



## MUSC 424: The Music of John Williams

**Units:** 2

**Term—Day—Time:** Spring 2024—Mondays—4:00–5:50pm

**Location:** TMC G156

**Instructor:** Tim Greiving

**Office:** Virtual

**Office Hours:** By appointment

**Contact Info:** [tim.greiving@usc.edu](mailto:tim.greiving@usc.edu)

### Course Description

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John Williams is arguably the most important film composer of all time, and one of the most important *composers* in our lifetime. He has been an influential force not only in cinema but popular culture at large. Steven Spielberg and George Lucas created the dreams of several generations with their movies; Williams gave our dreams their musical personality. Movies essentially replaced religion in the 20th century; Williams wrote the church music of our age.

Too, Williams became America's unofficial composer laureate, writing fanfares and themes for national occasions ranging from the Olympic Games and NBC Nightly News to the 2009 inauguration of Barack Obama. He inherited a mantle from Aaron Copland and Leonard Bernstein, coming to represent the country and its cultural identity on the world stage.

This course is not *musicological* in nature, but rather focuses on the narrative, emotional, and psychological roles that Williams' scores play in their respective films. We will also examine his personal biography, the breadth and depth of his unparalleled film career, as well as his considerable musical contributions outside of cinema.

I've just written the first major biography of Williams (for Oxford University Press), and I will be sharing new research and information as well as assigning selections from the book.

There will also be special guests as schedules permit.

## Learning Objectives

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1. **Biography:** You will learn the life story of John Williams—the family and cultural forces that formed him, how he developed his talents and found his musical voice, and what events and experiences led to his phenomenal rise beginning in the 1970s.
2. **Work:** You will learn to draw connections and contrasts between Williams' work in each of the different phases of his career, and between his film scores and music for the concert hall. You will gain an appreciation of his vast canon, and will be able to explain both its diversity and its unity.
3. **Roles:** You will learn to identify and describe the various roles and functions that Williams' music plays across the (approximately) 150 films he has scored. You will develop a vocabulary and an insight about what is really happening in the interplay between Williams' music and the images on screen.

## Description and Assessment of Assignments

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### Weekly films

I will assign two films to watch each week in advance of our class period. You may need to pay to rent or download some of these films—though definitely *always* check any streaming services you're subscribed to and see if they carry the movie. (Max and Kanopy are both free for USC students.) Consider any cost here the equivalent of purchasing a textbook.

### Readings

Every week you will read short selections from my biography (in progress) relevant to the years and films we're discussing. These will be posted as PDFs in Brightspace.

### Participation

I will frequently ask questions about the assigned films or readings; your engagement in class discussions (and demonstration of having done the assignments) will be the most significant part of your grade.

### Midterm Presentation

You will pick one feature film (any film) scored by John Williams and give a two-minute presentation, in class, about the role his score plays in that film; you can either focus on one particular scene or sequence, or give an overview of the score as a whole. You will focus on the narrative, emotional, or psychological roles of the music, using the skills and vocabulary we establish throughout the semester.

### Final Exam

A short-answer exam, the culmination of the major subjects and ideas we discuss in class. It will be administered in class with pencil and paper (no notes).

## Grading Breakdown

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Grades will be recorded in Brightspace.

<b>Assignment</b>	<b>% of Grade</b>
Midterm Presentation	30
Participation	40
Final exam	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

## Grading Scale

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Course final grades will be determined using the following scale.

A	93-100
A-	90-92
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	59 and below

## Policies

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### Attendance

1. This course is being offered in an in-person modality. Deviations or exceptions will not be considered unless the instructor is presented with a directive from the offices of Student Health, Student Affairs, or OSAS.
2. Students are permitted a total of TWO (2) absences (excused or unexcused) for the entire semester without any grade penalty. These absences may not include Test/Quiz or Presentation days.
3. In case of absence, it is your responsibility to find out about assignments and prepare accordingly. I encourage you to first contact a friend/colleague in the class to find out about any missed work to be made up following an absence. Students may also contact

the instructor with questions. However, the instructor reserves the right to limit office-hour advising in the instance of excessive absences.

4. If a student must miss a Test/Quiz/Exam due to an emergency, proof of the absence (such as a doctor's note) may be required.
5. If you become persistently sick or have other personal problems that interfere with this course, please contact me so that we may address the situation together.
6. Each absence above the permitted number (excused or unexcused) will result in a 5% deduction in the course grade, e.g. 90% becomes 85%.
7. In the case of an official USC Athletic Event: an official letter from a representative of the USC team, etc., submitted at least one week in advance of the event.
8. In the case of religious observance: Notify me at least one week in advance of the holiday and preferably at the start of the semester.

