

John Williams



Born 8th February 1932

Films John Williams has composed music for include:

- JAWS (1975)
- Star Wars (1977)
- Raiders of the Lost Ark (1981)
- E.T. (1982)
- Home Alone (1990)
- Schindler's List (1993)

John Towner Williams was born on the 8th February, 1932 on Long Island, New York, America. His mother was called Esther and his father was called Johnny Williams. His father was a jazz percussionist who played with the Raymond Scott Quintet.

In 1948, the Williams family moved to Los Angeles where John attended North Hollywood High School graduating in 1950. He then went on to attend the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), and studied privately with the Italian composer Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco.

In 1952, Williams was drafted into the U.S. Air Force, where he conducted and arranged music for the Air Force Band as part of his assignments.

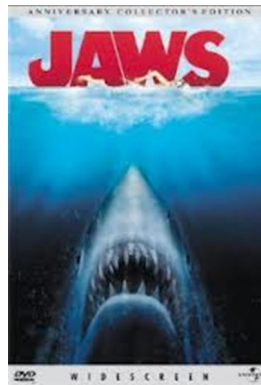
After his Air Force service ended in 1955, Williams moved to New York City and entered the famous Juilliard School, where he studied piano with Rosina Lhévinne. During this time, Williams worked on the jazz scene as a jazz pianist in New York's many clubs and eventually studios, most notably for the composer Henry Mancini, who composed the 'Pink Panther' theme music. His fellow session musicians included Rolly Bundock on bass, Jack Sperling on drums and Bob Bain on guitar. This was the same lineup featured on the Mr. Lucky television series. Williams was known as "Little Johnny Love" Williams during the early 1960s and he served as music arranger and bandleader for a series of popular music albums with the singer Frankie Laine.

Williams was married to actress Barbara Ruick from 1956 until her death on the 3rd March 1974. The Williams' had three children: Jennifer (born 1956), Mark (born 1958), and Joseph (born 1960). The Williams' younger son (Joseph) is one of the various lead singers the band Toto. John Williams married his second wife, Samantha Winslow, on the 21st July 1980.

His career as a musician so far, has stretched over six decades. Throughout his career, he has composed music for many award winning films and has had a long association with the great film director, Steven Spielberg.

Williams has won five Academy Awards, four Golden Globe Awards, seven BAFTA Awards, and 21 Grammy Awards. With 47 Academy Award nominations, Williams is the second most nominated person, after Walt Disney.

The film music that I have chosen to comment about is:



I have chosen to write about the film music from JAWS because of the effect that the music creates. John Williams creates dramatic tension and suspense in the music by using a simple but very effective motif based on just two notes that are only a semitone apart. (A semitone is the smallest step between two notes)

The theme itself is known as a leitmotif, meaning a tune that is used to represent a character, place or event.

Tension is also created in the way the two notes are played. For example, the audience know something is going to happen when the JAWS theme is heard. John Williams uses musical elements, such as dynamics (meaning how loud or quiet) and tempo (meaning how fast or slow) to help describe the shark. Each time the JAWS theme is heard, the music begins quietly and slowly. This allows the audience to believe that the shark is miles away but as JAWS gets a little closer, the music gradually increases in dynamic and tempo.

The music creates mystery and tension from the very first note that is played. As well as Williams' use of musical elements to create this effect, the choice of timbre (meaning types of musical sounds) is also important. The theme is mainly heard and played by the strings section of an orchestra. The string section of an orchestra is made up of violins, violas, cellos and double basses. The brass section is also a strong feature in this music, playing lots of accented notes, which represent the shark's teeth. The woodwind section plays something very different, with the high woodwind instruments, for example the flute playing little flourishes, which could represent the shark's movement as JAWS slices through the water. Like the brass section of the orchestra, the percussion section also helps to create tension by using instruments such as the snare and bass drums as well as cymbal crashes, which are all played at the moment that the audience is led to believe that JAWS is attacking.