un spectacle sportif où le rôle de la musique dans la recherche d'une « unisonance », ou d'une union sonore productrice et reflet d'une union corporelle et sociale (Eichberg 2009), est à interroger dans sa dimension politique.

Corps en musique, musique en corps : de la corporéité des fanfares olympiques de Williams

- 3 Derrière l'évidence souvent invoquée au sujet des fanfares olympiques de John Williams, à savoir leur caractère virtuose et l'émotion quasi-viscérale qu'elles procurent (Braider 1996 et 2002 ; John Williams Fan Network JWFAN 2014 ; Comcast 2016 ; Gelt 2023), il y a la question fondamentale du spirituel et du corporel. Enjeu traditionnel du processus créatif artistique, elle apparaît de manière éclatante dans les œuvres du compositeur, à la corporéité qu'il convient de souligner.

Corps du dedans, corps du dehors

- 4 Cette tension entre corps et esprit et sa présence au sein de la création musicale ont été largement discutées par John Williams au sujet de ces fanfares censées symboliser musicalement l'exploit sportif. En vérité, si le

compositeur pose à la base de sa réflexion une dichotomie claire entre une musique et un art « spirituel » et un sport « physique » par essence (cité dans [Guegold 1996, xi](#)), celle-ci a évolué pour percevoir davantage de liens entre sport et musique. En effet, Williams souligne aussi l'occasionnelle dimension artistique et spirituelle du sport au détour de moments d'exception, comme il perçoit des points communs entre athlètes et musiciens dans l'entraînement, l'importance du tempo (cité dans [Guegold 1996, xii, xiv-xv](#)) et la propension à incarner « l'esprit humain qui se dépasse pour se réaliser et prouver son existence » (cité dans [Rogers 1984](#)). Dans ces fanfares olympiques, il va plus loin, en symbolisant musicalement l'expérience physique et spirituelle des athlètes sur la piste, et en donnant notes à une représentation et une mise en musique du « corps du dedans et du dehors » de l'athlète ([Vigarello 2014](#)), de sa performance physique à son ressenti en passant par ses émotions ressenties. *Olympic Fanfare and Theme* incarne parfaitement cette démarche, de l'entrée des héros·ïnes dans l'arène sportive à leur victoire finale, en passant par mille ressentis avant, pendant et après la course : « Vous êtes sur la ligne de départ, seul, tout est si calme, vous êtes si intensément concentré. [...] Et puis d'un seul coup, le bruit. [...] Peut-être que, si mon imagination ne me joue pas des tours, les athlètes ressentent de nouveau l'énergie de la foule en approchant de la ligne d'arrivée. Enfin, un final en fanfare, une célébration du vainqueur et un salut à l'ensemble des compétiteurs² » (cité dans [John Williams Fan Network JW Fan 2014](#)). Dans sa pièce, Williams retranscrit la concentration avec le lyrisme introspectif des cordes et des nuances *mezzo forte*, pour ensuite rendre l'effort puis la victoire avec des nuances plus fortes et la puissance des cuivres. Ainsi, Williams met en musique une expérience corporelle, psychologique, sensorielle, émotionnelle et spirituelle, donnant une profonde dimension corporelle à des œuvres pourtant par principe grandiloquentes. Du tableau héroïque, on passe à une peinture du ressenti corporel de l'athlète.

2. « You are at the start line, you are alone, it is so quiet, the focus is so intense. [...] Then it does get loud. [...] Maybe, if my imagination is right, as they approach to the winning line, the athletes will again begin to start to feel the crowd. Then, a flourish till the end, a salute to the winner, and a salute to the competitors. »

« Plus vite, plus haut, plus fort »

- 5 Au-delà de la retranscription du ressenti de l'athlète, il y a celle de l'idéal athlétique. En effet, en entretien, Williams souligne son projet, à savoir « la célébration de ce dont est capable le corps humain » (cité dans [Comcast 2016](#)). Et s'il insiste sur la dimension « spirituelle » de la musique et des performances musicales (cité dans [Guegold 1996, xiv](#)), ses fanfares olympiques ont une réelle dimension physique, allant jusqu'à refléter la devise olympique d'alors, « Citius, Altius, Fortius » (« plus vite, plus haut, plus fort »). *Call of the Champions* en est un exemple évident. Le chœur y scande la devise olympique en latin dans une œuvre ternaire autour des trois mots, où l'élévation spirituelle et physique est centrale, renforcée par

une mise en scène audiovisuelle et pyrotechnique insistant sur les envolées des athlètes à grand renfort d'images animées et de feux d'artifice. Plus encore, la partition de trompette des trois fanfares, et plus particulièrement des œuvres de 1984 et 1996, est le parfait exemple de cette devise entièrement mise en notes et en corps. Les nombreux détachés et coups de langue y symbolisent la vitesse et la dextérité. Les nombreuses notes aiguës et la tessiture en jeu mettent en lumière la question de l'élévation. Les nuances *fortissimo* et les *forte piano* suivis de crescendos intenses soulignent l'idée de force et de puissance. Lui-même ancien trompettiste, Williams était conscient de la performance que requerrait la partie de trompette, lui qui dédia *Summon the Heroes* à la première trompette du Boston Pops, Tim Morrison, et qui décida consciemment d'y jouer avec la hauteur des notes et la tessiture choisie pour renforcer la dramaturgie de la performance musicale, devenue aussi performance athlétique (cité dans [Guegold 1996, xvi](#)). Ainsi, jouer les fanfares olympiques de John Williams s'apparente à une épreuve physique quasi olympique ([John Williams Fan Network JW Fan 2014](#)), ce qui pose la question de la possible analogie entre le corps de l'athlète et celui du·de la musicien·ne, d'un culte de la performance, généralisé au sein des sociétés capitalistes ([Ehrenberg 2011](#)), qui trouve sa réalisation dans le sport comme dans la musique, et donc de la transformation du·de la musicien·ne en athlète à travers les partitions de Williams.

Illustrer et relayer un ethos corporel

- 6 À travers ses compositions, John Williams, en reflétant l'expérience corporelle de l'athlète et en mettant en musique la devise olympique, tout en la faisant incarner par les musicien·nes eux·elles-mêmes, va même jusqu'à illustrer et relayer un ethos corporel, celui des Jeux olympiques modernes. Notamment défini par Pierre de Coubertin au moment de leur création, cet ethos est multiple et opère une synthèse entre un idéal chevaleresque fantasmé et l'ethos sportif anglo-saxon de l'époque, marqué par la célébration de l'effort, de la compétition, du dépassement de soi et de la victoire, mais aussi l'union entre les compétiteur·rices, entre l'individu·e et le collectif ([Coubertin 1912](#)). Un ethos à la fois corporel et spirituel, où le spirituel est incorporé, où la morale mise en actes et incarnée devient éthique. Par ailleurs, si l'ethos olympique est ici parfaitement mis en musique par Williams, qui voit notamment des aspects compétitifs dans les Jeux comme dans la musique, à travers les cuivres et les cordes qui se répondent et la structure même en format A-B-A-B de sa pièce *Olympic Fanfare and Theme* (cité dans [Guegold 1996, xv](#) ; [John Williams.org 1996](#)), il est aussi mis en scène et en mouvements au moment des performances au cours des cérémonies d'ouverture, des « sonneries

héraldiques » des trompettes naturelles, évoquant l'idéal chevaleresque (cité dans [John Williams Fan Network JWFAN 2014](#)), aux chorégraphies mêlant individualité des danseur·ses montré·es en gros plan et instant d'union collective symbolisée par leur mise en cercle, en passant par les coupes dans les œuvres, préférant les tutti aux soli lors des cérémonies. C'est le cas notamment avec *Summon the Heroes*, dont le solo de trompette fut supprimé dans la version jouée lors de la cérémonie des Jeux d'Atlanta.

- 7 En somme, Williams mêle « le physique et l'artistique » à travers ses pièces (cité dans [Guegold 1996, xii](#)). Il utilise l'art pour symboliser le physique et vice versa, conférant ainsi à ses œuvres une réelle corporéité, saisissant le « corps du dedans et du dehors » de l'athlète et investissant le corps de ses musicien·nes pour incarner d'autant plus les idéaux sportifs et olympiques, eux-mêmes fondamentalement liés au corps, et ainsi réaliser le projet coubertinien originel d'union du sport et de l'art de manière potentiellement plus totale. Ses œuvres se distinguent alors du reste du paysage sonore et musical des cérémonies olympiques, qui ne place pas le corps au centre et dont la mythologie s'avère moins universelle que celle pensée par Williams.

Un mythe mis en musique et en mouvement : de la dimension mythologique des fanfares olympiques de Williams

- 8 Au-delà de leur corporéité à l'unisson de l'ethos olympique, les fanfares olympiques de John Williams permettent aussi et surtout de toucher à ce que le compositeur envisage comme véritablement universel, à savoir les mythes liés à l'Olympisme de paix, d'égalité et d'union supposée entre les peuples, mythes apolitiques de façade pourtant profondément politiques.

Une musique empreinte d'une vision mythologique

- 9 Tout d'abord, plus encore que la question de la physicalité, la question spirituelle et mythologique est transversale et fondamentale chez John Williams, comme en d'autres temps chez Richard Wagner, grande source d'inspiration pour lui au-delà de l'utilisation du *leitmotiv* ([Desbrosses 2011](#) ; [Amblard 2019](#)). Celui-ci fait ainsi en permanence référence à une mythologie (en utilisant régulièrement ce terme) et à des mythes supposés partagés et à un langage musical commun ancré dans le spirituel pour évoquer les exploits d'athlètes devenu·es « héros et héroïnes » (cité dans [John Williams Fan Network JWFAN 2014](#)) « représentant le meilleur

de l'humanité » inspirant aisément leurs congénères (cité dans [Comcast 2016](#)), et « dont les luttes et les exploits nous ennoblissent tous·tes » (cité dans [Roger 1984](#)). Au moment d'évoquer son processus créatif, le mythe, ses « continuités », ses « résonances » et « ce que l'on en partage » (cité dans [Guegold 1996, xi](#)) s'avère central : « L'inspiration m'est venue, j'imagine, de cette idée mythologique à laquelle nous semblons tous adhérer. Des histoires de divinités et de héros vivant quelque part, au sommet des montagnes, et capables de choses dont nous sommes incapables. Mais il y a aussi pour moi cette généalogie ininterrompue de savoirs transmis de génération en génération, comme les histoires que l'on se raconte traditionnellement autour d'un feu de camp. J'imagine que la mythologie se trouve à la source de tout folklore populaire ou presque. Et l'art populaire est lui-même à la source de tout art, ou presque. Par conséquent, au final, la mythologie pourrait bien être la source de tout art, d'où la nécessité de s'intéresser à ses récits, à nos ancêtres. Les héros. [...] Je pense sincèrement qu'il y a une sorte de généalogie mythologique partagée³ » (cité dans [Guegold 1996, xiv](#)). En effet, Williams perçoit dans l'exploit sportif une source d'inspiration mythologique commune à tous·tes : « Ces prolongements de mythes et toutes ces histoires qui résonnent en nous et que nous partageons tous. Ces histoires qui nous font réagir lorsque nous voyons des gens franchir la ligne d'arrivée et suer sang et eau pour faire quelque chose qui n'a pourtant aucun sens⁴ » (cité dans [Guegold 1996, xi](#)). Pour invoquer musicalement cette mythologie partagée, il se tourne vers les trompettes et les percussions, des instruments, selon lui, porteurs de cette profondeur évocatrice et éléments consubstantiels à tout rituel cérémoniel collectif empreint de spiritualité : « Il y a quelque chose de particulier chez les trompettes et les tambours. Nous parlions de Lincoln. Dans l'un de ses grands discours, il mentionne "les accords mystiques du souvenir". Ces choses dont on se souvient, ces liens maintenus intacts. Parmi elles, il y a les tambours – les tambours de guerre – et juste après, la flûte du pâtre, suivie de près par les trompettes – les trompettes et les tambours de guerre, mais aussi de célébration, de cérémonie, ou encore de recueillement⁵ » (cité dans [Guegold 1996, xvii](#)). Il utilise ainsi des percussions qu'il qualifie de « primitives » (cité dans [Guegold 1996, xvi](#)), tant elles ont pour but d'invoquer des rythmes ancestraux rappelant la profondeur historique mythologique, comme un certain sens partagé par tous·tes. Il reprend également certains éléments de la marche pour reprendre l'idée de cortège et conférer une dimension rituelle à ses fanfares, et ce bien que celles-ci, pensées comme « des pièces de concert » ([John Williams Fan Network JWFAN 2014](#)), n'avaient pas pour but d'accompagner le défilé des athlètes, mais bien de devenir l'hymne de leurs Olympiades respectives. En 2002, le rituel est prolongé par le rapport aux sommets, à la montagne et à l'utilisation d'un chœur évoquant la pureté des chants liturgiques davantage que les pièces illustrant les jeux païens du cirque,

3. « The inspiration for me, I guess, just comes from the mythological idea that we all seem to feel. It's all about deities and heroes that lived up in the mountains somewhere that could do something we couldn't do. But that there is an unbroken line of knowledge that goes from generation to generation like a fireside folk tradition. I guess the source of all or most folk tradition is mythology. The source of most art is folk art. So the source of art has to be mythology really in the end that we have to know about these people, our parents. The heroes. [...] I really think there is this unbroken mythological thing. »

4. « The continuities of myth and all of this that we all resonate and share. That we respond to when we see people crossing the finish line, busting their gut to do something that doesn't make any sense. »

5. « There is something about trumpets and drums. We talk about Lincoln and one of his great speeches and he mentions the "mystic chords of memory". These things that we remember, these unbroken threads, include among them drums – drums of war and a very close second the shepherd's flute and a close third trumpets – trumpets and drums of war, of celebration, of pageantry, of weeping. »

comme *Parade of the Charioteers* de Miklós Rózsa (1959). Cette vision empreinte de mythologie est prolongée par le commentaire des journalistes diffuseurs des cérémonies, qui insistent notamment sur « l'élévation de l'esprit humain » dans le cas de Jim McKay, commentateur de la cérémonie pour le réseau ABC en 1984 ([News from the Past 2021](#)).

L'Athlète, héros-oïne d'un monomythe mis en musique

- 10 Dans ce cadre mythologique, le mythe ultime, véritable matière à travailler pour Williams, est celui de l'Athlète, héros ou héroïne moderne aux mille visages face à son destin, qui dépasse sa condition humaine sur la scène du spectacle sportif olympique. Un mythe aux origines évidentes. En effet, Williams est influencé par le spectacle sportif télévisé ([Rogers 1984](#)), théâtre du développement d'un récit autour de l'athlète et de sa course vers la victoire, véritable mythe moderne lui-même construit par les journalistes à partir d'une généalogie héroïque profonde ([Bonnet et Descamps 2024](#)). À l'image d'un spectacle sportif désormais transmédiatique ([Jenkins 2006](#)), le récit mythologique de Williams va reprendre les codes traditionnels du récit sportif, empruntant « une imagerie riche tant visuelle que mythologique » (cité dans [Guegold 1996, xii](#)). Il donne ainsi à son récit une dimension audiovisuelle, allant jusqu'à partir même « d'éléments visuels » et de la constitution de tableaux en 1996, comme la fanfare solennelle introductive des cuivres militaires sur le toit du stade, ou encore une séquence de défilé de drapeaux de toutes les couleurs symbolisant l'amitié entre participant-es (cité dans [Guegold 1996, xv](#)), pour raconter le mythe de l'Athlète. Une pratique dont Williams est expert, comme le montre son travail sur les musiques de film ([Huvet 2022](#)). Souhaitant représenter en musique « l'esprit de coopération, d'exploit héroïque, tous les efforts et la préparation qui préfigurent l'événement et les applaudissements qui lui succèdent » (cité dans [Burlingame 2016](#)), Williams utilise un langage particulier, tourné vers ce qu'il considère comme une mythologie partagée, dans lequel le médium, qu'il soit image ou musique, joue un rôle décisif. Il s'agit alors de « développer un grand arc narratif en musique » (cité dans [Guegold 1996, xiii](#)). L'exemple parfait de cette approche mythologique réside dans le récit développé par Williams dans *Olympic Fanfare and Theme* (1984). En effet, la pièce déroule un récit à la structure proche de celle du monomythe de Joseph Campbell ([\[1949\] 2008](#)), un auteur souvent évoqué pour son influence sur George Lucas lorsque celui-ci donna naissance à la saga *Star Wars*, véritable synthèse de nombreux mythes d'origines diverses ([Burns 2014](#)). Ainsi, dans la structure même de sa fanfare olympique ([figure 1](#)), Williams raconte en musique le récit initiatique de l'Athlète sur le point de concourir, de son

entrée dans le stade à son sacre final, en passant par les doutes introspectifs précédant l'envol, reprenant ainsi la trame narrative souvent invoquée dans le spectacle sportif transmédiatique, mais le sublimant en musique.

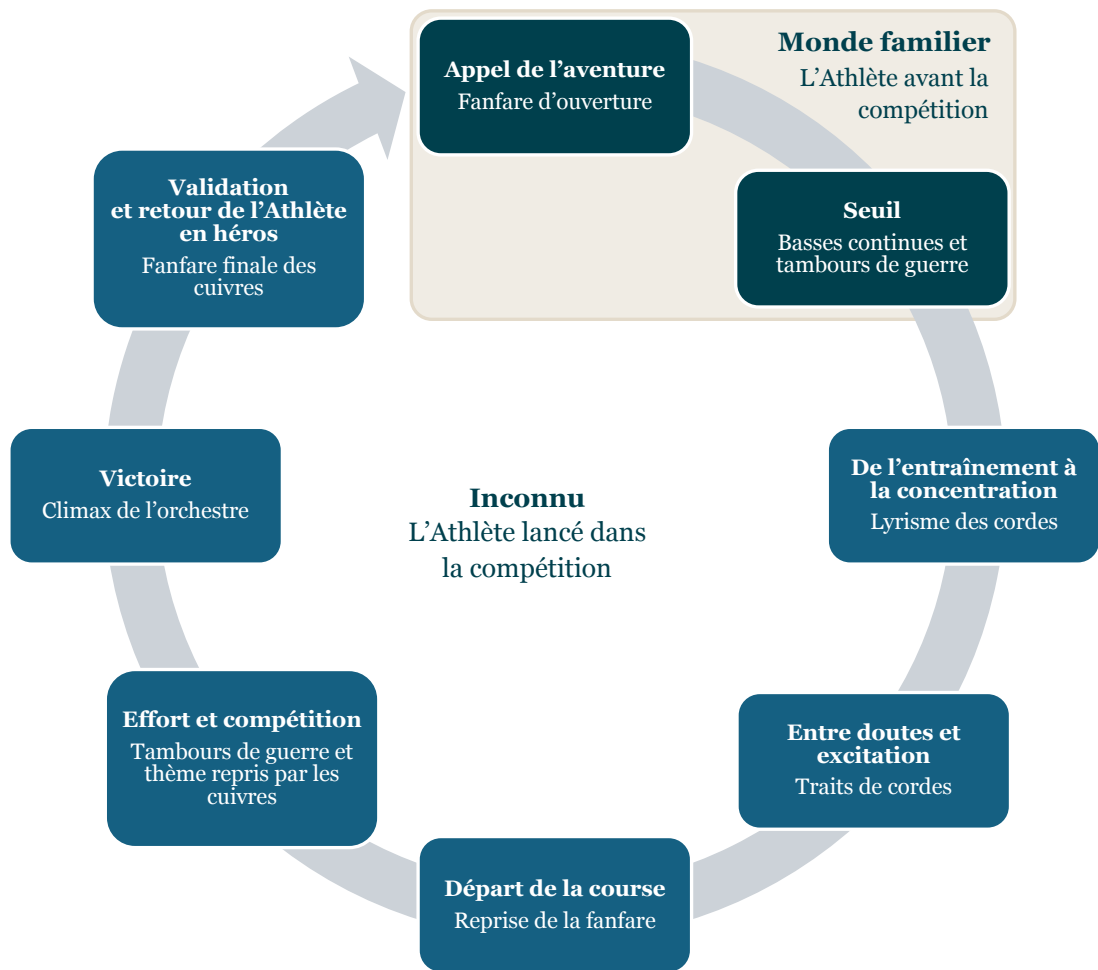


FIGURE 1
Olympic Fanfare and Theme (1984), ou le monomythe de l'Athlète mis en musique.

