

From “Jaws” to “Harry Potter,” Cleveland Orchestra performs John Williams' iconic film scores (Feb. 14)



The Cleveland Orchestra performed a Valentine's Day concert featuring beloved film scores Friday night at Severance Music Center. Roger Mastroianni

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CLEVELAND, Ohio — On Valentine’s Day evening, Keith Lockhart ignited the Cleveland Orchestra and wooed the packed house at Severance Music Center in a retrospective, *The Music of John Williams*.

Friday evening was an indulgence — a trip down movie lane and performances by an orchestra at its most vivid, thanks to Williams’ ingenious scoring and Lockhart’s energized conducting.

Lockhart’s close link to Williams through the Boston Pops Orchestra, having succeeded him there as music director 30 years ago, showed in his innate understanding of the music and sure-handedness on the podium. Excerpts from “Jaws,” “Star Wars,” “Indiana Jones,” “E.T.” and “Harry Potter,” along with lesser-known Williams scores, made for an impressive showcase. Lockhart also engaged the audience with several amusing stories he had in his back pocket about Williams’ early days as a film composer.

Lockhart told the crowd that Williams, now 93, has written film scores in eight of the 10 decades that sound films have existed — soundtracks for 110 films.

Once, in his early days when Williams played a sample of something he’d written for disaster film producer Irwin Allen, the older man told him flatly he didn’t like it. Turning to another more experienced composer for council, Williams was told, “Tell you what you do. Whenever Allen’s name comes on the screen, put in a cymbal crash.” Williams

did and Allen, after hearing the revision, was amazed by the improvement. “What did you do?” he asked.

Although many in the crowd, like Easter-only churchgoers, may not have been regular Cleveland Orchestra attendees, they sure knew and enjoyed Williams’ music.

The famous “Jaws” theme, comprising the most recognizable two notes in movies, first elicited laughter, but after a side glance from Lockhart, it soon became cause for alarm — and demanded a quick glance under my seat.

Williams writes so descriptively that images reanimated before our eyes — E.T.’s flying bicycle, Darth Vader’s menacing, Harrison Ford’s run in with a giant boulder. And heard in the concert hall, the music revealed itself more fully — Harry Potter never sounded so balletic, nor Star Wars so operatic.

“Sayyuri’s Theme” from “Memoirs of a Geisha” was revelatory, featuring a lovely performance by cellist Richard Weiss and showing Williams’ skill as a chameleon. This Japanese-inflected score, featuring bamboo flute, koto and gossamer strings, was nearly unidentifiable as his.

The Cantina theme from the first “Star Wars” served as an encore and sent attendees home whistling happily.

The program will be repeated on Sunday, Feb. 16 at 7:30 p.m. in Mandel Concert Hall at Severance Music Center. Tickets are available [online](#).

Kevin McLaughlin recently retired as librarian at the Cleveland Institute of Music. A freelance writer and editor, his weekly podcast on early jazz, “At the Jazz Band Ball,” may be found on a variety of podcast platforms.

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