## Course evaluation

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You will have an opportunity to submit comments on the mid-semester evaluation and the standard USC course evaluation survey at the end of the semester. Be honest!

## Course Schedule

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### Week 1 - January 13

**Introduction:** Who is John Williams, and what shaped him? A look at his ancestry and immediate family, his early years in New York and Los Angeles, and his artistic influences. I will be drawing on firsthand research conducted for my biography, as well as information directly from the man himself, to sketch a detailed portrait which will help you understand his musical personality and career trajectory.

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Required films for Week 2:

- *None But the Brave* (1965)
- *How to Steal a Million* (1966)

### Week 2 - January 20 - Martin Luther King's Birthday (NO CLASS)

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Required films for Week 3:

- *The Reivers* (1969)
- *The Cowboys* (1972)

### Week 3 - January 27

**Beginnings** (1956–1967): Williams started his professional career as a session pianist playing on other composers' film scores (as well as jazz and pop albums). He segued into arranging and orchestrating, then found steady scoring work as a staff composer in Universal's television division as well as assignments of mostly lowbrow feature films. His first decade of work was prolific and varied, a trade school like nothing else—even if the projects themselves were often less than prestigious.

**Becoming** (1967–1971): Establishing a reputation for quality and forming important relationships, Williams began to receive film assignments more worthy of his talent. He gained his first real professional recognition as an arranger and adapter working on movie musicals, and several work trips to Europe (with an extended stay in London) coincided with—or perhaps catalyzed—the maturing of his voice.

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Required films for Week 4:

- *Images* (1972)
- *The Towering Inferno* (1974)

#### **Week 4 - February 3**

**Experimenting** (1972–74): The 1970s were a playground for eccentric film scoring. Working with unconventional directors like Robert Altman, Williams played with unconventional scoring techniques and disparate musical styles, and his budding concert work reflected that experimentation. But he also honed a more conservative symphonic style for proto blockbusters, a series of disaster films that elevated his profile and foreshadowed the cultural juggernauts soon to come...

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Required films for Week 5:

- *The Sugarland Express* (1974)
- *Jaws* (1975)

#### **Week 5 - February 10**

**Beginning of a Friendship** (1972–75): In 1972, Williams met his most important collaborator: Steven Spielberg. The young filmmaker bucked the radicalism of his peers and embraced an old-fashioned, romantic approach to movie scoring, and he found the perfect partner in John Williams. Their careers rocketed in tandem with the phenomenon of *Jaws* in 1975, and neither they—nor Hollywood—were ever the same. Right during this time, Williams also experienced a profound personal tragedy that left a lasting imprint.

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Required films for Week 6:

- *Star Wars* (1977)
- *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977)

### **Week 6 - February 17 - Presidents' Day (NO CLASS)**

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Required films for Week 7:

- *The Fury* (1978)
- *Dracula* (1979)

### **Week 7 - February 24**

**Into the Stratosphere** (1976–79): Spielberg introduced Williams to George Lucas, and the composer changed the world once again with his revolutionary yet blatantly referential score for *Star Wars*—a pop culture quake whose effects are still being felt today. That same year, Williams wrote an equally remarkable but utterly unique science-fiction score for Spielberg, and his career and talents entered the stratosphere... and never left. (All of which does not mean, however, that he didn't score several bad movies with all of his newfound success. He did.)

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Required films for Week 8:

- *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980)
- *E.T.* (1982)

### **Week 9 - March 3**

**Life at the Top** (1980–85): Williams scored hit after hit, riding an unprecedented box office wave with Spielberg and Lucas but also imbuing their popcorn fantasies with gravity, classical mastery, and indelible tunes. The apex for both him and Spielberg was arguably *E.T.*, a deeply personal story for the filmmaker. Also, in 1980, Williams surprised both the classical and film worlds by accepting a position as conductor for the Boston Pops, a role which gave him international visibility—leading to his fanfares for the Olympic Games and the NBC Nightly News—as well as a platform where he could champion his own music and begin to tear down the wall between so-called “serious” music and music written for films.

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Required films for Week 9:

- *Empire of the Sun* (1987)
- *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989)

## Week 9 - March 10 - MIDTERM PRESENTATIONS

**Getting Serious** (1987–89): Spielberg proved that he could tell “serious,” adult stories, and Williams went along with him—without losing his penchant for melody and romanticism. Williams also formed an important relationship with director Oliver Stone, beginning a trilogy of films that took a hard look at America’s recent sins. He also scored adult films about romance, grief, and the devil. Williams finished his unparalleled decade of film scoring on top.