La mise en musique du mythe politique de l'Olympisme

- 11 Cependant, si John Williams dépolitise largement son propos sur la dimension mythologique de ses œuvres, il reste qu'il met en musique un mythe singulier, celui de l'Olympisme. Celui-ci est lui-même nourri d'une mythologie hellène antique fantasmée, à l'image de celle relayée par Pierre de Coubertin et son ancien professeur Hippolyte Taine ([1865] 1985). Williams partage ainsi le projet originel des Jeux olympiques modernes, cherchant à lier « le muscle et l'esprit », le sport et l'art (cité dans Guegold

1996, 4), comme Coubertin avant lui. Autre mythologie invoquée par l'olympisme coubertinien comme par Williams, l'esprit chevaleresque (John Williams Fan Network JWFAN 2014) et le sportsman vertueux (Braider 1996, 8) viennent compléter un mythe olympique, synthèse de plusieurs mythologies. Or, cette démarche partagée par Williams et Coubertin de « retour moderne de la tradition⁶ » (cité dans Guegold 1996, xviii) est tout à fait politique, à l'image de la notion de tradition elle-même (Hobsbawm et Ranger [1983] 2012). Cette dimension politique du mythe de l'olympisme apparaît de manière d'autant plus éclatante à la lumière des travaux de Raoul Girardet sur les mythes et mythologies politiques (1986). En effet, chaque élément propre à la définition de ce que Girardet désigne comme mythe politique se retrouve dans l'olympisme, comme dans les fanfares de John Williams (tableau 1). Ainsi, les fanfares comme leur mise en scène viennent raconter ce mythe. Enfin, le lieu même de ces performances apporte du sens. Du Colisée de Los Angeles et son évidente filiation à son homologue antique, au Stade sur la montagne de Salt Lake City, en passant par Atlanta et sa statue inspirée de l'Antiquité de Coubertin inaugurée en marge des Jeux du centenaire, chaque stade vient prolonger ce discours mythologique et politique.

6. « This modern revival of the tradition. »

Caractéristiques du mythe politique selon Girardet	Jeux olympiques	Fanfares olympiques de Williams
Récit codé	Symbolique et rhétorique olympiques	Langage musical particulier (cuivres, percussions, cordes)
Idéal du passé	Romantisation de l'Antiquité, de l'idéal chevaleresque et du sportsman	Dimension mythologique des percussions de guerre et de la trompette
Discours sur le présent	Parenthèse d'union entre les peuples sous la bannière olympique	Célébration des athlètes héroïnes et de tous les compétiteur·rices (virtuosité, tutti)
Visée de mobilisation	Union à travers la trêve et la communauté olympique	Célébration unanime, langage commun, tutti et arc narratif simple, « défilé collectif » en musique
Restructuration mentale	Parallèle entre la communauté olympique et l'Humanité	Langage musical « commun » qui fixe un idéal commun
Déformation du réel	Cf. partie suivante	

TABLEAU 1
Les fanfares olympiques de John Williams,
ou la mise en musique du mythe politique de l'olympisme.

12 En somme, à travers ses fanfares comme leurs performances chorégraphiées et visuelles, Williams relaie et développe le mythe olympique avec tant de

brio qu'il obtint l'Ordre olympique. Cependant, derrière une mythologie large, floue, associée à un certain primitivisme, mais unificatrice dans les mots et la musique de Williams, se joue une réalité de l'Olympisme et du spectacle sportif de l'époque bien plus complexe.

L'endroit et l'envers de la médaille : une musique reflet des tensions inhérentes au spectacle sportif

- 13 Dans ses mots comme dans sa musique et ses performances au sein des cérémonies d'ouverture, John Williams développe un récit qui se veut simple sur l'olympisme. Or, le récit olympique, comme sa réalité, portent en eux un certain nombre de tensions propres au sport-spectacle contemporain. Des tensions que l'on retrouve malgré tout aussi dans les fanfares olympiques de Williams.

Entre guerre et paix

- 14 Derrière la mythologie musicale développée par John Williams, il y a une insistance sur la paix et le partage d'une admiration commune universelle pour les athlètes, cette meilleure version de l'humanité s'affrontant dans la paix et le respect. Cet imaginaire de paix est repris par les chorégraphies mises en place, entre formation de multiples cercles et de tableaux collectifs, ou encore par les commentaires des journalistes, comme à Atlanta, où « la colombe, symbole de paix, volait haut » ce soir-là. Pourtant, la dimension guerrière de ces fanfares ne peut être éludée, elle qui est ancrée dans le genre musical même. Influencé par la musique militaire américaine à la John Philip Sousa ([Amblard 2019](#)), qu'il embrassa largement lors de son passage à l'US Air Force, Williams utilise des cuivres qui se répondent car selon lui, « il n'y a rien de mieux pour réunir les armées » (cité dans [Guegold 1996, xiv](#)). De même, il reconnaît un certain lien avec l'œuvre de Rosza, *Parade of the Charioteers*, dans l'évocation « des exploits d'Hercule, des esclaves enchaînés » et d'un imaginaire « païen » « dont on peut être moins fiers » (cité dans [Guegold 1996, xix](#)). Il y a donc dans ces fanfares olympiques une double dualité, à la fois entre la marche militaire et le défilé cérémoniel et festif (*pageantry*), et entre la martialité des percussions et des cuivres et le lyrisme pacifique des cordes. Cette dualité distingue donc Williams, également compositeur de multiples pièces patriotiques par ailleurs ([Amblard 2019](#)), d'une longue généalogie d'association esthétique entre sport et musique militaire et nationaliste en contexte cérémoniel ([Lazzaro 2017](#)), alors qu'il donne ici naissance

à une marche pacifique, sorte d'oxymore musicale, mais aussi sportive. En effet, cette tension se retrouve aussi entre l'idéal de trêve olympique et les contextes de guerre froide et du boycott soviétique en 1984, ou encore de patriotisme américain exacerbé en 2002 suite aux attentats du 11 septembre 2001. Plus fondamentalement, elle se retrouve dans le sport lui-même, qui oscille entre guerre symbolique et euphémisation de la violence (Elias et Dunning [1986] 1994), ou encore dans le lieu stade et son decorum, espace d'union comme d'aliénation et de propagande (Bolz 2008). Enfin, si Williams compose pour illustrer la mythologie sportive et olympique, ses fanfares, jouées dans le cadre des cérémonies d'ouverture des Jeux de 1984, 1996 et 2002, deviennent de fait des outils de *soft power* olympique et américain (Nye 2004) et de renforcement de l'hégémonie américaine sur le « marché du rêve » (Amblard 2019) olympique, pendant sportif du rêve hollywoodien cinématographique.

Entre unité et singularité

- 15 Autre tension fondamentale manifestée dans les œuvres de Williams comme dans le sport-spectacle olympique, la célébration simultanée de la compétition, des héros·ïnes et de « tou·tes les compétiteur·rices », de « l'esprit de coopération et de l'exploit héroïque » (cité dans Burlingame 2016). Williams insiste sur sa volonté d'écrire « non pas sur un·e seul·e héros·ïne, mais sur un groupe de héros·ïnes qui représente les meilleur·es d'entre nous » (cité dans Comcast 2016), comme sur la dimension unificatrice décisive de l'olympisme, selon lui : « Cet événement est devenu un réel objet de ralliement autour du monde, l'incarnation de l'idée d'une unité de l'humanité. Un événement signifiant pour nous, et ce à tant de niveaux politiques ou culturels... Un événement qui fait tout à fait sens, un événement très important⁷ » (cité dans Guegold 1996, xiii). *Summon the Heroes*, sa composition pour Atlanta 1996, « reflète cet effort de réunion entre les peuples » (cité dans Guegold 1996, xvi), jusque dans sa chorégraphie, où cinq groupes de personnes vêtues de couleurs différentes finissent par se mêler les uns aux autres. Pour réussir ce tour de force de symboliser l'union entre les peuples du monde entier, Williams choisit un langage musical qu'il considère commun. Il va ainsi choisir le son de l'orchestre symphonique et des chœurs, « mediums idéaux d'expression de l'idée de grandeur » selon lui (cité dans Guegold 1996, xvii). Il va aussi utiliser les trompettes, qui permettent selon lui d'invoquer une sorte de « généalogie mythologique intemporelle » (cité dans Guegold 1996, xiv). Il va enfin simplifier ses pièces entre leur version enregistrée et leur version jouée lors des cérémonies, ôtant notamment le solo de trompette du début de la version enregistrée de *Summon the Heroes* pour davantage insister sur le collectif que l'individuel dans le cadre de la

7. « This event has become a really unifying thing around the world, a theme about the oneness of humanity and has meaning for us in so many political and cultural levels of all kinds... very valid, very important. »

cérémonie même. Il va surtout adopter une grammaire musicale largement occidentale, qui sonne « émotionnellement familière » (Desbrosses 2011, 47), mais qui doit être interrogée. En effet, pour Williams, celle-ci, porteuse d'une « mythologie multiculturelle », est « puisée dans le répertoire opératique du XIX^e siècle » et « est fermement enracinée dans des sensibilités culturelles occidentales » (Rossi 2011, 115). De plus, bien qu'ancré dans cette généalogie largement européenne (Amblard 2019), Williams est aussi et surtout un symbole et un relai de l'*Americana* et de l'exceptionnalisme américain (Tylski 2011). Or, comme le souligne Florent Groult, « il faut bien reconnaître que les valeurs véhiculées par la devise olympique ("Citius, Altius, Fortius", signifiant "Plus vite, plus haut, plus fort") se confondent aisément avec celles qu'aimerait afficher l'Amérique en toute circonstance » (Groult 2011, 71-72). On oscille donc entre le projet d'union et la mise en avant des athlètes exceptionnels voulu par Williams notamment à travers l'utilisation de ce qu'il perçoit comme un langage musical commun, et l'imposition implicite d'un modèle olympique, occidental, voire américain, porté sur la compétition, la quête du record, et l'acculturation, voire l'assimilation des autres peuples, dans la mise en musique, à travers les parties physiquement exigeantes de trompette, par exemple, et en chorégraphie, dans le récurrent mouvement d'effacement de l'individu-e dans le collectif, d'un langage finalement culturellement identifié et partagé parce que dominant dans un contexte de mondialisation culturelle alors largement américanisée. Ce projet est d'ailleurs explicitement mis en mots par les commentateurs de NBC en 1996 : « Le monde devient alors une famille mélangée, tandis qu'une montagne d'humanité est formée par les figurants [...]. Toutes les tribus perdent leur identité. Ce soir, en ces Jeux olympiques, elles se transforment pour ne faire qu'une⁸. » Cependant, en dépit des intentions de Williams, l'érection de ce langage, ce modèle culturel et cet ethos corporel en idéal commun à l'humanité pose question. En effet, cette démarche d'éducation des publics, relayée par un discours transmédiatique, revêt alors les oripeaux d'un certain ethnocentrisme, ce qui la lie à l'histoire du sport, elle-même empreinte d'impérialisme et d'américanisation (Darbon 2008), tout particulièrement incarnée par l'histoire olympique (Bale 2002). Le discours musical devient ici un autre relai de cette démarche d'imposition d'une esthétique occidentale (Descamps 2014), comme il a pu l'être dans d'autres contextes (Small 1997). Williams participerait donc possiblement à « la propagation de l'universalité contestable du modèle américain » (Amblard 2019). Cela souligne également l'utilisation des cérémonies d'ouverture olympiques comme « espaces de production de discours idéologiques » (Segrave 2015) dans lesquels la musique joue un rôle-clé pour renforcer l'hégémonie olympique (et ici américaine) dans les champs sportif et culturel.

8. « The world is becoming a mixture of one family, as they create a mountain of humanity [...]. All the tribes are losing their identity, there is a transformation, at these Olympics, they become one. »

Idéal en puissance, perverti en actes

16 L'ultime point commun entre les œuvres de Williams et l'olympisme réside dans la tension entre un idéal en puissance qui peine à se réaliser en actes. Williams lui-même est touché par l'idéal des Jeux à travers son expérience de téléspectateur (cité dans [Rogers 1984](#)). Inspiré par celui-ci, il va alors nourrir un autre idéal, celui de toucher universellement à travers son œuvre, mais aussi à travers la retransmission télévisée des cérémonies d'ouverture, « immense opportunité de communiquer aux autres cet idéal » (cité dans [Guegold 1996, xiii](#)) que le spectacle olympique avait pu lui transmettre par le passé devant son téléviseur. Pourtant, la rhétorique olympique qui a « olympisé » Williams par écrans interposés ne sert qu'une version idéalisée, « disneyfée » ([Bryman 2004](#)) ou même spectacularisée ([Debord \[1967\] 1996](#)) d'une histoire olympique plus complexe. Cette histoire fut notamment déconstruite et critiquée de manière véhémente par Jean-Marie Brohm, qui souligna un idéal originel factice, mis au jour par les différentes olympiades du passé, l'amenant ainsi à parler de « mythe olympique » ([1981](#)). Les fanfares de John Williams constituent donc un effort de remédiation musicale d'une « réalité politique » construite et médiatisée ([Nimmo et Combs \[1983\] 1990](#)) qui établit une unité et une paix de façade, détournant d'enjeux politiques plus problématiques au sein d'un idéal pourtant censé être apolitique. Pourtant, Williams nourrit son propre idéal d'atteindre le plus grand nombre, et adapte son œuvre en conséquence : « On n'écrit pas la même composition si celle-ci doit être jouée devant 1000 personnes, ou bien si celle-ci doit l'être sur une esplanade et pour 250 000 personnes. On peut aussi y mettre beaucoup de notes. L'écriture ne doit pas forcément être simplifiée. Mais il me semble tout de même qu'il faut un fil conducteur évident, sorte de grand arc qui surplombe la composition. Plutôt qu'une succession de multiples petits éléments expressifs apportés par touches pointillistes. En somme, je pense que le média entre en jeu dans le processus d'écriture. L'image que l'on se fait de la musique olympique et de la musique de cérémonie a donné naissance à un certain style qui est en partie le résultat de notre souci d'établir un dialogue interculturel, de la prise en compte de la taille du public, et de la portée potentielle d'une telle composition et d'un tel spectacle⁹ » (cité dans [Guegold 1996, xiii](#)). Dans le cas des finales de ses fanfares olympiques, le mélange identifiable en question-réponse de mélodies lyriques jouées par les cordes et les cuivres, et de percussions et sonneries guerrières transmet le projet esthétique et idéologique de Williams. Un projet qui se heurte à sa culture et son langage musical occidentaux et américains, comme vu précédemment, mais aussi à la question de la réception ou de l'utilisation des œuvres de Williams malgré ses intentions originelles. En effet, avec ses fanfares, et donc un genre emblématique de la culture musicale américaine ([Amblard 2019](#)), il a

9. « You don't write the same kind of piece that you're going to play for an audience of 1,000 as you're going to play out on the Esplanade for an audience of 250,000. You can still have a lot of notes. It doesn't have to be simple. But it seems to me that the line has to be like a big arc. Rather than a lot of pointillistic little aspects of expression. So, I think the media is involved. What we think of Olympic and pageant music has developed a certain kind of idiom that is partly the result of the cross-cultural thing we're doing, the size of the audience, and the reach of it all. »

contribué au *soft power* olympique et américain, quand lui visait la promotion de l'union entre les peuples. Cette tension entre idéal démocratique et désir d'accessibilité au plus grand nombre en puissance, et utilisation en acte pour illustrer des aspirations patriotiques n'est pas sans rappeler le destin de la musique d'un autre compositeur américain emblématique, Aaron Copland (Crist 2005, 148, 200). Elle rappelle également une autre tendance du spectacle sportif, à savoir l'invocation de la notion de pureté dans ses récits pour soutenir des entreprises viciées (Butterworth 2010).

- 17 Au final, John Williams a tant réussi son entreprise de mise en musique de l'olympisme qu'il en est venu à en refléter les tensions fondamentales. Transversales, largement présentes dans le récit transmédiatique du sport-spectacle, celles-ci transparaissent également du médium musique, qui ne parvient une fois encore pas à réaliser l'impossible – produire le langage d'une paix tout à fait universelle.

Lier le physique et le spirituel... au service d'une idéologie ?

- 18 Les fanfares olympiques font partie intégrante du spectacle sportif, et elles sont relais du récit transmédiatique qu'il véhicule. Avec virtuosité, les fanfares de John Williams sont parvenues à mettre en musique un ethos et un idéal corporels, à mettre le corps au centre, et à opérer à bien des égards la fusion du physique et du spirituel... pour mettre en mouvement et unir le corps social, tant des bénévoles s'animant dans l'enceinte des cérémonies d'ouverture que des publics devant leurs écrans. Le mythe olympique, mythe corporel par excellence, comme le mythe de l'Athlète, sont ici mis en musique et en corps. Seulement voilà, ancrée dans le spectacle sportif de ces méga-événements sportifs et dans un contexte transmédiatique et de « transmédiatisation » de passage du visuel au sonore (Bruhn 2007, 175), la musique de Williams devient-elle simple outil discursif et rhétorique parmi d'autres au service d'un discours olympique à l'apolitisme de façade trompeur ? En somme, malgré son projet unificateur originel, John Williams pourrait bien avoir produit des fanfares pour un modèle exceptionnel « au pouvoir orphique », étendant l'emprise de ce dernier de Hollywood aux stades olympiques, « d'un marché du rêve » à l'autre, pour prolonger l'analyse de Jacques Amblard (2019). Sa musique devient alors un énième médium relais de discours politiques, échappant ainsi au projet de son compositeur. Pourtant, sont-ce ces discours politiques qui perdurent et continuent d'être transmis au moment où *Olympic Fanfare and Theme* est jouée en ouverture du concert hommage à John Williams dirigé par Gustavo Dudamel en 2019, ou encore lors du concert-événement de John Williams avec le Berliner Philharmoniker en 2022 ? Ou

bien est-ce le mythe universel de l'Athlète (ou de l'Humanité) triomphant face à la difficulté ?

- 19 La question se pose encore aujourd'hui, alors que Williams a été sollicité pour illustrer les affrontements martiaux de National Football League (Comcast 2016) comme pour purifier un autre mythe, celui du football universitaire (Gelt 2023). Que reste-t-il ? La version idéalisée née de l'esprit du compositeur, ou bien le sous-texte latent politisé consubstantiel à ces spectacles ? Plus fondamentalement, son cas interroge sur le statut de la musique dans le spectacle sportif, entre idéal d'« unisonance » (Eichberg 2009) et intemporelle question d'un (im)possible langage universel, posée pour la musique comme pour l'image (Augé, Didi-Huberman et Eco 2011). Il y a enfin une autre tension fondamentale à élucider, celle entre les propos largement apolitiques de John Williams et ceux de ses critiques. Si la dimension américaniste et occidentale de sa musique est évidente, reste un compositeur qui compose pour le plus grand nombre avec son langage musical, conscient des limites d'une telle entreprise : « Voilà ce que j'ai voulu faire. J'imagine que c'est pour cela que j'utilise les trompettes. Je suppose qu'il y a d'autres façons de procéder, mais je n'y suis tout simplement pas familier. À l'avenir, une prochaine génération pourra peut-être toucher davantage de gens grâce à l'électronique¹⁰ » (cité dans Guegold 1996, xiv). L'avenir musical des Jeux olympiques et de leurs cérémonies reste à écrire. Pour ce qui est des fanfares de 1984, 1996 et 2002, elles incarneront face à l'histoire, pour cette période, l'hégémonie américaine sur les scènes sportives et olympiques – comme l'hégémonie de la musique de John Williams dans les imaginaires collectifs héroïques occidentaux. Ou simplement une mise en musique approfondie et inédite du corps sportif.

