

# CHAPTERS

## 1. The Greatest Moment in Orchestral Music

*John Williams: Star Wars - A New Hope (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack) - Main Title*

## 2. Spectacular Sound

*Ottorino Respighi: The Pines of Rome - 3rd and 4th movements*

*Claude Debussy: La Mer - 1st movement*

## 3. Telling Tales and Painting Pictures

*Benjamin Britten: Four Sea Interludes - 4th movement*

*Dmitri Shostakovich: Symphony no. 10 - 2nd movement*

## 4. The Beauty in Simplicity

*Maurice Ravel: Piano Concerto in G - 2nd movement*

*Antonín Dvořák: Symphony no. 9 - 2nd movement*

## 5. Listen! Focus on the Music!

*Ludwig van Beethoven: Symphony no. 7 - 2nd movement*

*Johannes Brahms: Symphony no. 1 - 4th movement*

## 6. Virtuosity

*Sergei Rachmaninov: Piano Concerto no. 2 - 1st movement*

*Igor Stravinsky: The Rite of Spring - Sacrificial Dance*

## 7. The joy, the delight, the fun of music

*Leonard Bernstein: Candide - Overture*

*Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: The Marriage of Figaro - Overture*

*Carl Vine: Celebrare Celeberrime*

## 8. Keep going. This only gets better!

*Gustav Mahler: Symphony no. 2 - 5th movement*

# THE GREATEST MOMENT IN ORCHESTRAL MUSIC

***John Williams: Star Wars - A New Hope (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack) - Main Title***

*London Symphony Orchestra, John Williams (conductor)*

The piercing trumpet, the clash of the cymbals, the exotic colours of the woodwind, the profundity of the brass sound, and the bright intensity of the enormous string section: this is the first second of what may be the greatest moment in all orchestral music. Who doesn't love that opening chord of *Star Wars*! Instantly recognisable; this piece captures so much of what makes the orchestra one of the most inspiring of all human achievements. It is a phenomenal sound - eighty incredible musicians playing together - and it is a sound that nearly everyone loves. And rightly so. Centuries in the making, the orchestra is the crowning achievement of hundreds of thousands of composers, instrumentalists, conductors, audience members, instrument makers, music publishers, music administrators, concert promoters, happy historical coincidences, the occasional genius ... and you. The very fact that you (surely!) share my love of the sound of a great orchestra playing *Star Wars* involves you in the ongoing development and celebration of the orchestra.

That first chord triumphantly ends and we're off! Now it's the brass. A fanfare. We are at the beginning of something special. The trombones proudly throw the listener forwards. And then the trumpets. Brilliance! You hear echoes of military campaigns launched by this very sound. And do you hear it? In the background, an echo from the horns: the instrument associated with hunting. The intensity of the orchestra is building. Underneath - yes, underneath! - the sixty members of the string section are wildly pumping their bows back and forth; and though they are high-pitched, it is the shimmering of the lone triangle that is at the top of the sound. Finally, the tuba enters. An ascending figure: a call to arms. We're now at the moment of the three big chords played by the whole orchestra.

And we're only ten seconds in! It is at this moment that the piece begins in earnest. That great trumpet melody opens up and soars over the orchestra. This is a trumpet at its best. Though there are eighty musicians playing at the same time, the trumpet - the king of the orchestra - shines forth. The orchestra is at its best too! As thrilling as it is for an audience to hear such a virtuosic performance, the orchestral musicians on stage never fail to be inspired by the Principal Trumpet taking flight across the orchestra's sound.

But listen to the wonderful complexity that accompanies the trumpet melody. It's a march led by the timpani. Whilst the trumpets provide the glitz and glamour, it is the accompaniment that represents the pomposity of ceremony and procession. It is as if the trumpet melody is the sparkling of the queen's golden carriage in the bright sunlight, whilst the accompanying music is the confidence and strength of the marching army that follows. This music creates a world. Epic history, an uncertain future, and heroes and heroines. The composer and the musicians are saying: listen up, we've got a fantastic story for you!

About twenty seconds in, the composer, John Williams, reveals his extraordinary craftsmanship. He repeats the trumpet melody, but he varies the music in the accompaniment. It's a wonderful display of compositional virtuosity. Importantly, the composer is embedding his score with a uniqueness and a level of commitment that says to the musicians and the audience: I care about this. Can you hear the defiant strength in the music as a result of the change in the accompaniment played by the timpani? And can you hear the change in the high-pitched violins? Suddenly they play a much faster, repeating rhythm, creating an urgency that launches the listener forwards to every next beat.

How brilliant to be nearly thirty seconds in and to have not yet heard the fundamental sound of an orchestra: a string section playing a long, expressive melody. John Williams has kept us waiting. The bombastic music is over, and now the strings caress their instruments to bring us a beautiful,

radiating sound. It is a gorgeous melody. This is the sound of love and passion. Can you hear the depth of expression in every note, at every moment? And listen again. Can you hear other colours of the orchestra: the harp is playing a flurry of notes up and down throughout and the bell-like glockenspiel is adding twinklings of light, highlighting the most important notes of the melody.

And then we have the dramatic build-up: a crescendo! Literally an 'increasing' of the sound. It is as if the listener is approaching the top of a mountain and is about to get the opportunity to see the wonderful panoramic view from the top. Do you notice that the build-up also involves a slowing down in speed? As is so often the case, until now the music has been driven forwards relentlessly. But, in pulling back the speed in the final few moments before the climax, anticipation is prolonged. It's like gathering tension in a bow, and then just before releasing, pulling it just that little bit tighter before an explosion at the release of the arrow.

