



John Williams  
(b. 1932)

# *The Music of John Williams*

If you watch the movie *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, tune into the NBC Nightly News, or watch the Olympic Games, you'll hear the music of John Williams! He has received 42 Academy Award nominations (more than any living person; he has won five). He has won 19 Grammy Awards, and has also written music for the Concert Hall (symphonies, concerti, fanfares, and Olympic themes.)

John Towner Williams was born in Floral Park, N.Y., on February 8, 1932. He was the oldest of four children. His father Johnny Williams played in radio orchestras in New York City. As a child, John studied bassoon, cello, clarinet, trombone and trumpet, forming a band with several friends. At age 15, he wanted to become a concert pianist. In 1948, the family moved to Los Angeles, when John's father began playing with studio orchestras, performing music for movies and television.

While in the U.S. Air Force, John Williams conducted and arranged music for service bands. He was discharged in 1954 and settled in New York, enrolling at Juilliard—studying piano with Rosina Lhevinne. In 1956, John moved back to Los Angeles and worked as a pianist in studio orchestras for Columbia Pictures, and later, 20th Century Fox. He performed in the soundtracks for *South Pacific* (1958) and the TV series *Gilligan's Island*. "I would sit at the piano, and if I had a few bars rest, I would look up at the screen and try to figure out how they were matching the action on the screen to the music in the orchestra—how they were conducting it."

Tired of always playing someone else's music, John wanted to begin writing his own film music. He worked for film composers like Bernard Herrmann (who composed music for the Alfred Hitchcock films). John earned his first Academy Award for adapting the music for *Fiddler on the Roof* (1971). His big break came, when he began working with film director Steven Spielberg. He earned his second Academy Award for music in the movie *Jaws* (1975), followed by other films, such as *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Jurassic Park*, and *Schindler's List*. Spielberg introduced Williams to director George Lucas, creating another partnership with the *Star Wars* series. The soundtrack of the first *Star Wars* film sold more than four million copies and earned Williams his third Academy Award.

In 1979, Williams became conductor of the Boston Pops Orchestra—a post he held for 14 years. At age 73, John Williams continues to compose music for film and concert audiences around the world.