10. « That's what it is for me. I guess that's why trumpets. I suppose there are other ways to do it, but I just don't know them. Another generation may have better ways to do it electronically. »

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Musique, mèmes et #ChatonsMignons : analyse communicationnelle d'une dynamique d'intermusicalité connectée sur TikTok

Music, memes, and #CuteKittens: analyzing the communicative dynamics of connected intermusicality on TikTok

Justine Simon

Mots clés : réseaux socionumériques, mèmes, viralité, intermusicalité, circulations, réception

Keywords: socio-digital networks, memes, virality, intermusicality, circulations, reception

RÉSUMÉ

La musique occupe une place de plus en plus importante au sein des échanges socionumériques. Afin de saisir les dynamiques de création et de partage de ces réalisations musicales connectées, cet article s'appuie sur l'analyse d'un corpus de 1 306 publications issues de TikTok, qui mettent en scène des #ChatonsMignons. Trois axes sont retenus pour analyser la problématique de la viralité des musiques : les représentations sémiotiques construites dans les compositions plurisémiotiques, la circulation et la réappropriation des références intermusicales, et enfin la réception de plusieurs créations par un public étudiant.

ABSTRACT

Music is taking an increasingly important place in socio-digital exchanges. In order to understand the dynamics of creation and sharing of these connected musical creations, this article is based on the analysis of a corpus of 1,306 publications from TikTok, featuring #ChatonsMignons. Three axes are specifically addressed in order to examine the problem of the virality of music: that of semiodiscursive representations constructed in plurisemiotic compositions, that of the circulation and reappropriation of intermusical references and finally that of the reception of several creations by student audience.

- 1 À l'heure où les environnements numériques façonnent en profondeur les pratiques culturelles et médiatiques, les sciences de l'information et de la communication jouent un rôle central pour comprendre les dynamiques de circulation des discours au sein des espaces socationumériques. Dans un contexte où l'attention est devenue une ressource convoitée, la viralité – entendue comme la diffusion rapide et massive de contenus sur les réseaux socationumériques – constitue un objet d'étude privilégié.
- 2 Dans la continuité d'une recherche sur la viralité des images de #ChatonsMignons ([Simon 2024a](#)), cet article s'intéresse aux dynamiques participatives, virales et affectives, qui façonnent la circulation des contenus sur les plateformes numériques. Cette étude a mis en évidence le rôle central de la participation des usager·ères au sein de communautés en ligne, les logiques de partage viral influencées par les algorithmes des plateformes ainsi que la centralité de l'émotion comme vecteurs de partage de ces images. Cette contribution prolonge l'analyse en se concentrant spécifiquement sur l'influence de la musique dans ces phénomènes de viralité.
- 3 Afin d'essayer de comprendre les mécanismes de viralité de ces images, nous avons constitué un ensemble de données de quatre-mille publications sur les réseaux socationumériques Twitter, Instagram et TikTok. Une veille de contenus, une recherche par mots-clés (mots-clés et/ou *hashtags*) et un suivi des activités par comptes ciblés (comptes de mèmeurs, par exemple) ont été menés sur une période de quatre mois, d'octobre 2021 à janvier 2022. Toutes les publications rassemblées présentaient une image de chat (fixe sur Twitter et Instagram, animée dans le cas de TikTok).
- 4 L'analyse du corpus a révélé que les images de #ChatonsMignons – *hashtag* qui cristallise l'idée du partage viral d'images de chats sur les réseaux –, constituent des icônes culturelles en constante réinvention. Elles adoptent donc le principe de « trivialité » proposé par Yves Jeanneret ([2014](#)), qui consiste à considérer les objets numériques partagés (textes, images, vidéos, musiques, etc.) au carrefour de différents usages socationumériques. Premier usage, l'animal est au centre de stratégies variées en

communication politique (Jakubowicz 2021). En ce sens, le chat devient un animal politique. Il est deuxièmement une figure centrale d'expériences sociales mémétiques au sein de communautés virtuelles. On peut évoquer la « culture du chat remixé » en référence aux recherches sur la culture participative (Allard 2016 ; Gunthert 2015 ; Jenkins, Ito et Boyd 2017). L'image du chat contribue également à la construction des « identités numériques » (Cardon 2008) et construit de nouvelles formes de sociabilité. La viralité du *hashtag* #ChatonMignon s'explique enfin par la dimension affective qu'il contient : cette dernière est un ingrédient essentiel dans le fonctionnement du modèle capitaliste attentionnel et émotionnel des plateformes (Alloing et Pierre 2017).

- 5 Trivialité, culture participative, identité numérique et affectivité ont constitué les lignes saillantes de l'analyse qui se focalisaient sur les relations (hyper)textes/images. Cependant, l'étude des 1 306 publications de TikTok a également mis en évidence l'importance du rôle des bandes sonores.
- 6 Quel est le rôle joué par les bandes-son – et plus particulièrement par les musiques – dans les mécanismes de circulation virale des contenus sur TikTok ? Plus précisément, en quoi l'intermusicalité connectée contribue-t-elle à la communication virale ?
- 7 La mise en musique des publications TikTok est fortement corrélée à une révolution technologique et sociale dans nos environnements médiatiques et numériques. Elle concerne notamment l'importance de la musique dans la conception des émissions télévisuelles (Gueraud-Pinet 2019) ou encore l'influence que les algorithmes exercent sur les fonctionnalités créatives mises à la disposition des usager·ères de TikTok (Chemillier et Rabearivelo 2023) ou de YouTube (Heuguet 2021). Dans le contexte de la culture participative, il semble crucial de s'intéresser aux mécanismes de réappropriation de musiques s'inscrivant dans des processus de diffusion virale. TikTok est en effet l'une de ces plateformes qui bouleverse la manière dont le public s'approprié la musique. Les utilisateurs et utilisatrices interagissent désormais en se liant par la musique. Il s'agit ainsi de comprendre les relations établies entre la participation des tiktokeur·euses, le partage de musiques et la communication virale.
- 8 La viralité se définit par la diffusion rapide, massive et souvent imprévisible de contenus au sein d'espaces socionumériques. En tant que phénomène de communication complexe, la viralité a été examinée par Ugo Roux (2020) et Valérie Schafer et Fred Pailler (2022), entre autres, en se penchant sur l'étude des mèmes. Plusieurs facteurs contribuent à la définition des phénomènes viraux : en ce qui concerne la circulation virale de musiques sur TikTok, on suppose qu'il existe des facteurs externes liés

aux plateformes musicales ou aux médias (qui jouent un « rôle d'amplificateur » de viralité ; [Pailler et Schafer 2022](#)), des facteurs technologiques qui fonctionnent de manière verticale (rôle des affordances technodiscursives¹, des technodiscours ou encore des algorithmes), et des facteurs caractérisés par une horizontalité des échanges (déclinaisons et partages de pairs à pairs connectés).

- 9 Cet article cherche à saisir les ingrédients de la viralité des musiques partagées sur TikTok en distinguant ces trois niveaux dans une perspective à la fois sémiotique et communicationnelle. En rattachant notre propos au questionnement portant sur la culture participative, nous proposons la notion d'« intermusicalité connectée » pour désigner les phénomènes de réappropriation collective de musiques partagées. On envisage ainsi l'intermusicalité sous son aspect global, où chaque musique est reliée à d'autres musiques produites antérieurement. Les musiques partagées sur TikTok se réfèrent à un ensemble intermusical ne dépendant pas que de la plateforme. Elles sont empruntées aux univers culturels, médiatiques et numériques, puis reprises de manière fidèle ou remixée.
- 10 La musique était présente dans près de 80 % du corpus étudié sur TikTok. C'est donc sur cet échantillon que se concentre l'analyse actuelle. Afin de saisir les dynamiques de création et de partage de ces réalisations intermusicales connectées, deux axes sont spécifiquement abordés permettant d'examiner la question de l'émergence du sens impulsée par la musique : celui des représentations sémiotiques construites dans les compositions plurisémiotiques et celui de la circulation et de la réappropriation des références intermusicales.
- 11 Un troisième axe sera abordé en ouverture de cet article permettant d'appréhender la réception/interprétation de publications musicales à caractère viral par un public d'étudiant-es.

1. La notion d'« affordance » s'inscrit dans plusieurs théories de l'action ([Ghislis, Perea et Ruchon 2019](#)). Elle s'applique dans les études des espaces numériques pour analyser les interactions entre l'utilisateur et son environnement technologique. L'affordance technodiscursive désigne à la fois le processus d'influence des dispositifs technologiques sur les usager-es dans le partage ou la création de contenus et l'incorporation des fonctionnalités de ces dispositifs par les usager-es. Cette incorporation autorise une expérience plus ou moins originale en fonction des contraintes imposées par les dispositifs.

Représentations sémiotiques d'imaginaires intermusicaux

- 12 La première entrée analytique permettant de saisir le rôle joué par la musique dans la communication virale est sémiotique. Il s'agit d'étudier la façon dont la musique – en tant que discours – met en circulation des imaginaires collectifs, et participe de la construction d'une mémoire culturelle partagée. Le sens construit dans les compositions plurisémiotiques se réfère ainsi à des imaginaires intermusicaux, qui se transforment et se réactualisent au gré des réappropriations des tiktokeur-es.

Éléments de cadrage théorique

- 13 De nombreuses fonctionnalités ne cessent d'être développées au sein des dispositifs socionumériques permettant de mobiliser des contenus variés du point de vue de la matérialité sémiotique (textes, hypertextes, images, musiques, etc.). Au niveau du texte : insertion de liens URL, de technosignes (*hashtags* et mentions) et d'*emoji* ; et au niveau de l'image : insertion d'images fixes, de compilations d'images, de GIFs, insertion de vidéos ou réalisation de vidéos remixées (pratique du *mashup*), insertions de musiques (sur les photos, vidéos ou *stories*), superposition d'*emoji* ou de stickers sur les images, etc. La nature plurisémiotique des discours partagés sur TikTok reflète la richesse de ces possibilités (**figure 1 ; extrait 1**).

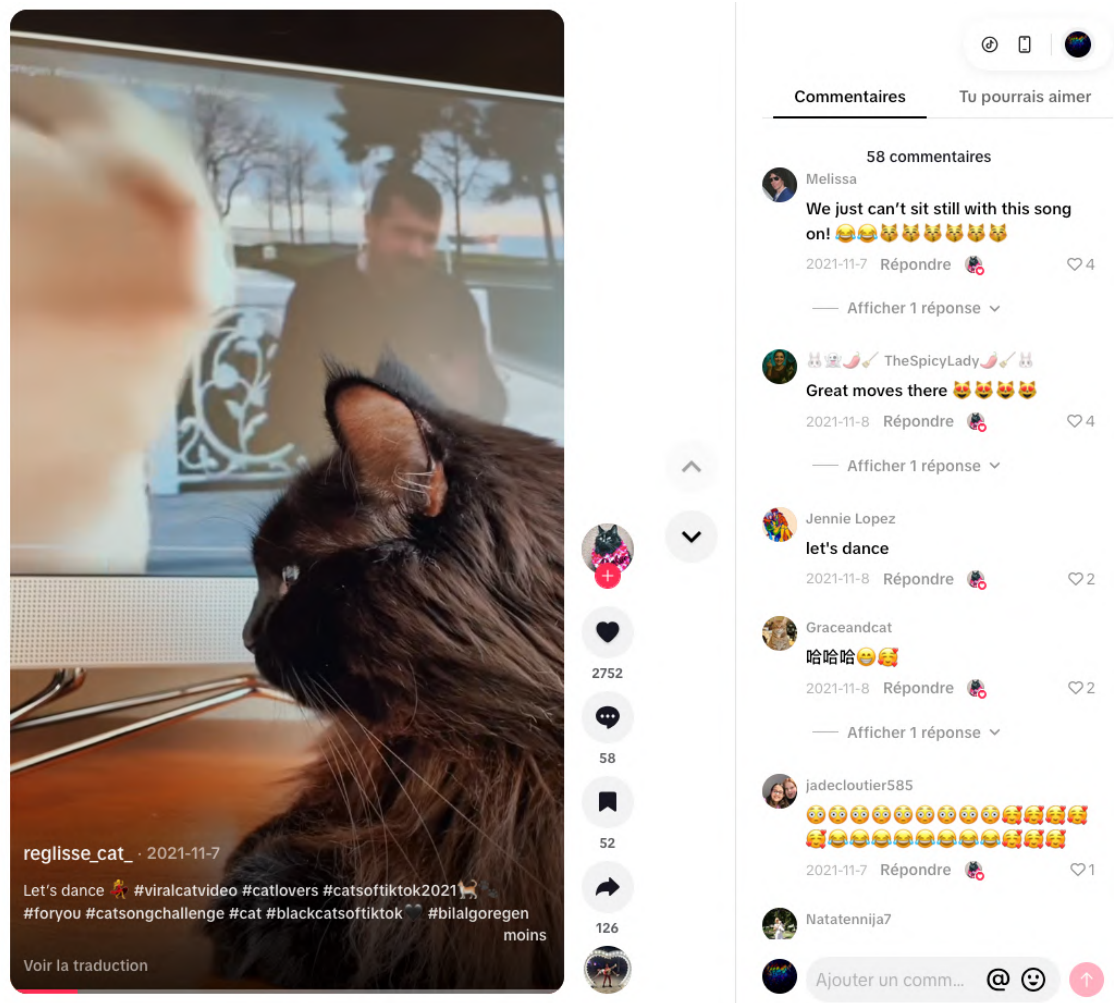


FIGURE 1

Capture d'écran TikTok illustrant l'hétérogénéité sémiodiscursive.

@reglisse_cat. « Let's dance 🐱 ». *TikTok*, 7 novembre 2021.

https://www.tiktok.com/@reglisse_cat/video/7027916255919082799.

- 14 L'émergence du sens se réalise en considérant ces éléments dans leur ensemble (Paveau 2017) : le discours est à la fois plurisémiotique (composé de différentes matérialités sémiotiques) et hypertextualisé (Simon 2018), c'est-à-dire relié à d'autres discours, intégrés à un espace énonciatif mosaïque, contenant des points de rencontre concrétisés par des hyperliens. L'analyse de la composante musicale ne peut s'extraire de cette unité de sens. Typiquement, sur TikTok, la signification se construit principalement à travers la composition visuelle et sonore. Comme pour le vidéoclip musical, on pourrait parler d'« images musicales animées » (Gaudin 2018).
- 15 L'analyse du discours intégrant cette composante est encore étroitement corrélée à la fonction communicationnelle des publications : donner son avis, se mettre en avant, encourager la participation, inciter à l'action, raconter ou inventer dans l'objectif de divertir, rechercher une complicité, susciter des émotions, etc. Même si le contexte de publication n'est pas toujours interprétable sur les réseaux (surtout en ce qui concerne l'identité des usager·ères au niveau de la conception, mais aussi par rapport à la connaissance du public touché au niveau de la réception), il est bien question de prendre en considération – dans la mesure du possible – ces objectifs communicationnels.
- 16 En examinant de près les différentes réalisations musicales des usager·ères (reprise ou remix), on remarque encore que les discours partagés sur TikTok sont marqués par cette complexité. La technologie numérique a bouleversé les modes de production de contenus. La réalisation musicale est rendue accessible à un plus large public, amateur et néophyte. Il est désormais plus facile de fabriquer sa musique, mais cette facilité peut plus facilement induire une uniformisation des contenus. La configuration de la plateforme influence le processus de réappropriation des discours musicaux. À savoir que le choix de musiques d'accompagnement est limité et influencé par les logiques du réseau. En effet, pour réaliser un « clip » sur TikTok, l'usager·ère choisit une bande-son avant d'insérer l'image. L'insertion de cette bande-son relève de processus distincts. L'usager·ère peut tout d'abord utiliser un son issu de la sonothèque libre de droits de TikTok. Cette sonothèque est organisée par thématiques : « gaming », « relax », « mignon », etc. ; par styles musicaux : « électronique », « hip hop », etc., ou par succès : la rubrique « TikTop » (ou « tendances ») met en avant les musiques les plus virales, ce qui influence fortement les choix des usager·ères. La reprise de musiques peut de plus se faire directement depuis la publication de quelqu'un. Par ailleurs, la redirection indique le nombre d'utilisations du son, ce qui dynamise la réappropriation collective. La bande-son peut aussi être automatiquement ajoutée, puisqu'elle fait partie de la vidéo partagée (« *original sound* »). Il est encore possible d'ajouter une sonorité unique à l'image (en enregistrement original) ou d'insérer une musique non libre de droits grâce à une astuce détournant

les fonctionnalités de la plateforme (publication d'un « *original sound* » avec une musique connue, par exemple – ce qui correspond une forme d'affordance inversée²). Dans tous les cas, il existe différentes fonctionnalités d'ajustement des contenus au niveau de la bande-son (logiciels de mixage du son intégrés à la plateforme). Ces fonctionnalités incluent l'ajustement des effets vocaux, l'ajout d'une voix off grâce à la synthèse vocale, le découpage de l'extrait musical inséré, ainsi que le contrôle du volume, de la vitesse et de la synchronisation du rythme.

2. L'affordance inversée correspond à un détournement par l'utilisateur des fonctionnalités initiales d'un dispositif.

- 17 Dans cette configuration de tension entre liberté de créer et contrainte technologique et algorithmique, il s'agit d'examiner quels imaginaires intermusicaux traversant la plateforme TikTok sont mobilisés dans le corpus étudié, construisant de la sorte une mémoire interdiscursive (Moirand 2007), c'est-à-dire un ensemble dialogique auquel on se réfère dans un contexte particulier (rappels, répétitions, redéfinitions, etc.).
- 18 Dans la lignée des travaux portant sur la notion de « dialogisme interdiscursif » (Volochinov [1929] 1977) – cet entrelacement d'une multitude de voix présentes dans un discours, semblable à un millefeuille, habité d'innombrables déjà-dits, déjà-vus ou déjà-entendus – notre attention se porte sur la dimension dialogique interdiscursive des publications intermusicales partagées sur TikTok. En effet, l'intermusicalité entre en relation directe avec la mémoire collective mobilisée par les usager-ères et conditionne sa réception – d'où l'importance de la prise en compte du contexte communicationnel. C'est pourquoi cette mémoire intermusicale – dans le sens où elle relie les usager-ères – est interrogée du point de vue de la viralité. Mobiliser des références appartenant à une mémoire interdiscursive peut permettre de consolider la participation collective.
- 19 Pour approfondir notre réflexion de la reprise musicale, nous avons essayé d'opérer une distinction entre deux procédés de réappropriation d'un point de vue interdiscursif au sens large. Gérard Genette (1982) puis Gilles Lugin (2006) distinguent deux niveaux de réappropriation d'un discours d'origine. D'une part, on parle d'« intertextualité au sens strict » lorsque le discours d'origine est explicitement visible ou plutôt – dans notre cas – audible. Le déjà entendu est facilement identifiable, bien qu'il ait été modifié (extrait musical découpé, par exemple) : cette première catégorie correspond à un faible degré de réappropriation. D'autre part, l'« hypertextualité » correspond à une forte transformation du discours d'origine. Le discours est totalement réinterprété et n'est plus reconnaissable littéralement³. Ce deuxième procédé relève d'un fort degré de réappropriation. Les imitations instrumentales, les transpositions dans un autre style musical sont des exemples de réappropriations hypertextuelles. Les opérations de transformation touchant à la vitesse d'une musique relèvent aussi de cette deuxième catégorie. Cette grille de lecture permet

3. Le recours à des applications de reconnaissance d'image (dans un cas d'intericonicité) ou de musique (dans un cas d'intermusicalité) permet d'objectiver cette distinction : si la référence n'est pas perçue par le logiciel, on parlera d'hypertextualité.

de classer les transformations, mais les catégories ne sont en réalité pas totalement étanches entre elles⁴. Il arrive parfois qu'on doive faire face à des modifications qui fusionnent ces deux types de changements.

Catégories d'analyse

- 20 Venons-en aux représentations les plus mobilisées dans les compositions partagées sur TikTok, en nous focalisant sur les musiques insérées dans la bande-son. Cinq catégories sont mises au jour.
- 21 Le corpus étudié est tout d'abord marqué par le partage de créations artistiques remixant le vrai miaulement du chat. La pratique du remix de miaulements réels est assurée par des musicien·ennes professionnel·elles et l'usager·ère lambda ne fait que le partager. The Kiffness réalise des créations musicales originales de ce type, comme dans l'exemple du remix NumNum Cat, où le miaulement du chat en train de laper son lait est transformé en mélodie (**figure 2** ; **extrait 2**).