And at this point we arrive. Now, fifty seconds in, the horns take the theme. And rightly too. Whereas the trumpet is king of the orchestra, the horns are the powerhouse. These instruments can create a sound with immense depth and intensity of volume. So, while the trumpet boldly led the orchestra out on a new expedition, the horns majestically take us forward on the journey. Importantly, too, the horn is renowned for the physical challenges it presents to the player. High notes are particularly precarious, and there is the chance that horn players will miss their highest notes! Can you hear the physical strain that is experienced by the players and transmitted through their sound? I find the technical difficulties faced by the musicians - and the overcoming of these challenges - to be one of the most compelling reasons for listening to an orchestra.



I hope you have jumped out of your chair and sprinted to your computer to listen to John Williams' *Star Wars* soundtrack. From the many available recordings, you will notice that I have chosen the *A New Hope (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack)* version. There is a rawness and an excited

energy in this recording that sets it apart. This is the London Symphony Orchestra on fire! Importantly, the recording was a defining moment for this orchestra, putting it on the map internationally, and changing the future fortunes of the orchestra and its players. To this day, the London Symphony Orchestra continues to be one of the most magnificent orchestras in the world.

The tales and traditions of the great orchestras are things of legend, and the story of the London Symphony Orchestra is no exception. Throughout its history, thrilling performances and illustrious recordings have coexisted alongside narrowly avoided disasters. The LSO, as it is often known, was the first British orchestra to tour the United States. Originally it was destined to travel on the RMS *Titanic*, but thanks to a last-minute change of schedule, it made its journey on the RMS *Baltic*. In the 1970s, the move to a new concert hall at the multi-arts venue, the Barbican Centre, almost led to bankruptcy. But, over time, the relationship between the LSO, the Barbican Centre, and its neighbour, the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, has flourished, creating one of the world's most dynamic arts institutions.

The fireworks surrounding the LSO's formation - a mass resignation from the Queen's Hall Orchestra - created a passionately individualistic, audacious, and visionary orchestra that became the first in London to be owned and governed by its players. The opportunity to set the artistic agenda for the orchestra attracted bold musicians. Central to their convictions - and a quality that remains to the present day - is that each individual musician must be a virtuoso. A famous example was the trumpeter Maurice Murphy, who played his first notes as Principal Trumpet with the LSO on the *Star Wars* recording. Listen again to the exhilarating, fearless, almost brazen punch of that first trumpet note. Maurice Murphy quickly became one of the most respected trumpeters in the world, and he became someone whose performances embodied the spirit of the London Symphony Orchestra.

But without a great composer, the London Symphony Orchestra would have had nothing to play! Can you hear how every moment in the score has been meticulously constructed by the

composer? For instance, at 1'25" (one minute and twenty five seconds) we hear mysterious music featuring a solo piccolo. Shortly after, the music is much more intense - perhaps apocalyptic - and increasingly static. Then suddenly, at 1'57" we lurch forwards into battle-like music before transitioning back to the heroic opening melody which we hear at 2'14". John Williams seamlessly moulds these contrasting sections together, to the delight of the listener. The music appears to flow effortlessly out of his pen, through the musicians of the orchestra, and into your ears.

Like all great composers, John Williams' music is instantly recognisable as his own. It is unique and it is underpinned by conviction. His music includes the *Star Wars* films, *E.T.* (who can fail to be overwhelmed by the music at the climax of the film!), those two unforgettable notes of *Jaws*, the poignant painfulness of the *Schindler's List* theme, not to mention *Harry Potter*, *Jurassic Park*, *Superman*, and *Indiana Jones*. This substantial body of work, his consummate command of compositional craftsmanship, and his infinite imagination, has enabled John Williams' music to be forever etched into a canon of repertoire that orchestras and audiences have been moulding for centuries.



Perhaps the most important quality of John Williams' music is its ability to communicate emotions to a listener with sincerity, depth and nuances that cannot be expressed in words. This is a quality shared by all of the great composers and it is the essence of an answer to what is often considered to be a difficult question: what is music?

Music is a celebration of the beauty of sound and / or the communication of emotions through sound. Sometimes music is written for the pure joy of sound and, at the other extreme, sometimes it is just raw passion. But, orchestral music most often celebrates beautiful sound whilst simultaneously communicating emotions to a listener. This is the case throughout the *Star Wars* score. A good example occurs at 3'12", where a long, expressive melody is played by the cellos,

which are themselves surrounded by beautiful sounds from the orchestra. Perhaps you agree with my instinctive response to the melody? The emotions I feel are ones of reflection and mourning; but also I hear a sense of optimism for the future.

When I listen in greater detail, I begin to understand why I respond to the music in this way. I notice that the melody frequently stretches upwards. Naturally, a stretch is difficult to play because it takes more physical effort than moving by step. Perhaps the melody is deliberately designed to be challenging in order to affirm a sense of struggle? Equally, the melody maintains an unrelenting forward momentum throughout, perhaps conveying determination. Concurrent to this there are continuous high-pitched, alternating notes in the violins. For me, this gives the impression of anxiety. And do you hear the harp swirling around in the background, reminding us that we're in a fantasy world? Finally, there are energetic pronouncements by the flutes. Perhaps the urgency of these outbursts communicates an excited confidence for the future? Or maybe they are sinister taunts intended to send a chill through the listener?

Of course, we can never know the composer's explicit intentions. At first this may seem daunting. But it isn't! Music is ubiquitous, and as such you are already a fluent interpreter of the language. By allowing your ears to receive the sound of an orchestra, the indescribable-in-words emotions will be communicated to you without a problem. In fact, without film, it is *easier* to listen to orchestral music. A picture speaks a thousand words, but music speaks a thousand pictures. Orchestral music gives the listener the opportunity to see their own film, to feel their own emotions, and to hear a probably unmatched range of thrillingly beautiful sounds. All you need to know is that no prior knowledge is required.