

The Cleveland Pops Orchestra kicks off new season with music by John Williams

by Mike Telin



“The hardest part of programming a John Williams concert is that there’s so much you have to leave out,” Cleveland Pops music director Carl Topilow said during a telephone conversation. “I’ve seen programs that focus on Spielberg movies, for example. But our idea was to present a cross-section of his music.”

On Friday, November 12 at 8:00 pm in Mandel Hall at Severance, Topilow and the Cleveland Pops Orchestra will present “A Salute to John Williams.” The program will include selections from *Star Wars*, *Indiana Jones*, *Jurassic Park*, and *Harry Potter*. Tickets are available [online](#).

And if you have any doubt that Topilow is ready to be back at Severance conducting some of the music he loves most, check out this [video](#). (Spoiler alert — Superman is involved.)

Perhaps the greatest composer/movie director partnership is that of Williams and Steven Spielberg, which dates back to *The Sugarland Express* in 1974 and continued a year later with *Jaws*. “There’s an interesting story of how it all began,” Topilow said. “Apparently somebody had written some music for Faulkner’s *The Reivers* — they didn’t like it so they asked John Williams to write something. The score is just terrific. Spielberg heard it and said, ‘That’s who I want,’ and the rest is history.”

Friday’s concert will also include violinist Steven Greenman performing music from *Fiddler on the Roof*, the film that brought Williams his first Oscar.

Members of the orchestra will also be featured in the theme from *Schindler’s List* and *Summon the Heroes*, and saxophonist Howie Smith will take center stage during *Catch Me If You Can*. Of course, the music from *Star Wars* will be part of the evening. “I like

how perfectly the music for Princess Leia, Yoda, and Darth Vader complements their characters,” he said.



Of course, over the past eighteen months, Topilow has spent his fair share of time away from the podium. “I learned to play the piano,” he said excitedly. “I wanted to just be able to sit down and play the standards like *Our Love is Here to Stay* or *Embraceable You*. I practiced an hour a day and now when I see a piano I run over and play it, which I never could do before.”

Topilow also published [*The Orchestral Conductor’s Career Handbook*](#). “I’m not sure what I intended — I wrote down everything I know in a manner that I hoped would be interesting and attention-grabbing. The nice thing about it is that the non-musicians who have read it have told me they’ve enjoyed it and there’s something in it for everybody.”

All good indeed, but above all, Topilow said that he looks forward to being back at Severance. “That’s where we all want to be.”

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