4. Les types et les degrés de transformation varient et peuvent correspondre à différents temps de la création musicale : la composition, le travail à l'instrument, l'interprétation et l'enregistrement (qui connaissent eux-mêmes des modalités plurielles). Ces objets permettent ainsi d'interroger ce que nous nommons « reprise » (Kihm 2010).



FIGURE 2

NumNum Cat (vidéo n° 5 présentée dans le cadre de l'étude de réception).
@thekiffness. « My top 5 Cat Songs! ». *TikTok*, 7 avril 2023.
<https://www.tiktok.com/@thekiffness/video/7219264746141338885>

- 22 Cet artiste réinterprète aussi des thèmes connus. La musique de *Squid Game* (Netflix, 2021-2025, musique composée par Jung Jae-il) est ainsi

reprise en retravaillent le son des miaulements. Le duo de French Fuse remixe de la même manière le thème d'*Harry Potter* avec le miaulement des chats. Nous avons baptisé ce procédé, qui consiste à transformer des miaulements réels en mélodie, le « miaulement enchanté ». Cette première catégorie de réinterprétation constitue un exemple d'imitation instrumentale qui relève de l'hypertextualité. En effet, la mélodie initiale n'est pas immédiatement reconnaissable. Cette forme d'imitation au caractère ludique est sans doute un facteur de viralité.

- 23 Deuxième catégorie similaire à la première : les miaulements synthétiques mis en musique. D'autres pratiques évoquant la parodie musicale *Duo des chats* – cette parodie musicale composée par Gioachino Rossini – sont des compositions réalisées à partir d'onomatopées de miaulements (cette fois synthétiques et non réels). Les imitations à caractère humoristique sont réalisées grâce à l'outil informatique. Le miaulement est à nouveau enchanté de manière hypertextuelle grâce au numérique. Ainsi, des mêmes vidéos de chats célèbres sont repris dans ce genre de reprises décalées : Bongo Cat, Mallow Meme Cat, Pop Cat sont par exemple mis en scène en train de réinterpréter des titres viraux comme « Believer » (du groupe Imagine Dragons). Au niveau de l'image, cela correspond à la catégorie « intertextualité au sens restreint » alors que, pour ce qui est de la musique, cette transformation relève de l'hypertextualité. Les *covers* au style « Meow » bénéficient d'un large succès (qui dépasse les seuls réseaux socionumériques) grâce à l'alliance de l'intericonicité et de l'hypertextualité musicale.
- 24 La réutilisation de musiques issues de la sonothèque libre de droits de TikTok constitue une autre catégorie. Elle peut se réaliser à travers les deux opérations de transformation : le découpage d'un extrait musical ou la compilation d'extraits (intertextualité au sens restreint) ou encore des méthodes de remix (hypertextualité). Le style le plus représenté dans ces reprises est la musique de variété (pop principalement) impulsée par l'industrie musicale afin de toucher un large public.
- 25 À titre d'exemple, la musique peut se mettre au service d'une ambiance (ambiance en lien avec l'événement d'Halloween reprenant par exemple des « *cute horror songs* »). La reprise d'un extrait musical est aussi un moyen d'intensifier la relation de complicité affective entre soi et son chat. Une usagère publie ainsi une musique attendrissante (« You Are My Sunshine » de Christina Perri) lorsqu'elle apprend qu'elle est positive au Covid-19 (« Positive au Covid, pas en forme, Doudou prend soin de moi #chat »).
- 26 Dans un autre registre, la musique devient un véritable outil de propagande, notamment en faveur des partis d'extrême droite. Par exemple, l'exploitation de la mise en scène de soi dans l'intimité est reprise en communication politique par Marine Le Pen. Le 15 décembre 2021, elle

publie une vidéo dans laquelle on peut la voir rire en regardant son chat dans le sapin de Noël. La musique de fond « All I Want For Christmas » de Mariah Carey exploite l'affectivité inoffensive tout en cherchant à toucher un public de masse (**figure 3 ; extrait 3**). C'est un des ingrédients mobilisés qui participe à une stratégie de dédiablement du parti (et qui perdure dans les contextes électoraux des Européennes et des Législatives de 2024 avec le candidat Jordan Bardella).



FIGURE 3

Mariah Carey au service de la dédiablement
(vidéo n° 4 présentée dans le cadre de l'étude de réception).

@mlp.official. « Le sapin est prêt pour Noël ! ». *TikTok*, 15 décembre 2021.
<https://www.tiktok.com/@mlp.official/video/7041964613700750598>.

- 27 Dans cette même troisième catégorie, c'est également grâce aux paroles des chansons que le sens émerge. Parmi les nombreuses déclinaisons de chats filmés comme s'ils revivaient la scène d'« 1, 2, 3 soleil » de *Squid Game*, un-e tiktokeur-euse a fait le choix d'insérer un extrait du tube « Somebody's Watching Me » de Michael Jackson. Le chat est en position de joueur, observé par la poupée assassine prête à bondir au moindre mouvement. Cette citation relève de l'intertextualité au sens restreint.

- 28 Quatrième catégorie : la musique en tant qu'extension créative des œuvres de fiction. La réinterprétation musicale occupe une place de plus en plus importante dans la pratique d'extension des œuvres fictives. Cette catégorie entre directement en résonance avec la notion d'intermusicalité connectée, considérant la musique comme un élément réapproprié par un ensemble d'usager·ères connectés. Des musiques connues issues de la culture populaire de masse sont utilisées pour intensifier la visibilité des publications. Ces références intermusicales ont un grand potentiel viral : musiques de dessins animés (par exemple, *Tom et Jerry*), de films d'horreur – lors de la période d'Halloween, des musiques d'horreur accompagnent le partage d'images de chats noirs, comme celle du film *Psychose* d'Alfred Hitchcock (1960 ; **figure 4**) –, de séries télévisées, etc.

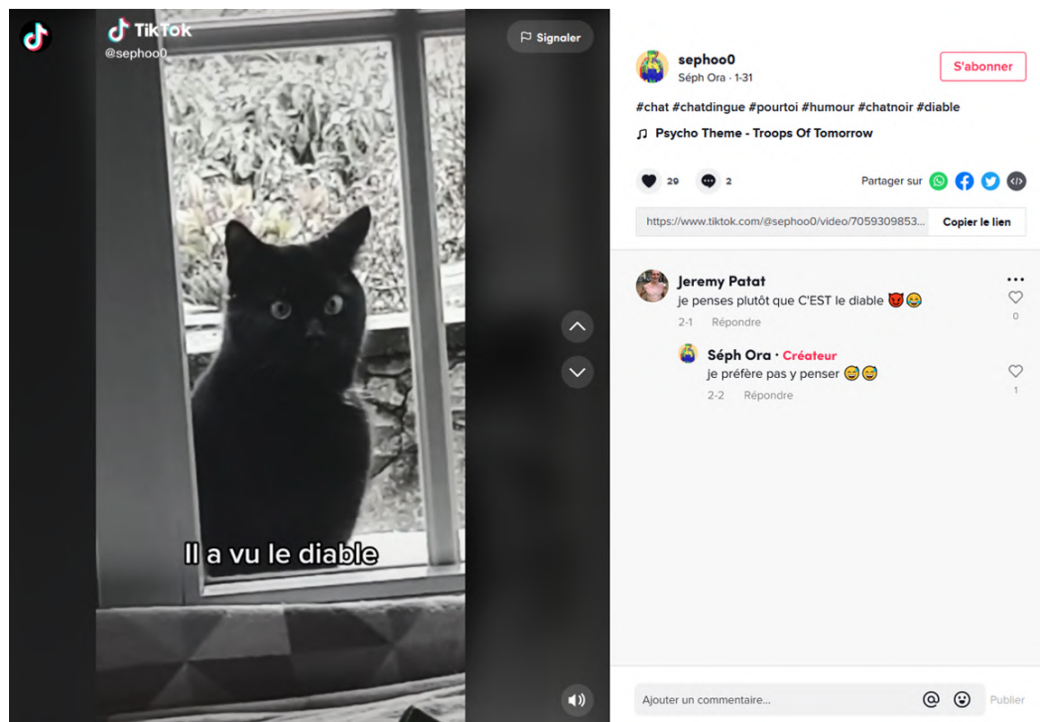


FIGURE 4
Musiques de film d'horreur (vidéo n° 3 présentée dans le cadre de l'étude de réception).
@sephoo0. « #chat #chatdingue ». *TikTok*, 31 janvier 2022.

- 29 Des musiques issues de productions cinématographiques à gros budget plus ou moins récentes sont également représentées, à l'instar des sagas *Harry Potter* (2011-2017), *Pirates des Caraïbes* (2003-2017), du film *S.O.S. fantômes* (*Ghostbusters*, Ivan Reitman, 1984) ou de la série *Squid Game* (**extrait 4**).
- 30 La nostalgie occupe une place prépondérante dans ces reprises, où le plaisir connecté jouant sur l'aspect démodé des musiques partagées en lien avec les

références citées⁵. À nouveau, le contexte de communication est important, puisque ce qui peut être considéré comme étant « ringard » dépend de *qui* regarde. Il est cependant important de souligner que de nombreuses réalisations sur TikTok misent sur le succès de musiques nostalgiques et de leur potentiel de réappropriation viral en contexte numérique.

5. Sur la question de la nostalgie, voir les travaux de Fantin, Fevry et Niemeyer (2021).

- 31 Enfin, des musiques que nous appelons « mignonnes » sont représentées. Elles correspondent à un ensemble de schèmes ou de tropes mélodiques, timbriques et instrumentaux censés favoriser la détente et susciter l’amusement. Ces musiques sont à leur tour reprises, car associées au type de contenu (le #ChatonMignon), comme la chanson « Baby Shark », « The Cuppycake Song » (musique chantée par une petite voix d’enfant) ou encore la reprise de « Axel F » rendue célèbre par Crazy Frog au début des années 2000 (**figure 5 ; extrait 5**).

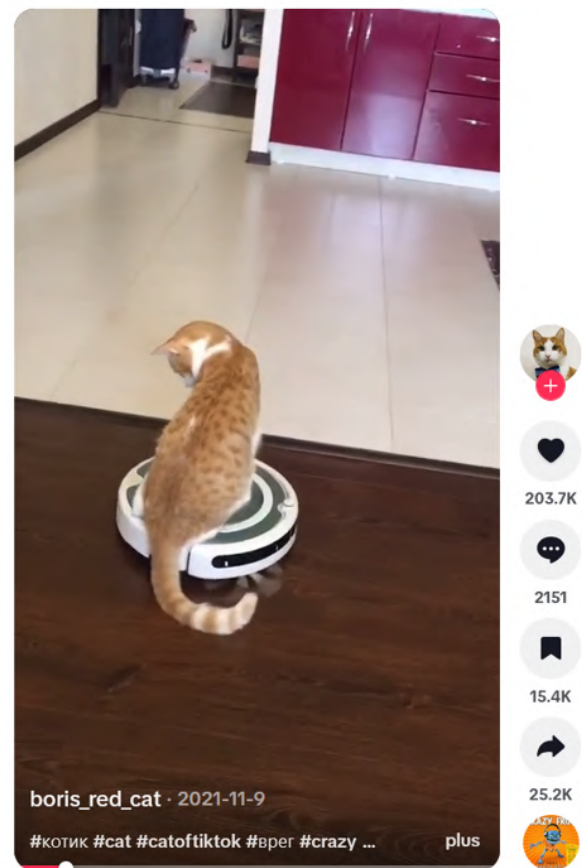


FIGURE 5
Chat sur un aspirateur robot, accompagné par la chanson « Axel F » (Crazy Frog, 2005).
@boris_red_cat. « #КОТИК #cat #catoftiktok ». *TikTok*, 9 novembre 2021.

- 32 Pour renforcer l’aspect mignon, la vitesse des musiques peut être accélérée. Souvent, cette transformation hypertextuelle donne un effet comique aux publications.

- 33 En somme, qu'il s'agisse de créations originales artistiques, de réappropriations plus ou moins ludiques ou encore d'instrumentalisations de représentations musicales (comme pour la récupération stratégique de Mariah Carey en contexte de propagande politique), on constate que les réalisations musicales sont très variées. Plusieurs facteurs permettant d'expliquer la viralité des contenus peuvent être mis en avant : la récupération de musiques prolongeant des œuvres de fiction issues de la culture populaire, la reprise de musiques nostalgiques ou encore l'exploitation de l'esthétique de la mignonnerie pour affecter les publics. De plus, ces ingrédients peuvent être intégrés à des processus participatifs.

Circulation virale d'imaginaires musicaux

- 34 Au sein du dispositif socionumérique TikTok, il est difficile d'isoler ces productions sémi-discursives d'un mouvement collectif. La réappropriation est en effet souvent réalisée de manière participative. À travers la notion d'intermusicalité connectée, nous voulons souligner le fait que l'usage d'une musique se fait rarement de manière isolée. Son partage dépend de dynamiques participatives, se mettant souvent au service de la circulation virale. Les imaginaires intermusicaux représentés jouent ainsi un rôle essentiel dans une perspective participative. Ces réalisations intermusicales sont considérées dans un élan de création collective.

Cadrage théorique : intermusicalité, culture participative et mêmes musicaux

- 35 L'intermusicalité connectée prend son sens en lien avec la notion de « dialogisme interlocutif », qui énonce que toute production discursive s'inscrit intrinsèquement dans une chaîne de parole. Toute publication TikTok entre de la sorte dans une relation de dialogue *in absentia* avec d'autres discours, passés et à venir. L'anticipation de la réaction dialogique de l'autre est inhérente au discours.
- 36 Le concept de « culture participative numérique » met en évidence une dynamique interactive entre les internautes et les discours plurisémiotiques. Les nœuds de relation sont tissés grâce aux fonctionnalités technodiscursives, mais aussi, bien sûr, grâce aux nouvelles formes de sociabilité connectée. Dans les processus de création et de partage de posts, intervient ainsi le « nous » collectif. De la sorte, les pratiques musicales numériques à distance peuvent être pensées en tant que créations collectives⁶.

6. L'étude menée par Sylvain Martet et Elsa Fortant (2022) portant sur la transformation numérique du *jam en période Covid* analyse comment une communauté de producteurs et d'amateurs de musiques électroniques a pu produire de la musique collectivement grâce à des dispositifs numériques.

- 37 Le dispositif sociotechnique de la plateforme TikTok bouleverse ainsi la composition musicale grâce aux fonctionnalités numériques mises à disposition, mais elle bouscule aussi les modes de circulation de productions musicales – modes largement influencés par ses configurations algorithmiques. L'importance accordée à la musique tient en grande partie par sa proposition de « *trends* » mises à la disposition des usager·ères grâce au moteur de recherche de sons. Grâce à cette fonctionnalité, il est possible de réutiliser la bande-son d'une vidéo en ayant connaissance des autres vidéos l'ayant déjà employée.
- 38 Qu'elles soient simplement reprises (en lien avec la notion d'intertextualité au sens strict) ou réappropriées, les musiques partagées sur TikTok dépendent ainsi d'un nouvel écosystème fondé sur la sociabilité participative. En effet, la sociabilité numérique participative favorise l'émergence de nouvelles formes de communication interpersonnelle et communautaire au sein des espaces socionumériques. Elle encourage des mouvements participatifs en ligne allant de la simple participation à un mouvement de création collective, à la mobilisation participative politique, comme c'est le cas de l'activisme numérique.
- 39 La musique au sein de la plateforme TikTok serait donc un facteur clé dans la participation en ligne et pourrait donc être considérée comme un ingrédient favorisant la viralité. C'est l'hypothèse que nous défendons ici. Nous supposons que la musique est un moteur de viralité et que celle-ci augmente considérablement le capital attentionnel de la plateforme. Le succès de TikTok repose selon nous en grande partie sur sa composante sonore et musicale, qui donne à la musique un nouveau statut dans le partage de contenus : son potentiel mémétique. Dans le langage courant, on parle désormais de « mèmes » pour désigner les thèmes musicaux les plus connus. En s'appuyant sur différents travaux portant sur les mèmes (Allard 2016 ; Shifman 2014 ; Simon et Wagener 2024 ; Wagener 2022), on peut définir un mème comme un signe constitué d'une combinaison plurisémiotique – fixe ou animée – de textes, images, sons et/ou musiques, s'inscrivant dans une expérience sociale collective. La notion de « mème musical » repose elle aussi sur un phénomène de participation collective des usager·ères – qui reprennent, détournent ou réinterprètent des séquences musicales.
- 40 De plus, les mèmes musicaux se caractérisent à la fois par une valeur sociale et affective. La charge émotionnelle des musiques est un ingrédient majeur participant de ces élans de création collective. La reprise de sons et de musiques prend une valeur sociale, car elle s'inscrit dans une volonté de s'intégrer à une communauté numérique, mais elle se charge aussi d'une valeur affective. En référence aux recherches de Camille Alloing et Julien Pierre (2017), on peut comprendre cette charge affective

comme un élément central du « web affectif⁷ ». Les musiques aimées, reprises ou partagées ne sont pas seulement des préférences individuelles, elles deviennent autant de traces numériques interprétées par les algorithmes comme des indices de ce qui affecte les usager·ères. La notion de même musical est ainsi réciproquement dépendante : d'un phénomène de participation collective chargée émotionnellement, où les usager·ères reprennent, détournent ou réinterprètent des séquences musicales ; et des affordances technodiscursives des plateformes (fonctionnalités et algorithmes de recommandation) – qui quant à elles propulsent certaines musiques, susceptibles de devenir virales.

Musiques virales à usage mémétique

- 41 Plusieurs chansons accompagnant les chats mis en scène dans le corpus étudié figurent parmi les dix « tendances musiques » les plus virales en 2022 (classement publié par la plateforme⁸). À ce titre, on peut citer « Astronomia », chanson russe créée par Tony Igy en 2020 et utilisée pour créer des mèmes (vidéo de départ de danse avec un cercueil porté), ou bien « Oh No », extrait musical remixé par Capone à partir du tube « Remember (Walking in the Sand) » du groupe The Shangri-Las, initialement paru en 1964 (**figure 6** ; **extrait 6**).
- 42 Cette musique exprime un ressenti lorsque les événements ne se sont pas déroulés comme prévu. Les vidéos de chats du corpus ont souvent un effet comique.
- 43 « Ievan Polkka » est une chanson d'animé japonais jouée par le personnage populaire Hatsune Miku. Elle est popularisée en 2007 dans un même vidéo dans laquelle un chat blanc (renommé Vibing Cat) danse au rythme des tambours d'un batteur de rue. Plusieurs vidéos faisant partie du corpus étudié s'inspirent de ce même grâce à une mise en abyme (la **figure 1** en est un exemple). Le chat domestique est posté devant un écran (mobile ou tablette) où défile la vidéo virale et ce dernier est filmé en train de « danser » de la même manière que le Vibing Cat. Le fait que le chat filmé bouge de manière synchronisée au rythme du tambour renforce la force de l'intermusicalité mémétique. Filmer son chat dans cette situation donne l'occasion de répondre à une sorte de défi participatif.
- 44 Dans un autre registre rejoignant la question de la participation politique en ligne, il faut encore souligner l'usage de musiques à caractère viral dans le cadre de formes d'activisme numérique. La capacité de certaines musiques circulant sur TikTok à susciter l'adhésion, à fédérer des publics ou à porter des engagements collectifs a notamment été analysée par Laurence Allard (2021), qui mobilise à cet égard les travaux de Gilles Deleuze et

7. Le « web affectif » désigne un processus numérique où les affects des usager·ères sont captés, analysés et utilisés pour influencer leurs comportements en ligne. Sur les réseaux sociaux numériques, ce processus consiste à identifier les contenus qui suscitent des réactions émotionnelles (comme la joie, l'humour, la surprise, la colère, etc.), puis à exploiter ces données pour amplifier la circulation de ces contenus et maximiser l'engagement des usager·ères, tout en générant de la valeur économique pour les plateformes via la publicité et les recommandations. En d'autres termes, les affects, une fois captés, deviennent un levier pour renforcer l'attention.

8. « Classement des musiques qui ont cartonné sur TikTok en 2022 ». *TikTok Newsroom*, 8 décembre 2022. <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/fr-fr/classement-des-musiques-qui-ont-cartonne-sur-tiktok-en-2022>.

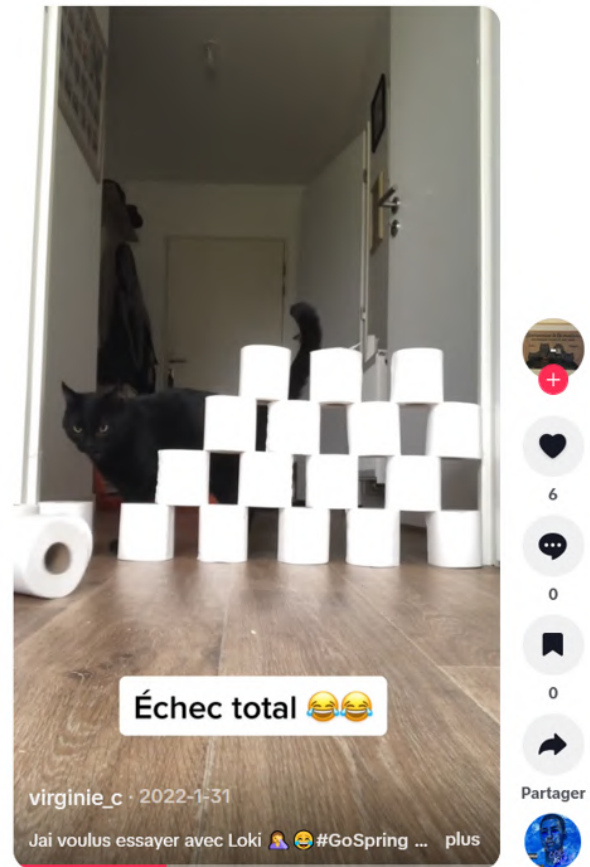


FIGURE 6

« Oh No » (vidéo n° 6 présentée dans le cadre de l'étude de réception).
@virginie_c. « Jai voulu essayer avec Loki ». *TikTok*, 31 janvier 2022.
https://www.tiktok.com/@virginie_c/video/7059362638307806470.

Félix Guattari (1980). En s'appuyant sur leur concept de ritournelle, elle montre comment des motifs musicaux, lorsqu'ils sont repris, détournés et rejoués dans un contexte participatif, peuvent créer des formes de territorialisation affective et sociale. Chez Deleuze et Guattari, la ritournelle n'est pas simplement un refrain musical : elle est un opérateur d'organisation du chaos, une manière pour un sujet ou un collectif de se situer dans un monde en mouvement. Ainsi, dans les pratiques numériques telles que celles observées sur TikTok, la ritournelle fonctionne comme un vecteur de subjectivation partagée, capable à la fois de cristalliser des appartenances et d'ouvrir à de nouvelles formes d'expression politique ou sensible.

- 45 Dans le corpus étudié, certaines bandes-son sont mobilisées comme outils de prise de position idéologique. Deux grands types de positionnements émergent. Le premier regroupe des usages à visée militante ou critique, où la musique sert à dénoncer des formes d'injustice sociale, de racisme,

de sexisme ou d'intolérance. Le second, plus ambigu, renvoie à des usages problématiques où des extraits musicaux sont associés à des représentations visuelles véhiculant des imaginaires d'extrême droite⁹.

Meow Cat Memes

- 46 Le processus mémétique se voit encore amplifié par des chansons mignonnes virales spécifiquement thématiques autour de l'univers du chat. Cette entrée atteint le plus fort degré d'intensité dans la pratique de ce que nous avons appelé le « Groovy Clic&cat » ([Simon 2024b](#)) – cette action génératrice d'attention relative à une musique associée au chat. Plusieurs reprises accompagnent les vidéos de chats étudiées : « Go Kitty Go » (plus de 3 000 vidéos réalisées en janvier 2024), « Meow ! » (plus de 5 000 vidéos), « Cats the Living Tombstone » (plus de 70 000 vidéos), ou encore « I Love My Kitty Cat », de Parry Gripp qui comptabilise plus d'un million de vidéos – il s'agit de la musique la plus représentée en termes quantitatifs dans le corpus étudié.
- 47 Ces reprises musicales, caractérisées par un faible degré de réappropriation, favorisent leur circulation massive. En outre, l'ensemble de ces musiques émettent une émotion positive qui contribue à leur viralité.

9. Le partage viral de la chanson « Erika » – composée en 1938 par Herms Niel – est emblématique des dynamiques et des tensions qui émergent en contexte socio-numérique. Cette chanson de propagande associée au régime nazi se met au service d'élans de création participative à caractère humoristique, contribuant à normaliser des symboles idéologiques (voir [Simon 2023](#) sur l'étude de l'imagerie des #Chadolf #Kitler accompagnant cette chanson et [Simon 2026](#) sur la viralité de la chanson « Erika » de manière plus générale).

Réceptions de créations intermusicales

- 48 Pour cet article, nous avons voulu développer un dernier axe d'analyse centré sur l'émergence du sens impulsée par la musique : celui de l'interprétation à partir d'une étude de réception. Cette approche interprétative est celle qui est adoptée par Magali Bigey à propos des *fanfictions* ([2017](#)) et par Gabriel Segré ([2013](#)) à propos de l'auditeur-fan. Elle rejoint encore le courant de « sémiotique sociale » développé par Alexandra Saemmer et Nolwenn Tréhondart ([2022](#)) qui s'intéresse à l'interprétation des publics en situation et s'intègre dans la réflexion menée par Maxime Cervulle ([2023](#)) sur la définition du public « [caractérisé] simultanément par sa capacité à agir et à signifier ». Dans toutes ces approches, l'accent est mis sur le rôle actif joué par les publics au niveau interprétatif. Elles permettent également de considérer toutes les lectures possibles, qui dépendent des biais interprétatifs des publics (en fonction de leur âge, de leur système de valeurs, etc.).
- 49 L'étude de réception a été réalisée en janvier 2024 auprès de 116 étudiant·es inscrit·es en première année de BUT Information-Communication¹⁰. C'est à ce moment que l'hypothèse du potentiel viral dépendant du partage

10. La composition de ce groupe est à 75 % de genre féminin. Un tiers se dit être un·e usager·ère fréquent·e de TikTok et un quart seulement se qualifie de « fan de chats ».

musical s'est construite. Ayant le souci de faire le lien entre recherche et pédagogie, nous avons souhaité mener cette approche exploratoire.

- 50 L'expérimentation pédagogique visait trois objectifs. Tout d'abord, elle cherchait à introduire de manière ludique un certain nombre de concepts propres à la culture numérique (culture participative, identité numérique, web affectif, etc. Deuxièmement, elle souhaitait éprouver l'hypothèse du rôle joué (pensé essentiel) par la musique dans la circulation massive de publications sur TikTok. Enfin, elle cherchait à comprendre ce qui affecte le public étudiant dans les publications en question et ce qui pourrait les inviter à agir sur la plateforme en termes de création et de partage des contenus.
- 51 Sept captures d'écran de publications TikTok issues du corpus analysé dans le cadre du projet de recherche #ChatonsMignons ont été projetées sur un grand écran (1. « Baby Shark » ; 2. « Squid Game » ; 3. « Chats noirs et *Psychose* » ; 4. Marine Le Pen ; 5. NumNum Cat ; 6. « Oh No » ; « 7. #Chadolf #Kitler »).
- 52 Le plus grand obstacle méthodologique de cette étude est que ces publications datent de plus de deux ans. La constitution du corpus s'est ainsi déroulée entre octobre 2021 et janvier 2022, ce qui entraîne un décalage important dans la réception de ces travaux.
- 53 Les étudiants avaient cinq minutes pour réagir à chaque image projetée. La saisie s'est faite directement sur le logiciel d'édition d'enquêtes Sphinx de manière anonyme. Pour chaque image, trois questions identiques guidaient la réception :
- *Question 1 : À ton avis, hormis le fait que cette image soit drôle, pourquoi a-t-elle été fortement partagée, aimée, etc. ? (plusieurs réponses possibles, à classer par importance)*
 - *Participation* : parce que c'est une tendance du moment
 - *Musique* : parce que la musique est sympa ou connue
 - *Culture populaire* : parce que la référence culturelle est connue
 - *Affectivité* : parce qu'elle joue avec nos émotions (sympathie, tristesse, peur, etc.)
 - *Sociabilité* : parce que les valeurs partagées créent de la complicité

- *Question 2* : Aurais-tu envie de liker le contenu, de le commenter, de le partager ?
- *Question 3* : Aurais-tu envie de publier du contenu avec la même musique de fond ?

- 54 Il faut préciser que l'expérience a été menée lors du premier cours de culture numérique. Aucun cadrage théorique préalable n'avait alors été exposé et, bien entendu, les images ont été projetées sans qu'il n'y ait eu d'échanges à propos du rôle joué par la musique.
- 55 Le résultat global de l'analyse des réponses à la première question est très parlant, mais il faut bien entendu relativiser ces résultats étant donné la faible portée de cette expérience du point de vue quantitatif. La musique apparaît comme réponse majoritaire dans six questions sur sept. Il n'est pas étonnant que, pour l'image sur les #Chadolf #Kitler, la musique n'ait pas été citée, le contenu ayant été majoritairement perçu comme choquant. La référence est qualifiée de « douteuse » par un étudiant. Concernant les autres publications partagées, les étudiants ont fourni des éléments d'analyse (alors que le champ « réponse ouverte » était facultatif). Ils ont établi un lien direct avec la question de la viralité : « Car la musique "Crazy frog" est assez connue [*sic*] » (1. « Crazy Frog ») ; « car la musique a beaucoup tournée sur les réseaux sociaux ces dernières années. elle a été utilisée pour plusieurs trend [*sic*] » (6. « Oh No ») ; « La musique de Noël la plus populaire [*sic*] » (4. Marine Le Pen), etc. Dans quelques réponses, ce sont des éléments d'analyse au niveau de la construction du sens qui sont mis en avant : « la musique fait référence à quelque chose qui fait peur, cela peut être utilisé pour des situations et faire en sorte que cela rende la chose drôle » (3. Chats noirs). D'autres *verbatim* relevés s'orientent de plus vers la subjectivité énonciative en donnant un avis ou un ressenti : « La musique est trop entendue » (2. « Squid Game ») ; « j'aime l'univers de la musique, le fait de partir d'un bruit de chat pour en faire un remix entraînant, bon concept ! » (5. NumNum Cat).
- 56 Les réponses à la deuxième question apparaissent tout aussi éloquentes. En appliquant le tri croisé, on remarque que la majorité des étudiants qui likent le plus se considèrent non seulement comme de « gros utilisateurs de TikTok », mais aussi des « fans de chats » (**figure 7**). En revanche, les thématiques politiques n'invitent pas à l'engagement (les mêmes 4 et 7, avec Marine Le Pen et #Chadolf #Kitler).
- 57 Le potentiel participatif de réappropriation de la même musique est, enfin, absent. La réponse à 100 % pour les sept images projetées) à la troisième question – « Aurais-tu envie de publier du contenu avec la même musique de fond ? » – est unanime : « jamais ».

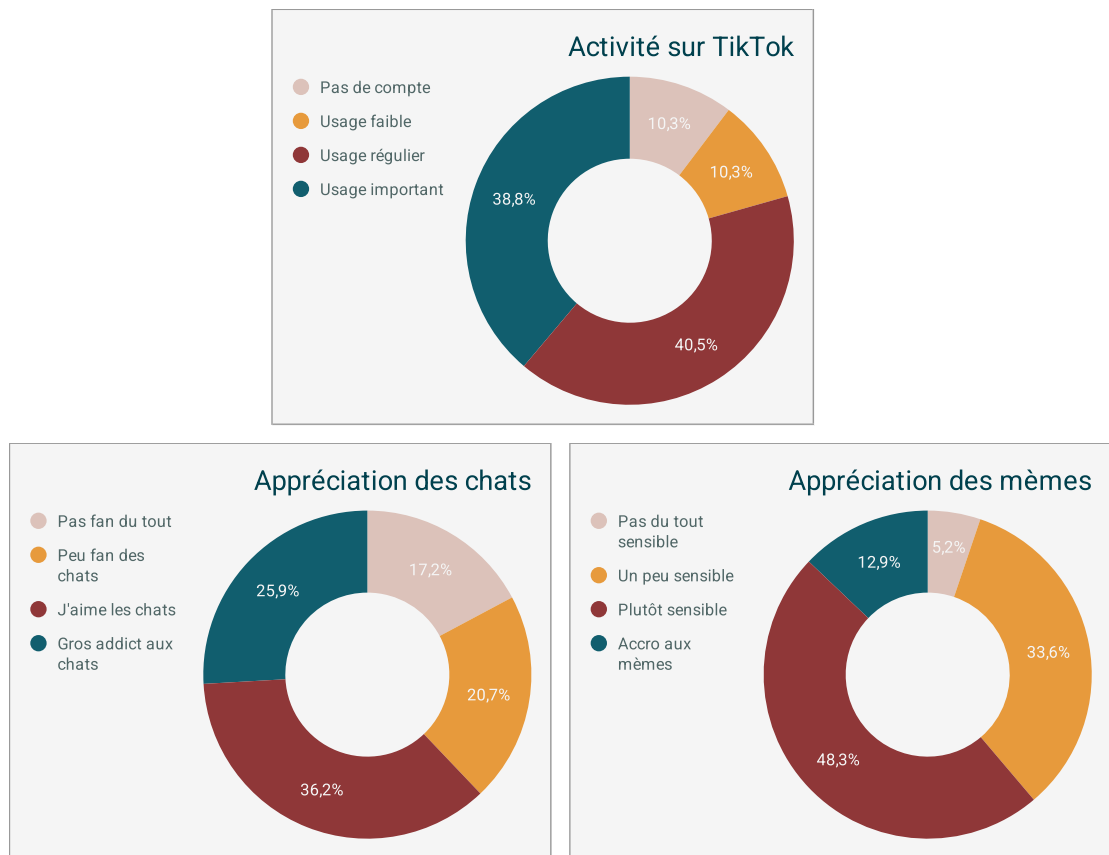


FIGURE 7
Réponses aux questions générales.

58 Cette étude permet pour finir d’appréhender avec du recul la portée socialement significative de la musique au sein de la création musicale sur TikTok. Rappelons que l’expérimentation de l’interprétation du public étudiant s’est réalisée hors contexte sociodiscursif (en classe, et non chez soi devant son smartphone) et le choix des publications leur a été imposé (un corpus de #ChatonsMignons datant de deux ans).

Conclusion

59 Au terme de cette analyse, on peut affirmer que certains imaginaires sémiotextuels construits dans les musiques partagées peuvent avoir un impact sur la viralité des publications. Les pratiques d’écriture sonore observées au sein du corpus étudié sont diversifiées des points de vue sémiotextuel et communicationnel. À ce premier niveau, la musique est bel et bien perçue comme un nouvel ingrédient d’une expérience sociale créatrice et performatrice. Les références musicales faisant référence à des

univers de fictions issues de la culture de masse ont un impact certain. Il en est de même pour les références de type nostalgiques. Les musiques associées au monde de référence du « mignon » dynamisent encore des affects au sein de communautés d'amoureux des chats, y compris dans un objectif qui serait détourné de la simple distraction – comme nous l'avons vu avec l'exemple de la dédiabolisation de l'extrême droite.

- 60 Fonctionnant sur des algorithmes puissants, la plateforme TikTok exerce une influence sur ses utilisateurs et utilisatrices, qui se conforment aux tendances musicales qu'elle met de l'avant. Ces facteurs technologiques identifiés dans l'introduction comme fonctionnant de manière verticale contribuent largement à la mémétisation des musiques. Les fonctionnalités technologiques permettent en outre à tous de créer des productions musicales, tout en s'insérant dans un collectif. La dynamique affordancielle qui est en jeu permet, de plus, de générer de la complicité grâce au moteur de recherche de musiques mis à la disposition par TikTok.
- 61 De surcroît, les musiques deviennent des mèmes dont la prolifération doit être pensée dans une dynamique de communication liée à un environnement technologique, social et affectif. Et cette contagion affective musicale amplifie la logique de capitalisation de l'attention. Le capitalisme de la plateforme, dépendante d'une économie de l'attention, se construit grâce aux tendances suivies, lancées, exploitées par les usager·ères. Et le risque de l'enfermement algorithmique n'est pas négligeable.
- 62 L'expérience musicale transgressive et mémétique ouvre encore des potentiels de formats d'expression à buts critiques (formes d'activisme numérique, par exemple) et politiques (récupération de formats venant « d'en bas » au service de l'idéologie).
- 63 La notion d'« intermusicalité connectée » permet à l'issue de cette analyse d'appréhender les logiques de viralité au niveau de l'horizontalité des échanges, de la verticalité des algorithmes et également à l'échelle des univers musicaux existant en dehors de la plateforme TikTok.
- 64 Véritables machines à clics, les publications musicales virales sur TikTok sont devenues représentatives de la circulation virale de contenus affectifs. Dans ce cocktail explosif pensé en termes de viralité (force des algorithmes, dynamique sociale collective et mémoire intermusicale qui peut être uniformisée ou stéréotypée), il faut bien mettre en évidence la dimension affective de la musique, qui définit le plaisir que nous avons à écouter, créer ou jouer de la musique. Le partage d'émotion constitue en lui-même un appel à l'émotion, et ce double mouvement possède une capacité exponentielle à capter l'attention et susciter l'intérêt. Un vaste champ de recherche reste à investir pour approfondir les interrelations entre musique, affectivité et viralité, et ainsi consolider les réflexions amorcées ici.

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À PROPOS DE L'AUTRICE

Justine Simon est chercheuse en sciences de l'information et de la communication à l'université Marie et Louis Pasteur, au sein de l'unité de recherche ELLIADD. Sa recherche porte sur l'analyse des discours numériques mêlant textes, hypertextes, images, sons, musiques, dans une perspective interdiscursive et argumentative. Ses derniers travaux se consacrent à la question de la viralité sur les réseaux socionumériques et aux mèmes, pensés en tant que résultats d'une pratique participative. En lien avec différentes problématiques sociopolitiques, Justine Simon tente de comprendre les enjeux de circulation, réappropriation, confrontation et réception de mèmes musicaux au sein de différents espaces socionumériques.

Aider à mieux entendre

Dialogue avec Karol Beffa autour de son essai
biographique *Bernard Herrmann*
(Actes Sud, 2024)

Alexandre Vuillaume-Tylski

Mots clés : Herrmann (Bernard), Beffa (Karol), entretien,
recherche-création, biographie

Keywords: Herrmann (Bernard), Beffa (Karol), interview,
practice-based research, biography

« À l'écran, la musique débusque et amplifie les pensées intimes des personnages. Elle transforme souvent de simples dialogues en moments de poésie. » (Bernard Herrmann, cité dans [Beffa 2024, 80](#))

- 1 « Savoir écouter¹ » était un des crédos de Plutarque (vers 44 – vers 125), mais aussi d'un certain nombre de compositeurs au fil des siècles capables d'être également, et chacun à leur manière, enseignants et chercheurs. Compositeur, pianiste et maître de conférences à l'École normale supérieure (ENS PSL), Karol Beffa (né en 1973) s'inscrit dans ce sillon d'enseignement-recherche-création – rhizome permettant d'étendre, d'élargir, la curiosité et l'inspiration, d'intensifier les oxymores et les rencontres², toutes propices à un renouvellement de la créativité et de la pensée. Karol Beffa poursuit cette équation féconde avec son essai biographique *Bernard Herrmann* (Actes Sud, 2024) dans lequel il condense la vie et l'œuvre du compositeur américain – reconnu pour ses musiques de films (et de radio), en particulier chez Orson Welles, Alfred Hitchcock, François Truffaut ou Brian De Palma, mais trop peu encore pour ses œuvres

1. « Combien de gens se font du tort parce qu'ils veulent s'exercer à discourir avant d'avoir su tirer les fruits d'une leçon d'écoute [...] On dit encore que la nature, en nous donnant deux oreilles et une seule langue, voulut nous obliger à moins parler pour mieux entendre » ([Plutarque \[1995\] 2019, 19 et 22](#)).

2. Démontrant les bienfaits des dialogues transdisciplinaires, le mathématicien Cédric Villani propose à Karol Beffa une caractérisation de la musique de film comme « émotion d'origine abstraite » ([Beffa et Villani \[2015\] 2017, 236](#)).

dites « de concert³ ». Juif new-yorkais, Bernard Herrmann (1911-1975) est un lecteur acharné dès l'enfance ; « Benny », à seulement treize ans, dévore ainsi le *Traité d'instrumentation et d'orchestration* d'Hector Berlioz (1844) et y découvre sa vocation. Son érudition précoce et son caractère explosif lui attirent très tôt le rejet des autres, il se sent vite « différent » et « développe un goût prononcé pour l'étrange et la marginalité » (Beffa 2024, 19). Mais plusieurs rencontres marquent son épanouissement, dont celle avec Percy Grainger (1882-1961), compositeur et professeur à l'Université de New York qui « le familiarise tant avec la monophonie antique qu'avec la musique atonale, sans oublier les univers extra-européens, les polyphonies ou les rythmes africains, asiatiques et amérindiens » (Beffa 2024, 40). L'anglophilie de Bernard Herrmann (il s'installe en Angleterre à partir des années 1960), ses multiples inspirations tant littéraires que musicales font naître chez lui des créations pour le concert, mais aussi pour la radio alors en vogue dans les années 1930 – forme qui lui apprend à composer vite et « à savoir tirer parti des contraintes qu'on lui impose en termes de durée à respecter, d'atmosphère à traduire ou encore de variété de styles » (Beffa 2024, 53). Ses musiques pour Hollywood ne sauraient se réduire à ses huit collaborations avec Hitchcock (sur lesquelles beaucoup a déjà été écrit), ce que montre ici Karol Beffa en valorisant d'autres cinéastes et films au sein du corpus⁴. Outre le plaisir qu'il prend à traverser des œuvres-clé (et méconnues) du compositeur, Karol Beffa met aussi au jour dans son ouvrage les frustrations ressenties longtemps par Bernard Herrmann, dont son sentiment d'avoir trop rarement pu aller « jusqu'au bout » de ses possibilités, notamment en tant que chef d'orchestre ; « Benny » en parle d'ailleurs sans filtre à sa femme dès la fin des années 1940 : « J'ai de plus en plus l'impression que je n'ai aucun talent qui vaille quoi que ce soit... Peut-être finalement ne suis-je pas un véritable compositeur ni un véritable chef d'orchestre. La plupart de la musique que j'ai écrite est au mieux complètement inutile » (Herrmann, cité dans Beffa 2024, 83). Pourtant, la qualité décevante, éternellement « commençante » et inachevée, de toute musique ne fait-elle pas, si l'on en croit Vladimir Jankélévitch⁵, tout son « charme » justement ? Pour d'autres, comme Pascal Quignard, la musique n'est-elle pas aussi essentiellement l'expression d'une profonde « nostalgie »⁶ ?

2 Dans le portrait doux-amer de Bernard Herrmann dressé par Karol Beffa, les tiraillements et tâtonnements du compositeur américain s'avèrent souvent inspirés, lui qui produit *in fine* une œuvre plus que significative au sein d'un xx^e siècle musical turbulent, éclectique et complexe. Désireux d'être à la fois précis sur le langage cinématographique mais aussi sur les archives existantes, Karol Beffa s'est ouvert à l'expertise de plusieurs spécialistes dans la préparation, la rédaction puis la relecture de son livre⁷. Parmi les sources bibliographiques affichées à la fin de

3. Parmi les œuvres de concert de Bernard Herrmann abordées par Karol Beffa : son opéra *Wuthering Heights* (1951), sa *Symphonie n° 1* (1941) ou encore sa cantate *Moby Dick* (1938).

4. Citons par exemple *Le Jour où la Terre s'arrêta* (Robert Wise, 1951), où Bernard Herrmann fait vibrer le générique d'ouverture par l'emploi d'un thérémine, ou, moins connu, *La sorcière blanche* (Henry Hathaway, 1953) où il fait usage d'un serpent. Ou encore, *Voyage au centre de la Terre* (Henry Levin, 1959), avec ses cinq orgues graves incarnant les entrailles de la Terre et diffusant un sentiment de gravité.

5. « La musique nous prépare à de grandes choses qui sont sur le point d'arriver... Hélas ! les grandes choses restent éternellement en instance, les grandes choses ne se produisent jamais. [...] [La musique] est l'accompagnatrice » (Jankélévitch [1961] 2015, 140).

6. « Chaque musique a quelque chose à voir avec quelque'un que nous avons perdu. [...] La musique est la nostalgie, après l'apprentissage des langues collectives, de l'état antérieur de la phonation, du souffle, de l'animation, de l'anima, de la psychè » (Quignard 2008, 81 et 85).

7. Dans les remerciements de son livre, Karol Beffa exprime sa gratitude pour le soutien dont il a bénéficié : « Je remercie grandement Jean-Loup Bourget et Michel Chion d'avoir consacré une partie de leur temps précieux à une relecture attentive du manuscrit de ce livre et de m'avoir suggéré des modifications et des compléments bienvenus. David Fiala et Marc Lambron ont eu la

son essai biographique, l'auteur-compositeur mentionne plusieurs titres d'ouvrages (cités plus tard dans notre entretien), tout en pointant leur approche essentiellement filmique : « tous les auteurs ont eu tendance à se concentrer sur les musiques de films de Bernard Herrmann et n'abordent que de façon marginale ses œuvres pour le concert. Or, il était à mon avis essentiel d'étudier aussi ces dernières pour voir en quoi elles s'inspirent de ses musiques de films, ou réciproquement les nourrissent » (Beffa 2024, 165-166). Soucieux par ailleurs de dire ses liens artistiques avec Bernard Herrmann, Karol Beffa raconte, dès l'introduction de son livre, sa découverte au début des années 1980 de l'univers Herrmann, avec sa partition pour *Mais qui a tué Harry ?* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1955) qu'il décrit en ces termes : « économe de moyens, acide mais ludique, stravinskien en diable » (2024, 7). Durablement marqué, Karol Beffa donnera même le titre de *Vertigo* à son quintette composé en 2019, en hommage à Bernard Herrmann et son quintette *Souvenirs de voyage* (1967). L'ouvrage que Beffa consacre au compositeur américain est devenu ainsi une sorte d'évidence pour lui :

À force de voir des films dont Herrmann a écrit la musique, à force de lire et d'écouter ses partitions, j'ai voulu en savoir plus sur ce compositeur pour l'image reconnu comme le meilleur d'entre ses pairs, mais qui regrettait de n'avoir pas eu la carrière de chef d'orchestre et de compositeur pour le concert dont il avait rêvé » (Beffa 2024, 9).

- 3 Le dialogue qui suit avec Karol Beffa entend revenir dans les pas de Bernard Herrmann mais aussi éclairer quelques lignes de force philosophiques à l'œuvre derrière cet essai biographique rédigé moins *sur* un artiste (position dominante à proscrire de toute étude) qu'*avec* ses doutes et ses idées.

* * *

Alexandre Vuillaume-Tylski : Une des visées de votre portrait, à la fois analytique et tout public, est de tenter de vous approcher au plus près de la psyché et de l'identité musicale de Bernard Herrmann – avec notamment plusieurs passages⁸ qui définissent concrètement ce « style Herrmann » qui aura donné aux scènes et aux images de cinéma de nouveaux reliefs et arômes. Plusieurs mois ont passé depuis la parution de cet ouvrage, comment a-t-il été reçu jusqu'à présent ? Sachant que les livres de cinéma, et encore plus peut-être ceux consacrés à la musique de film, constituent, a priori, des « niches éditoriales », belles et nécessaires, mais souvent trop peu suivies par le grand public, en dépit des livres édités aux éditions Vrin, Symétrie, Presses universitaires de Rennes, Éditions universitaires de Dijon, Rouge Profond, Visage Vert...

gentillesse de mettre à ma disposition des bandes-son et CD de la musique de Herrmann, dont des raretés difficiles à se procurer. Je suis redevable à Elsa Caze-neuve, Jérôme Guichard, Anna Khachaturova et Benoît Rossel d'avoir utilement complété ma documentation » (2024, 171).

8. Citons ces passages défini-toires : « harmonies rampantes, indécision modale, vague rythmique, duplication des motifs » (27), « prédilection pour le trouble, le morbide, que charrient des progressions chromatiques aux directions incertaines » (36), « profils mélodiques dépressifs et zébrures de cordes en trémolos rapides » (94), « cauchemar géométrique fait d'épisodes musicaux pulsés, hachés, télescopés, entailles auditives » (112), « spirales d'ostinatos, *flatterzunge* de vents et couleurs harmoniques glauques » (121), « accords sinistres, lamento d'octaves pesantes, choral tapi dans le grave, redoublements inhabituels » (125), « scherzo macabre » (132), ou encore « dégradés de gris, accords ambivalents, polarisés, pulsations de caisse claire qui s'accéléraient au fur et à mesure que l'état mental du héros se dégradait » (154).

Karol Beffa : Curieusement, mon livre sur Bernard Herrmann est peut-être celui pour lequel j'ai eu le plus de comptes-rendus, tant de la part de la presse généraliste que de celle spécialisée en musique ou en cinéma (*Première, Cahiers du cinéma, Positif...*). Peut-être cela vient-il du fait que nombre de mélomanes et de cinéphiles aiment Bernard Herrmann. J'ai néanmoins été fort surpris de constater que plusieurs musiciens avec qui je discutais, ainsi qu'un collègue musicologue, ne connaissaient pas le nom de « Bernard Herrmann », même si la plupart appréciaient les films dont il avait écrit la musique. Ils le connaissaient sans le connaître...

Alexandre Vuillaume-Tylski : Alors que viennent de paraître en langue française un numéro de revue universitaire consacré à John Williams ([Huvet et Tosser 2025](#)) et un volume richement illustré dédié à Jerry Goldsmith ([Desrichard 2024](#)), votre essai biographique Bernard Herrmann, plus ramassé et personnel, a contribué d'une autre manière encore à cette offre livresque actuelle autour des « grands noms » de la musique de film. Pourquoi avoir porté votre choix d'étude sur le parcours de Bernard Herrmann plutôt que sur celui d'une autre figure de la musique pour le cinéma ?

Karol Beffa : Il y a effectivement d'autres compositeurs pour l'écran sur lesquels j'aimerais écrire. Par exemple, Ennio Morricone (1928-2020), dont j'ai lu un livre d'entretiens qui le présente de manière assez complète ([Morricone et De Rosa \[2016\] 2018](#)). J'ai aussi depuis longtemps le projet d'écrire sur John Williams (né en 1932), qui est pour moi le dernier des grands, avec une œuvre importante qui comprend aussi des musiques pour le concert ; mais il me faudrait pouvoir m'entretenir avec lui, et je ne sais pas si c'est encore possible. Je songe également à Michel Legrand (1932-2019), que j'ai un peu connu (j'ai même eu l'occasion de faire un petit concert avec lui). Il existe un livre très intéressant rassemblant les entretiens qu'il a eus avec Stéphane Lerouge ([2018](#)), mais on manque de travaux plus pointus, techniques, sur son travail et son esthétique. Legrand est portée aux nues à la fois comme pianiste de jazz et comme auteur de succès, voire de tubes. Il me semble cependant que l'on n'a pas assez cherché à trouver l'unité qui sous-tend son œuvre, une œuvre de fait très protéiforme. Il y a encore un autre compositeur dont le nom me vient à l'esprit, ancien enfant prodige et génie absolu, et dont l'œuvre, aussi bien pour le cinéma que pour le concert, est considérable : Erich Wolfgang Korngold (1897-1957). J'ai déjà commencé à rassembler de la documentation pour un prochain travail. En fait, si j'ai choisi Bernard Herrmann, c'est en partie dû à mon éditeur, Bertrand Dermoncourt [directeur de la collection « Musiques » chez Actes Sud], qui m'a suggéré son nom ; il trouvait à certaines de mes pièces musicales une parenté avec celles de Herrmann – ce qui certes me flattait mais n'était pas sans être un peu intimidant...

Alexandre Vuillaume-Tylski : Vous avez consacré des livres à des compositeurs tels que György Ligeti (1923-2006) ou encore Maurice Ravel (1875-1937). Quels points communs y a-t-il selon vous entre ces compositeurs et Bernard Herrmann ?

Karol Beffa : Herrmann adorait Ravel, il a dirigé et même enregistré certaines de ses œuvres en tant que chef d'orchestre. Et on trouve des passages très ravéliens dans les partitions de Herrmann, par exemple dans *L'aventure de Madame Muir* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1947), dans *Fahrenheit 451* (François Truffaut, 1966), et surtout dans son opéra *Wuthering Heights* (1943-1951). Le cas de Ligeti est différent. Ligeti n'a jamais écrit pour le cinéma – bien que le cinéma ait eu recours à ses musiques, notamment Kubrick dans *2001 : L'Odyssée de l'espace* (1968), dans *Shining* (1980) et dans *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999). Ligeti, en effet, craignait d'être l'esclave d'un réalisateur ou d'un producteur. Lui qui avait vécu les totalitarismes nazi puis soviétique ne supportait pas dans ses créations le moindre embrigadement, le moindre rapport de subordination ou de soumission. Cultivé, intelligent, Ligeti partageait avec Herrmann un côté irascible, ironique, sarcastique. Tous deux étaient des personnages hauts en couleur, au tempérament souvent volcanique.

Alexandre Vuillaume-Tylski : En 1948, John Cage s'inquiétait de l'écart grandissant entre compositeurs à cause d'un monde musical qu'il jugeait « extraordinairement disparate », au point « d'isoler », disait-il, « les compositeurs les uns des autres et de creuser un grand fossé entre chacun d'eux et la société » ([1948] 2020, 49). Dans le cas de Bernard Herrmann, dont le caractère particulier et imprévisible que vous décrivez dans votre essai avait pu l'isoler de ses pairs, vous montrez aussi ses évolutions personnelles en parallèle avec ses évolutions musicales. Herrmann a même déclaré en 1948, dans un aveu assez déchirant : « Mes sentiments et mes désirs sont ceux d'un compositeur du XIX^e siècle. Je suis complètement en porte-à-faux avec la réalité présente. Je suis à la recherche de l'impossible – je ne veux de la vie que la poésie » (cité dans Beffa 2024, 84).

Karol Beffa : Dans les années 1930, Bernard Herrmann s'est intéressé entre autres à Charles Ives (1874-1964) et à Henry Cowell (1897-1965). Il était extrêmement curieux de tous les courants de la modernité musicale, qu'ils soient post-stravinskiens ou post-schönbergiens. À partir de 1948, dans le monde musical se sont fait jour des divergences, se sont creusés des fossés quasi infranchissables, avec l'arrivée de nouvelles avant-gardes dans lesquelles Bernard Herrmann ne se reconnaissait pas. Dès lors, Herrmann a eu du mal à se faire admettre en tant que musicien pour le concert⁹ – contrairement à Leonard Bernstein par exemple –, même s'il était reconnu comme compositeur pour le cinéma¹⁰. Je parlais précédemment de Morricone, Williams et Legrand, trois compositeurs

9. Herrmann affronte cette même difficulté d'être « entendu » que John Cage décrit en 1948 : « L'un des problèmes désespérants auxquels les compositeurs américains sont confrontés, c'est de ne pouvoir faire jouer leur musique une fois qu'ils l'ont écrite. J'en ai connu vraiment beaucoup qui ont fini dans l'aigreur, isolés dans leur studio » (Cage [1948] 2020, 22).

10. Herrmann reçoit notamment l'Oscar de la meilleure musique en 1942 pour *Tous les biens de la Terre* (*All That Money Can Buy*, William Dieterle, 1941).

jalusés pour leur succès auprès du grand public. Tous ont composé pour le concert – peut-être pour surmonter un complexe d'infériorité, car en général la musique pour l'écran est moins bien considérée que celle pour le concert. Personnellement, je trouve leurs œuvres pour le concert moins inspirées et moins originales que celles qu'ils ont écrites pour l'écran – et ce, alors même qu'ils étaient plus libres, n'étant pas bridés par les exigences de réalisateurs ou de producteurs. Quoi qu'il en soit, il ne fait pour moi aucun doute que la musique de cinéma de Herrmann, incroyablement raffinée et sophistiquée, est *savante* au sens fort du terme.

Alexandre Vuillaume-Tylski : Il existe un certain nombre de publications consacrées à l'œuvre de Bernard Herrmann¹¹ et que vous citez d'ailleurs en fin d'ouvrage, dont *Bernard Herrmann, un génie de la musique de films* (Haeghele 2016) et aussi, plus importantes, *The Life and Music of Bernard Herrmann* (Smith [1991] 2002), *Hitchcock's Music* (Sullivan 2006) et *Critical Essays on Bernard Herrmann and Alfred Hitchcock* (Rawle et Donnelly 2017). Si votre essai, lui, ne néglige pas l'œuvre de concert de Bernard Herrmann (si souvent interconnectée à ses propres musiques de films¹²), que regretteriez-vous éventuellement de ne pas avoir dit ou pu développer dans votre livre ?

Karol Beffa : La collection d'Actes Sud où est publié mon livre s'adresse à un public non spécialisé, j'ai donc dû éviter une trop grande technicité. Par ailleurs, mon texte ne devait pas dépasser 200 000 signes et, si je n'avais pas été soumis à ces exigences éditoriales, j'aurais sans doute développé davantage l'analyse des partitions. Une analyse qui, sans négliger la rigueur, laisse de la place à l'intuition, me paraît en effet constituer l'une des clés d'un bon ouvrage de musicologie. Pour en revenir aux contraintes qui m'ont été imposées pour mon livre, de toute façon, en tant que compositeur, j'ai toujours pensé qu'une contrainte était source de créativité.

Alexandre Vuillaume-Tylski : Dans votre essai *Comment parler de musique ?* (2013), vous vous interrogiez sur la pertinence du commentaire en musique : « Après tout, pourquoi parler de musique ? Ne se suffit-elle pas à elle seule ? » (2013, 21). À propos de l'impossibilité d'expliquer la musique, vous citiez Roland Barthes et vous repreniez l'expression de Pierre Boulez traitant certains musicologues de « releveurs de compteurs ». Vous alliez d'ailleurs vous-même dans ce sens : « L'art meurt du commentaire sur l'art » (2013, 26). Or, quand on écrit un essai biographique consacré à Bernard Herrmann, comment résoudre ce dilemme en quelque sorte philosophique ? Ne cherchez-vous pas surtout au fond à nous « aider à mieux entendre » (2013, 58) ?

Karol Beffa : À la lecture, l'analyse¹³ très développée d'une œuvre musicale, même quand elle est intéressante, peut être fastidieuse si elle n'est pas écrite dans un style accessible, agréable, faisant un usage dosé de la

11. Outre les livres et textes dédiés, le fonds « Bernard Herrmann Papers », conservé à la bibliothèque de la University of California de Santa Barbara, constitue une source fiable d'archives personnelles et professionnelles du compositeur.

12. Que l'on songe par exemple à la reprise d'éléments de sa *Sinfonietta for String Orchestra* (1936) dans *Psychose* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960) ou à la reprise de sa chanson « As the Wind Bloweth » (tirée de sa comédie musicale *King of Schnorrers*, 1968) dans la mélodie centrale de *Taxi Driver* (Martin Scorsese, 1976).

13. Karol Beffa s'est interrogé sur ce mot d'*analyse* dans *Comment parler de musique ?* : « Analyser signifie d'abord décomposer : décomposer ce qui est composé, mettre en évidence les parties qui composent une réalité. La musique serait-elle celui des arts qui est le plus « composé » et donc le plus apte à être décomposé ? » (2013, 41).

métaphore. J'espère y être parvenu dans mon livre sur Herrmann. Quand j'écris sur la musique, je veille à ce que les lecteurs puissent prendre plaisir à me lire, comme s'il ne s'agissait pas d'ouvrages didactiques. C'est une question de style, d'adéquation des images – les métaphores ne doivent pas envahir le texte mais l'éclairer. Universitaire, je suis bien entendu musicologue avant tout, même si, cinéphile, je lis volontiers des ouvrages d'études cinématographiques. Dans ces ouvrages, quand il y est question de musiques de films, l'auteur doit surmonter deux écueils : ne parler que de musique, sans se préoccuper des questions de narration, de cadrage, de lumière et de leurs liens avec la musique ; et, inversement, évacuer toute considération sur la musique. Pour résoudre le dilemme, je prends exemple sur Michel Chion (né en 1947), à la fois compositeur et spécialiste de cinéma pour qui j'ai le plus grand respect. J'ai d'ailleurs eu la chance qu'il accepte de relire mon manuscrit.

Alexandre Vuillaume-Tylski : Dans votre approche critique, vous évitez autant que possible les « analyses comptables » pointées par Pierre Boulez¹⁴ qui s'interrogeait sur la nécessité pour un compositeur de « théoriser ». C'était aussi un questionnement chez Jankélévitch : « Toute philosophie de la musique est une périlleuse gageure et une acrobatie continuée » ([1961] 2015, 107). En quoi écrire, enseigner et faire de la recherche, quand on est compositeur, vous semble nourricier ?

Karol Beffa : Enseigner la musique et la musicologie, c'est bien sûr enseigner des techniques, mais c'est aussi ouvrir les esprits à des considérations esthétiques, à des courants et à des répertoires méconnus. Enseigner oblige à expliciter des concepts, à vulgariser des savoirs complexes et à transmettre des méthodes d'analyse ou d'écriture. Faire de la recherche, qui se concrétise par la rédaction d'articles et de livres, nécessite de formuler clairement ses idées, de structurer sa pensée, de justifier ses choix.

Enseignement et recherche m'aident dans mon travail de compositeur : enseigner¹⁵ m'offre un cadre pour structurer et renouveler ma pratique, en la confrontant à celle des nouvelles générations. La recherche en musicologie s'appuyant souvent sur des approches issues des sciences sociales, de la psychologie, ou de la cognition, cela peut m'ouvrir de nouvelles perspectives dans mon processus créatif. Par ailleurs, mon travail de compositeur s'inscrivant le plus souvent dans un cadre tonal élargi, la réflexion historique elle aussi l'accompagne tout naturellement ; elle est une façon de dialoguer avec les styles du passé et permet ainsi d'éviter l'isolement esthétique. (À ce titre, Bernard Herrmann, dont les sources d'inspiration ont été si diverses, est une sorte de modèle.)

Dans un paysage musical où l'avant-garde se croit encore le centre de l'effervescence médiatique, écrire, publier, participer à des colloques permet à un compositeur « hors avant-garde », d'exprimer son point de vue,

14. Rappelons ici la formule de Pierre Boulez qui entendait ouvrir le champ musical à d'autres dimensions : « La musique est une science autant qu'un art » ([1963] 2017, 167).

15. Sur cette problématique éducative, Karol Beffa écrit : « Parfois des étudiants viennent me voir en me disant qu'ils ont envie de composer mais qu'ils ne savent pas quel style adopter. Tout ce que je peux faire, c'est les écouter attentivement et éventuellement les encourager à explorer telle ou telle direction. Mais ce n'est certainement pas moi qui vais trouver pour eux leur style » (Beffa et Villani [2015] 2017, 160).

d'expliciter ses choix artistiques, de montrer la portée intellectuelle de son travail, de dialoguer avec la communauté élargie des musiciens et des chercheurs. Vous avez raison de parler de *recherche-crédation*¹⁶, comme on le fait de plus en plus depuis une dizaine d'années, car cette activité encourage des allers-retours fructueux entre théorie et pratique. Prenez le cas d'Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992), compositeur français majeur du xx^e siècle : il était aussi professeur au Conservatoire de Paris, où il a formé quantité de musiciens, et il est l'auteur de travaux théoriques importants, tel son *Traité de rythme, de couleur et d'ornithologie* (1949-1992) en sept tomes. Il existe cependant des compositeurs qui ne sont pas précisément des « chercheurs ». Par exemple, Henri Dutilleux (1916-2013), que j'ai très bien connu, a laissé quelques textes, écrits d'ailleurs avec une très belle plume – reflet de la qualité et de l'incroyable sophistication de sa musique. S'il a donc ressenti à certains moments de sa vie le besoin de coucher sur le papier sous forme de mots quelques-unes de ses intuitions musicales, il n'en était pas pour autant ce que l'on appelle un « chercheur ». Sa musique est originale, non point parce qu'elle relèverait d'une « recherche », mais parce que c'était un compositeur au style suffisamment marqué pour que, dès les premières mesures, l'on reconnaisse son identité musicale. Pour ma part, je ne suis pas sûr que la somme d'écrits de Messiaen ait plus inspiré mon travail de compositeur que les rares textes de Dutilleux.

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16. Notons ici que le terme de « recherche-crédation » ne renvoie pas simplement à une posture réflexive ou à un aller-retour entre théorie et pratique – dynamique qui, au demeurant, est constitutive de toute démarche compositionnelle. La recherche-crédation peut désigner aussi un champ disciplinaire institutionnellement reconnu, avec ses cadres, ses protocoles et ses exigences propres en matière d'articulation entre production artistique et production de savoirs, avec ses fondements conceptuels et ses implications méthodologiques. Lire notamment Stévance et Lacasse (2013) et Stévance, Lacasse et Desjardins (2018).

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À PROPOS DE L'AUTEUR

Maître de conférences à l'Université Toulouse II Jean Jaurès, chercheur permanent au [laboratoire LLA-CREATIS](#), Alexandre Vuillaume-Tylski a publié et dirigé une dizaine d'ouvrages sur le cinéma. Pianiste amateur depuis de nombreuses années, il a coordonné notamment le « Cycle Piano & Cinéma » pour l'Université de Genève en 2021. Outre ses rencontres avec de nombreux compositeurs pour l'écran (Antoine Duhamel, Danny Elfman, Philippe Sarde, Martial Solal, Alan Silvestri, John Williams, Gabriel Yared...), il est auteur-réalisateur pour l'émission *Blow Up* sur Arte (115 épisodes à ce jour) et producteur délégué à France Culture (13 documentaires à ce jour, dont un portrait consacré à [Ennio Morricone](#)). Il coordonne par ailleurs le [Prix Corinne Vuillaume](#) depuis 2016 en mémoire de son épouse.

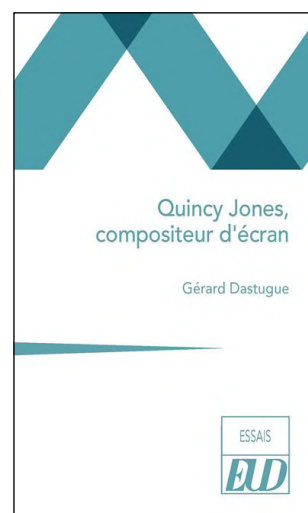
Gérard Dastugue, *Quincy Jones, compositeur d'écran*

Dijon : Éditions universitaires de Dijon, 2025

Stéphane Audard

1 Quincy Jones nous a quittés en novembre 2024, et les hommages rendus à cette occasion par la communauté artistique internationale montrent l'importance de cette figure incontournable. De ce point de vue, la parution du livre *Quincy Jones, compositeur d'écran* en 2025 aux Presses universitaires de Dijon est opportune et apporte une contribution pertinente à une bibliographie déjà relativement abondante consacrée à ce musicien. Gérard Dastugue, maître de conférences à la faculté libre des lettres et des sciences humaines de l'Institut catholique de Toulouse, est l'auteur d'une thèse de doctorat sur la réception spectatorielle de la musique de films dans le cinéma hollywoodien classique.

2 Il s'agit d'un livre petit format d'une centaine de pages, sans iconographie, consacré au travail de compositeur pour l'image de Quincy Jones, couvrant une relativement courte période dans une carrière immense, tant pour sa durée que pour l'éventail des domaines abordés. La production de Quincy Jones pour le cinéma fait l'objet de chapitres dans les monographies qui lui sont consacrées. On peut ainsi citer « Inside Celluloid City » dans *Quincy Jones* (Horricks 1986), « Hollywood Apartheid » dans *Quincy Jones: Musician, Composer, Producer* (Kavanaugh 1998), « On "Q" in Hollywood » dans *Quincy Jones: His Life in Music* (Henry 2013) ou encore « Works in Film, Television, Special Programs, Performances, and Documentary Films » dans *Quincy Jones: A Research and Information Guide* (Henry 2014). On trouve des déclarations de Quincy Jones sur cet aspect de sa carrière dans « Film & Television » dans *The Complete Quincy Jones: My Journey & Passions* (Jones 2008). Il s'exprime sur cette



expérience dans ses mémoires (Jones [2001] 2021). Gilles Mouëllic aborde également à plusieurs reprises Quincy Jones dans son livre *Jazz et cinéma* (Mouëllic 2000). Le sujet est donc bien documenté. Cependant, on ne trouve aucun ouvrage entièrement et uniquement consacré aux œuvres de Quincy Jones pour le petit et grand écran, alors même que des livres portent sur des aspects spécifiques de sa carrière, comme son activité de producteur (Bill 2010) ou sa collaboration avec Michael Jackson (Swedien et Jackson 2009).

- 3 Le livre de Gérard Dastugue vient donc combler un vide. En raison des dimensions modestes de l'ouvrage, l'objet n'est pas de réaliser une monographie d'ampleur sur le sujet, mais de présenter de façon synthétique les réalisations et les enjeux structurants, à destination de lecteurs et lectrices curieuses de s'informer sur le sujet. Cet objectif est réalisé avec beaucoup de clarté dans le propos et grâce à un plan chronologique efficace. Le livre est divisé en trois parties. La première partie, qui couvre la période 1933-1961, retrace la biographie de Quincy Jones et aborde dans le dernier chapitre seulement la question de la musique à l'image. Toutefois, était-il nécessaire de dérouler la vie de l'artiste depuis sa naissance en une dizaine de pages dans un livre aussi court ? Le choix de l'auteur peut s'expliquer par deux raisons : d'une part son lectorat n'est pas forcément spécialiste de l'histoire du jazz, et d'autre part, il peut ainsi présenter les étapes de sa formation et ses influences. Cependant, ce rapide survol biographique contient quelques imprécisions. Ainsi, l'auteur fait coïncider (19-20) la tournée du big band de Dizzy Gillespie de 1956 avec la diffusion du morceau « Desafinado », alors que celui-ci a été composé en 1958 seulement (Castro [1990] 2012). Le passage correspondant dans les mémoires de Quincy Jones, légèrement ambigu dans sa formulation, est ici repris trop littéralement. Ce n'est évidemment qu'un détail dans un ouvrage par ailleurs très précis et documenté.
- 4 La deuxième partie, qui s'étend de 1962 à 1972, porte véritablement sur le cœur du sujet. Le livre montre comment la carrière de Quincy Jones s'oriente alors vers le cinéma, au gré de collaborations avec différents cinéastes et acteurs, jusqu'à devenir une activité majeure pour lui à cette époque. On voit également comment l'éventail musical de Quincy Jones (jazz, pop, funk, musique savante, etc.) lui permet de répondre à toutes sortes de demandes, à une époque où d'autres jazzmen, également sollicités pour composer des bandes originales de films, ne s'inséreront pas aussi durablement dans ce milieu professionnel (par exemple, Miles Davis ou John Lewis aux États-Unis, Martial Solal ou André Hodeir en France). La description du cadre de travail, des contraintes de temps et du statut précaire des compositeurs pour l'écran, très facilement remplacés, montre les conditions dans lesquelles Quincy Jones compose pour l'écran. Les enjeux financiers et artistiques s'affrontent, les premiers l'emportant le

plus souvent sur les seconds. C'est encore plus le cas dans le monde de la télévision où l'on suit l'épuisement progressif de la veine créatrice de Quincy Jones, menant à l'arrêt progressif de son travail pour les écrans. Les films sont regroupés par thématique et par genre, ce qui aide à la compréhension et rompt la logique chronologique. Les difficultés liées aux tensions raciales, auxquelles se heurte cet artiste afro-américain, et son positionnement pionnier dans les industries musicale et cinématographique sont très justement abordés. Tout au long de cette partie, l'analyse des œuvres est précise et détaillée, notamment sur le plan de l'instrumentation. Il aurait été appréciable de voir figurer certaines partitions qui auraient éclairé le propos, et permis d'aller plus loin dans l'analyse thématique, rythmique et harmonique. Il en est de même pour des illustrations des films abordés. Certainement les dimensions de cet ouvrage ne le permettaient pas.

- 5 La troisième partie, 1972-1990, porte sur la suite de la carrière de Quincy Jones, après le cinéma, mais durant laquelle l'image est toujours présente dans son travail, de sa collaboration avec Michael Jackson jusqu'à *La Couleur Pourpre* (Steven Spielberg, 1985), dernier projet d'ampleur pour le grand écran. Cette partie s'achève avec le disque *Back on the Block* (1989), accompagné lors de sa sortie par le documentaire *Listen Up, the Lives of Quincy Jones* (Ellen Weissbrod, 1990). Il s'agit d'une véritable synthèse de sa carrière musicale, avec nombre d'invités prestigieux qui sont autant de compagnons de route de toujours (parmi lesquels Dizzy Gillespie, George Benson, Ray Charles, Miles Davis ou encore Ella Fitzgerald). Ici le son et l'image se relaient pour illustrer le parcours et l'œuvre de Quincy Jones lui-même.
- 6 On peut saluer le remarquable travail de Gérard Dastugue, tant pour la richesse de son érudition que pour sa capacité à la retranscrire dans un format court et très agréable à lire. Nul doute que mélomanes et cinéphiles tireront un grand profit de sa lecture. Une remarque, toutefois, peut être émise à l'issue de ce compte rendu de lecture. On aimerait que l'ouvrage soit plus long, afin de développer tous les aspects passionnants abordés ici, et inclure des illustrations, sous forme d'images et de partitions – bref, on en voudrait davantage, ce qui est le signe de la qualité du livre.

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À PROPOS DE L'AUTEUR

Stéphane Audard, guitariste de jazz, a notamment enregistré avec Michel Legrand. Il enseigne l'histoire du jazz et l'analyse au Conservatoire à Rayonnement Régional de Paris et à l'École Normale de Musique, où il coordonne le département jazz. Qualifié au grade de maître de conférence, il est également chargé de cours à l'université de la Sorbonne et à Paris Cité Université. Il a soutenu en 2024 sa thèse sur l'histoire de l'enseignement du jazz envisagée sous l'angle de la théorie des musiques audiotactiles, réalisée sous la direction de Laurent Cugny. Stéphane Audard est membre du comité de rédaction de la *Revue d'études du jazz et des musiques audiotactiles*, du *Journal de recherche en éducation musicale* et de la revue *Epistrophy*.

Louis Daubresse, *Silence(s) dans le cinéma contemporain. Histoire et esthétique*

Villeneuve-d'Ascq : Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2024

Aurélié Huz

- 1 Situant son enquête dans une trajectoire personnelle liée à la surdité sévère et à l'écoute appareillée, le livre de Louis Daubresse *Silence(s) dans le cinéma contemporain. Histoire et esthétique* invite à « entendre véritablement le silence » (11) dans des films qui en font un ressort narratif, un objet de représentation, un vecteur émotionnel ou une modalité critique. Tiré d'une thèse en études cinématographiques, l'ouvrage propose une approche transversale et plurielle de ce qui fait (le) silence au cinéma, sans éluder la difficulté définitoire autour de cet objet complexe.
- 2 Puisant à la philosophie et à l'anthropologie, l'introduction souligne la tension entre une définition ordinaire du silence comme absence ou suppression du bruit, et la nature réelle de ce phénomène qui résulte en réalité de « modalités restrictives » toujours partielles (23) – atténuation, raréfaction, évidement. Au cinéma, le silence naît d'une confrontation à l'ensemble des sons manipulés par le média (parole, bruit, musique), même s'il touche particulièrement la parole. Ce « travail du négatif » (27) conserve bien au silence la valeur d'un son (c'est un « silence qu'on peut entendre », 26), perceptible par contraste avec les habitudes d'écoute ou les attentes instituées par le film. À cet égard, le terme *silence* peut désigner aussi bien l'état particulier de tranquillité du monde (*sileo*) que l'acte de mutisme consistant, pour un protagoniste humain, à choisir de se taire (*taceo*). C'est en traquant ces deux options que Louis Daubresse propose



d'étudier les « figures cinématographiques du silence » (25), pour en dégager modes de construction et effets narratifs, esthétiques et affectifs.

- 3 Se concentrant sur le cinéma parlant, dans lequel le silence devient une véritable possibilité formelle, l'auteur mobilise un large corpus de films fictionnels, issus de différentes périodes et aires géographiques, mais majoritairement auteuriste et contemporain, comme le titre de l'ouvrage l'indique. C'est depuis le cinéma contemporain, en effet, que Louis Daubresse propose en première partie de remonter les généalogies du silence filmique, dans un parcours rétrospectif plus esthétique qu'historique, et c'est au cinéma contemporain dit « soustractif » qu'il consacre ensuite toute sa seconde partie, cherchant à dégager les significations philosophiques et sociopolitiques de films plaçant l'état du monde sous le signe du silence et du désastre.
- 4 Fructueuse, la démarche entreprend ainsi de montrer des continuités et des ruptures esthétiques, sous la forme de « constellations » d'images et de sons s'éclairant mutuellement (12), et s'appuie pour ce faire sur de nombreuses études de cas. Le « dépouillement par l'oreille » (31) et « l'ekphrasis des instants de silence » (29) fournissent de riches descriptions de séquences, très détaillées, mais parfois un peu longues, parce qu'elles repoussent souvent les moments d'articulation théorique. Toutefois, cette herméneutique du silence, étayée par les photogrammes, parvient à mettre en mots l'expérience sensorielle des spectateur-rices, puisant aussi aux études existantes sur les films analysés, ainsi qu'à un grand nombre de textes philosophiques dont les citations ont parfois le défaut de s'accumuler en notes et de produire un propos allusif plutôt qu'une démonstration explicite.
- 5 La première partie (« Passages du silence ») retrace une généalogie du silence dans le cinéma de genre, le cinéma narratif et le cinéma de la modernité à partir des années 1960, pour montrer une diversité d'usages fonctionnels, et saisir à la fois ce dont héritent et ce dont se démarquent les cinémas contemporains.
- 6 Le chapitre 1 analyse trois films emblématiques – *Il était une fois dans l'Ouest* (Sergio Leone, 1968), *2001 : L'Odyssée de l'espace* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968) et *Le cercle rouge* (Jean-Pierre Melville, 1970) – choisis pour leur ancrage générique autant que pour leur manière de détourner les conventions du western, de la science-fiction, et du policier ou du film de gangsters. Malgré quelques flottements sur l'approche des genres médiatiques (qui oscille entre liste de thèmes ou de codes plastiques, et appréhension culturelle), et si l'on peut être dérouté par le choix de traiter le « cinéma de genre » à partir de films qui, d'emblée, entendent se détacher des productions industrielles par un positionnement distinctif que les formulations de l'auteur naturalisent (évoquant par exemple des « œuvres à part

entière, et non des produits de série », 66), l'analyse dégage de manière fine et convaincante comment les séquences quasi muettes contribuent dans ces trois films à activer les attentes génériques, à orienter la lisibilité de l'intrigue, à accentuer la tension narrative et à produire les effets de danger. Le silence exacerbe ainsi une « écoute causale » dramatisée où tout bruit devient hautement signifiant. Mais ces films feraient aussi du silence le moyen de rendre la présence au monde de personnages solitaires et ouvriraient ainsi, au-delà des codes du genre, à des enjeux humains et existentiels.

- 7 Le chapitre 2 étudie les formes de silence liées à la surdité, au mutisme ou à la surdi-mutité à travers les fabriques de la subjectivité auditive dans le cinéma désigné comme « narratif-représentatif-industriel » (87). S'appuyant de manière stimulante sur les apports de la psychoacoustique et la description des expériences perceptives réelles, Daubresse examine comment des films comme *Il faut sauver le soldat Ryan* (Steven Spielberg, 1998), *Raging Bull* (Martin Scorsese, 1981) ou *Requiem pour un massacre* (Elem Klimov, 1985) peuvent faire éprouver l'écoute intériorisée de protagonistes atteints de défaillance auditive, à travers des procédés de rupture, d'atténuation, de submersion ou de distorsion sonores, et la manipulation du point d'écoute (l'auricularisation) – même s'il ne s'agit jamais que d'approximations. Les personnages muets par défaillance vocale ou refus de parler voient quant à eux leur silence rejaillir sur l'environnement sonore diégétique et engagent des effets dramatiques propres, liés à l'énigme du personnage, à l'indécidabilité de sa pensée et aux difficultés d'interprétation dans un espace où la communication verbale échoue. Le chapitre parvient à dégager comment ces figures du silence sont canalisées par des usages spécifiques de l'image (comme la place accordée au corps, les cadrages serrés sur les visages, les champs-contre-champs entre sourd-es et entendant-es), et induisent davantage qu'une mutation sonore : une incertitude cognitive et une autre forme de relation au monde, à rebours de la « normo-écoute » verbo-centrée.
- 8 Le chapitre 3 décale le regard vers un cinéma de la modernité présenté, dans une perspective philosophique, comme espace de « révolution esthétique » et de « conscience du monde contemporain après la Catastrophe » (104-105). Les pratiques du silence y répondraient aux désastres historiques, dans une sensibilité exacerbée au présent. Daubresse montre ainsi comment, chez des réalisateur·rices comme Michelangelo Antonioni, Robert Bresson, Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet, ou Marguerite Duras, le silence rompt avec les usages narratifs antérieurs, en particulier ceux du dialogue classique, pour recouvrir des significations plus symboliques. La dispersion oiseuse de la parole jusqu'à la surcommunication stérile, la voix blanche ou la diction *recto tono* antidramatiques, l'autonomie du son (la voix) désynchronisé de l'image (le corps), ou encore la recherche

d'une écriture filmique sans cesse trouée de silence sont autant de figures qui produisent des formes de silence habité et perturbant, où la parole est mise en crise et le récit dérégulé, et où se disent l'effondrement du sens et la déréalisation du monde.

- 9 C'est ce silence comme « état du monde » qu'envisage la deuxième partie de l'ouvrage dans le cinéma contemporain dit « soustractif¹ » ou « contemporain ». Daubresse s'appuie ici sur l'étude des films de Andreï Tarkovski, Theo Angelopoulos, Alexandre Sokourov, Šarūnas Bartas, Béla Tarr et Tsai Ming-liang, entre beaucoup d'autres. Ce cinéma de la raréfaction « minimise l'apport du scénario, du récit, de la parole, des décors, des personnages, du montage et du nombre de plans » (163), et construit ainsi un regard poétique et politique sur un monde désenchanté après la fin des grands récits progressistes. Le contemporain est ici pris, avec Giorgio Agamben, dans une acception philosophique située dans la continuité des positions critiques de la modernité.
- 10 Le chapitre 4 prolonge certaines observations du chapitre 2 en étudiant les silences humains et leurs formes d'« (im)puissance muette ». Les films d'Angelopoulos (*Alexandre le Grand*, 1980), de Tarkovski (*Andreï Roublev*, 1969 ; *Stalker*, 1979), de Bartas (*Few of Us*, 1996) ou de Pedro Costa (*Ossos*, 1997) construisent en effet, par leur silence, des positions morales et existentielles contrastées : mise au ban subie ou marque d'exclusion choisie, statut de supériorité ou réclusion sans raison, la disparition de la parole confère toujours au silence une valeur désocialisante. Il marque le repli, le renoncement ou la résistance passive des individus et des communautés face aux violences de l'histoire, aux dérives du capitalisme, à la misère sociale. Ces figures mutiques tendent à délier la narration, laissant le récit à l'état de fragments ou de pointillés, et produisant un effet descriptif où le silence fonctionne comme estompe et donne place aux vestiges de monde et d'êtres en voie de disparition.
- 11 En contrepoint de ces mutismes humains, le chapitre 5 étudie les « silences du dedans et du dehors » – les présences sonores discrètes et presque inaudibles d'un monde en désagrégation, qui au cinéma, dépendent étroitement du traitement des lieux à travers lesquels le silence peut « habiter le monde » (212). Lieux clos (le cinéma de quartier de *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* de Ming-liang, 2003), lieux ouverts sans frontières réelles (la Zone de *Stalker*), lieux intermédiaires et transitoires (la chaumière du *Cheval de Turin* de Tarr, 2011) : tous modèlent une écoute, un silence et une sensation de durée spécifiques. Surtout, les sons résiduels, au sein de ce *silere* du monde, deviennent des matières brutes du lieu, purement phénoménales, sans causalité ni chronologie. Donnant forme aux crises réelles (menace nucléaire, extinction culturelle, cataclysmes...), ces silences ambiants expriment en même temps une « expérience du désastre » uni-

1. Louis Daubresse reprend la désignation proposée par Antony Fiant dans *Pour un cinéma contemporain soustractif* (2014).

verselle, latente, toujours en cours, à la fois « muette et incommunicable » (227), dans une temporalité suspendue.

- 12 Ces figures cinématographiques (mutisme, silence) confèrent par ailleurs aux gestes, aux pratiques et aux rites faits en silence une valeur singulière, comme l'explore le chapitre 6. Vœux de silence chez Tarkovski (*Andreï Roublev* et *Le Sacrifice*, 1986), cérémonies collectives rituelles chez Angelopoulos (*Eleni : La Terre qui pleure*, 2004 ; *Le pas suspendu de la cigogne*, 1991), étirement démesuré des plans chez Ming-liang (*Les Chiens errants*, 2013) sont quelques-uns des exemples permettant d'envisager une écriture filmique où le silence exacerbe l'ampleur et la puissance expressive du geste à l'écran. Dans le silence ainsi déployé, les gestes des marginaux focalisent l'attention sur les corps ordinaires et la vacuité du quotidien (Lisandro Alonso, *Los Muertos*, 2004), tandis que les gestes incohérents, ambigus ou confus n'ont plus de sens qu'en eux-mêmes, sans mobile ni efficience (Šarūnas Bartas, *The House*, 1997). Cette poétique de l'évidement sonore tend à produire une « atemporalité radicale » (269) et déroute l'intérêt narratif. Daubresse souligne ainsi comment le cinéma soustractif travaille à produire par l'audition des « blocs de durée » (265) et vise une perception brute de l'espace-temps en-dehors de toute événementialité.
- 13 En recadrant l'ensemble des pistes de réflexion du livre non au sein d'une « théorie globale » mais à travers différents « régimes de discours possible » du silence au cinéma (283-284), la conclusion générale parvient à rassembler des résultats féconds, qui auraient pu toutefois être nettement moins disséminés au fil des chapitres, et plus systématiquement soulignés dans les transitions et les conclusions partielles. À travers cette étude, le silence cinématographique apparaît premièrement, et avec évidence, comme la construction d'une « matière sonore à part entière » (285), qui requiert d'être entendue et sollicite l'écoute parce qu'elle crée un désir de son. En somme, ce silence fonctionne comme un mode d'exacerbation de la vigilance auditive, donnant paradoxalement au son une puissance inédite. Deuxièmement, rappelant en cela combien au cinéma « le son dicte à l'image une certaine conduite » (284), les figures silencieuses configurent les attentes visuelles et cognitives, modifient la manière de voir, et peuvent même produire un « réapprentissage de la vision » (292).
- 14 Troisièmement, parce qu'il active nos hypothèses sur son origine, ses raisons, sa nature, le silence modèle la signification des lieux et des personnages qu'il affecte, selon des procédés variables : l'auteur suggère ainsi que le cinéma radical, qui forme le cœur de son corpus, recourt davantage au silence objectif par mutisme humain ou atténuation sonore du monde, qu'au silence subjectif par partage d'un point d'écoute altéré, qui serait associé aux usages plus balisés, ponctuels et dramatiques du cinéma narratif ou industriel. D'interprétation moins évidente et plus déroutante sans

doute, les silences du cinéma contemplatif toucheraient en particulier des lieux en déshérence et des êtres marginalisés, se donnant essentiellement comme une matière phénoménologique engageant un rapport renouvelé aux regards, aux corps et aux lieux, pour traiter de ruptures historiques, sociales et anthropologiques.

- 15 Si l'on peut regretter certaines distinctions sommaires entre cinéma de genre (où le silence aurait toujours une fonction utilitaire) et cinéma de recherche (où il s'émanciperait de ses attaches narratives), et si les rapports entre silence et musique auraient pu faire l'objet de développements plus conséquents, l'ouvrage permet bien de dégager en synchronie une diversité de potentialités expressives du silence au cinéma, de repérer des continuités entre différentes expressions cinématographiques, et de mettre en lumière de manière plus générale la singularité du son et de l'écoute filmiques. Les articulations qu'il propose entre silence, mutisme et écoute constituent une contribution précieuse à l'esthétique sonore du cinéma dans son ensemble.

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À PROPOS DE L'AUTRICE

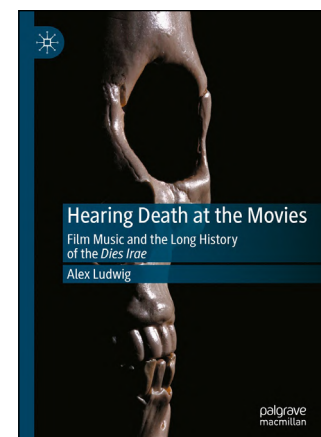
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Alex Ludwig, *Hearing Death at the Movies. Film Music and the Long History of the Dies Irae*

Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2025

Dan White

- 1 A car winds its way through a mountainous landscape, dwarfed by the scale of its surroundings. The camera drifts over a lake under a clear blue sky, tilting to follow the car, and a melody emerges that sounds at once ancient, modern, and ominously out of place. The slow regularity and minor modality of these single throbbing synth notes pair with subtle ambiances and metallic sounds to undermine what could be the opening to a summer road trip movie, instead conjuring a deeply ominous sense of foreboding with remarkable efficiency. Here, in the opening sequence of *The Shining* (Stanley Kubrick, 1980), Wendy Carlos's reworking of the *Dies irae* (a Gregorian chant from at least the 13th century if not earlier) does not announce itself as quotation so much as insinuation: stretched, transposed, electronically revoiced, and stripped of any liturgical context, it nevertheless carries with it a weight of historical and cultural association that shapes the scene before any other context is given to the car, its passengers and their journey. Death is not shown, named, or even foreshadowed explicitly, yet it is already present.
- 2 Moments like this have become so deeply embedded in the sonic language of cinema that at times they may go mostly unnoticed. The same melodic incipit appears elsewhere in strikingly different guises: half-hidden in the tolling of bells in *No Time to Die* (Cary Joji Fukunaga, 2021), woven subtly into compiled scoring in *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979), or refracted through a pre-existing carol in *Home Alone* (Chris Columbus, 1990), where the



motif shifts from striking fear into the hearts of children at the sight of their mysterious elderly neighbour to become an energising signifier of action as the narrative unfolds. In each case, the *Dies irae* operates not simply as a musical topic or historical reference, but as a mechanism of memory, recognition, and implication.

- 3 It is this peculiar capacity of the *Dies irae* to operate simultaneously as quotation, allusion, and ghostly trace that lies at the heart of *Hearing Death at the Movies*. Alex Ludwig's book takes seriously the idea that film music communicates not only through what is explicitly stated, but through what is half-heard, culturally remembered, or retrospectively recognised. Rather than treating the *Dies irae* as a fixed melodic object, Ludwig approaches it as a historically mobile and semantically flexible figure. Placing it at the centre of his project, he traces the *Dies irae* through Berlioz and Rachmaninoff into silent film cue sheets and through more than a century of Western (and to some extent non-Western) film and television history with a deftness and authority that reflects the significant time and effort dedicated to this project. Methodologically he demonstrates the power of public-facing scholarship and of crowd-sourcing examples, which is evidenced in the impressively broad corpus of instances presented and analysed throughout. And yet, the work never claims to be exhaustive, instead proffering a number of highly useful and adaptable frameworks for the analysis and categorisation of the *Dies irae* in a range of media.
- 4 The book is structured in two parts that helpfully cover history and theory in turn, with the latter section building on the more historical and contextual examples of the former. Chapter 1 introduces the *Dies irae* as a cinematic phenomenon with a long and evolving afterlife, situating the study within a tradition of musical signification while explicitly rejecting any claim to exhaustiveness. Ludwig frames his approach as open-ended and generative, informed by extensive crowdsourcing (thanks in no small part to his scholarly network and YouTube channel), and emphasises the chant's persistence across media. The chapter's discussion of Wendy Carlos's work for *The Shining* is particularly effective, demonstrating how the *Dies irae* is transformed, dispersed, and structurally embedded across both finished and unused cues (the archival work here being notably insightful), and how the music of this film has exerted significant influence on a range of subsequent media such as *Westworld* (HBO, 2016–2022) and *Ready Player One* (Steven Spielberg, 2018) through what is described as *The Shining*'s "long tail." Chapter 2 develops this focus through detailed analysis of Carlos's compositional methods, making a persuasive case for her use of the *Dies irae* as a formal and tonal organising principle rather than a surface-level quotation, and positioning Carlos as a pivotal figure in its modern cinematic afterlife. Chapter 3 then broadens the

historical frame, tracing the chant's use through silent cinema and early sound film and challenging assumptions about its relative modernity. Through case studies including Gottfried Huppertz's *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927), Gerald Fried's *The Return of Dracula* (Paul Landres, 1958), and the more ambivalent applications in Dimitri Tiomkin's scored documentaries, Ludwig demonstrates the *Dies irae*'s flexibility as a marker of death, destruction and moral darkness, while raising important questions about intentionality, context, and the gradual semantic evolution of the chant from religious sequence to cinematic trope. The chapter's inclusion of composers' own reflections provides valuable first-hand insight and brings the book's historically oriented first part to a close with a strong sense of anticipation for Part II.

- 5 The theoretical heart of the book lies in Chapter 4, which introduces Ludwig's typology of *Dies irae* usages, distinguishing between "types" of appearance with the imaginatively but effectively named "prelude to evil," "ominous echo," and "tension engine" types, further subdividing this last type into two categories of "ostinato" and "*fortspinnung*." This framework is one of the book's most significant contributions, offering a flexible and immediately intelligible set of tools that encourages readers to recognise and categorise examples beyond those discussed. The types are generally clearly explained and exemplified through the chapter's rich array of case studies—from *Day of Wrath* (Carl Theodor Dreyer, 1943) and *The Seventh Seal* (Ingmar Bergman, 1957) to *Mars Attacks!* (Tim Burton, 1996), *Crimson Peak* (Guillermo del Toro, 2015), and *Last Night in Soho* (Edgar Wright, 2021). Type 1 (the "prelude to evil") explicitly quotes at least the first eight notes of the *Dies irae* in their entirety; Type 2 (the "ominous echo") uses just the first four notes, and Type 3 (the "tension engine") applies repetition and/or alteration to these four notes to create more of an ostinato or continuous texture. The division of Type 3 categorises examples that are restricted to the four-note *Dies irae* incipit as "ostinati" and those that "spin forth" or alter, adapt or extend the incipit as "*fortspinnung*." Pleasingly, the textbook example of this "*fortspinnung*" type given, a cue from John Williams's *Jurassic Park* (Steven Spielberg, 1993) score, came to my mind on description of the type and before the example was even mentioned; testament to the clarity of Ludwig's theorisation. Before the types are fully established and exemplified, though, the chapter includes a striking chronological overview that maps shifts in type usage over time, and indicates a growing popularity in Type 1 that peaks in the 1970s before diminishing, two peaks in Type 2 usage in the 1990s and 2020s and a Type 3 peak in the early 2000s. Although the author may have been limited in terms of space, there is little exploration or accounting for these quite starkly demarcated trends. Although potentially a missed opportunity, it could be that due to the non-exhaustive

nature of the corpus the author did not want to read too much into the trends, but nonetheless there are unanswered questions here that future scholars may well wish to grapple with.

- 6 Chapter 5 then applies Ludwig's typology to a range of extended case studies, including films scored by Ennio Morricone, the *Friday the 13th* franchise, and *Star Wars*, demonstrating the adaptability of the framework and continuing to clarify the potential applications and modifications of the terms. Here, as elsewhere, the footnotes that feature throughout the book provide significant amounts of useful information and extra detail gleaned from archival work or ethnographic engagement with composers and other stakeholders. The *Friday the 13th* scores prove particularly effective at elucidating the subtle differences between the Type 1 and 2 usages, these being helpfully notated and tabulated. The identification of the *Dies irae* incipit as fused to the Force Theme in *Star Wars: Episode I – A New Hope* (George Lucas, 1977) is similarly convincing, though its similarity to an example given at the end of Chapter 4 (which is explicitly argued as not an intentional *Dies irae*) leaves space for ambiguity. This example is the fanfare composed by Jonathan Elias for Columbia Pictures in 1993, and both harmonise the *Dies irae* over the flattened submediant ($\flat VI$) giving it a distinctly Lydian inflection. The narrative connotations of the burning homestead in *Star Wars* may be evidence enough for the categorisation of this musical moment as a Type 1 “prelude to evil,” and the likely accidental use of the *Dies irae* in a studio fanfare would seem to preclude it from Ludwig's corpus. Nevertheless, it highlights the importance of narrative connotation to Ludwig's typology, and opens the door for further research on other “accidental” *Dies iraes* (such as the *Alien* example which is nonetheless included), as well as the potential to categorise instances by harmonisation, however rare they may be—that is, instances where the inflection is shifted from minor to Lydian as here, or even Mixolydian (as a $\flat \hat{7}-\hat{6}-\flat \hat{7}-\hat{5}$).¹ One of the Type 2 examples fleetingly cited in the Conclusion is “Into The Unknown” from Disney's *Frozen II* (Chris Buck and Jennifer Lee, 2019), but on close listening this song cleverly resets the *Dies irae* incipit in the Dorian mode from the outset (with a sharpened sixth in the piano accompaniment) before playfully shifting through Aeolian, Mixolydian, Ionian and Lydian settings, and this reharmonisation is in my view crucial to the softening of the motif's dark and deathly connotations for a children's film (its repetition as a diegetic plot device notwithstanding).

- 7 There may not have been room in the Conclusion for further discussion of instances such as this, but then with such a broad corpus Ludwig was spoilt for choice when it came to highlighting examples. Although the author consciously limits his corpus to film and television media alone, I

1. The author has discussed some of these details in a podcast episode with Crysanthé Tan, see [Star Wars Music Minute 2025](#).

would echo his suggestion that the realm of videogame music is indeed teeming with further examples, citing not only Karen Cook's 2017 article as he does but also Walczak (2025) and Mantilla-Wright (2025) as more recent indications of the ludic prevalence of the motif. Lastly, the ghosts of intentionality and over-identification that the author says haunted him throughout the project point towards some of the most interesting questions surrounding apparently accidental use of the motif, as epitomised by Bear McCreary's claim that "truthfully it was 100% accidental" (230). When is a *Dies irae* not a *Dies irae*? Where might we place the borderline cases, where either the melodies or motifs find themselves on the fringes of Ludwig's typology, or the narrative setting is less clear cut or more ambivalent?

- 8 The book closes with a hope that it may act as a theatrical "ghost light" for researchers, analysts, film buffs and other interested parties, to guide the way, equip them with tools—and hopefully prevent them from falling in the orchestra pit. Although the book leaves some room for questions at times, this is very much a strength as opposed to a weakness. It does not present itself as a closed case, a finished project or a complete corpus, but readily offers itself to analysts as a useful and transferable methodology, and to educators as a remarkably accessible textbook. Not only does it leave readers humming those fateful four notes, but it also leaves them with a curiosity regarding those examples that resist easy categorisation, and a readiness to go on the hunt for more. Suffice it to say, in *Hearing Death at the Movies* the ghost light shines brightly and is sure to light the way for future scholars exploring the darkest and deathliest corners of musical media.

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