**We will reserve half of this class period for your Midterm Presentations.**

--SPRING RECESS, March 16–23--

Required films for Week 10:

- *Home Alone* (1990)
- *Hook* (1991)

## Week 10 - March 24

**Serious Fun** (1990–92): Williams personally asked to score a low-budget, live-action Christmas cartoon—and his Midas touch (complete with two original Christmas carols) helped turn *Home Alone* into the top earning film of all time. He applied a similarly infectious, children’s theater approach to *Hook*, Spielberg’s swashbuckling extravaganza... which was nearly a full-blown movie *musical*.

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Required films for Week 11:

- *Jurassic Park* (1993)
- *Schindler’s List* (1993)

## Week 11 - March 31

**Terror and Tragedy** (1993): In the same year, Williams wrote a hymn and an anthem for Spielberg’s pioneering adventure about resurrected dinosaurs—tunes that entered the popular canon alongside his other classics—and paid sensitive tribute to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust for the director’s most sober magnum opus. Williams’ sensitivity and versatility were never so abundantly clear.

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Required films for Week 12:

- *Nixon* (1995)
- *Sleepers* (1996)

### **Week 12 - April 7**

**Darkness** (1995–97): Williams scored several films that examined the sour side of the American dream, including Oliver Stone’s epic portrait of Richard Nixon, a drama about child sexual abuse, and two movies that grappled with America’s original sin: slavery. His scores were laced with electronics and sharp angles, the human voice and poignant pain. His concertos and other works from this period shared some of that same DNA.

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Required films for Week 13:

- *Saving Private Ryan* (1998)
- *Star Wars - Episode I: The Phantom Menace* (1999)

### **Week 13 - April 14**

**War** (1998–2000): Williams stayed off the bloody beaches of Normandy for Spielberg’s visceral, verité depictions of World War II battles, but he did score the characters’ nobility and grief in *Saving Private Ryan*. He also returned to the embattled world of *Star Wars*, slightly reinventing the series with a more primal and impressionistic style while also making connections to his rapidly expanding space opera. *And*, he expanded on his Americana oeuvre with a sentimental score about the revolutionary war.

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Required films for Week 14:

- *A.I.* (2001)
- *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* (2001)

### **Week 14 - April 21**

**A New Millennium** (2001–11): Now an aging grandfather, Williams scored several movies about children—a robot boy, a boy wizard, a dead son—in a decade of impressive exploration. His scores for Spielberg’s post-9/11 films were appropriately frenetic and desolate. He also poured more energy into writing concert works that challenged the popular perception of his “sound,” and his status as America’s composer was cemented with an invitation to compose music for Barack Obama’s historical inauguration.

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Required films for Week 15:

- *Lincoln* (2012)
- *Star Wars - Episode VIII: The Last Jedi* (2017)

## Week 15 - April 28

**Old Friends** (2012–2023): Williams returned once again to the *Star Wars* universe, now owned by Disney and creatively stuck between a nostalgia fetish, corporate shareholders, and a zealous fanbase. His work with Spielberg was mostly quieter and focused on history, whether it was Abraham Lincoln, the Nixon years, or even the director's own childhood. Williams never stopped composing or conducting his music for ecstatic, sell-out crowds—and he achieved the cultural stature of a god.

--FINAL EXAM, Monday, May 12th--  
--LOCATION: In Class, 4:30–6:30pm--

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## Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

You will need a laptop, internet access, and access to Brightspace.

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## USC Technology Support Links

[Brightspace help for students](#)

[Software available to USC Campus](#)

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## Sharing of course materials outside of the learning environment

USC has a policy that prohibits sharing of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment. Please do not share or otherwise distribute class materials, music scores or recordings produced by me or any students in the conduct of this course without expressed permission.

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### *SCampus Section 11.12(B)*

*Distribution or use of notes or recordings based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study is a violation of the USC Student Conduct Code. This includes, but is not limited to, providing materials for distribution by services publishing class notes. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the Internet or via any other media. (See Section C.1 Class Notes Policy).*

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## Academic Integrity

The University of Southern California is foremost a learning community committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic misconduct is in contrast to the university's mission to educate students through a broad array of first-rank academic, professional,

and extracurricular programs and includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form).

This course will follow the expectations for academic integrity as stated in the [USC Student Handbook](#). All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term. You may not submit work written by others or “recycle” work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s). Students suspected of engaging in academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Other violations of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

Academic dishonesty has a far-reaching impact and is considered a serious offense against the university. Violations will result in a grade penalty, such as a failing grade on the assignment or in the course, and disciplinary action from the university itself, such as suspension or even expulsion.

For more information about academic integrity see the [student handbook](#) or the [Office of Academic Integrity's website](#), and university policies on [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#).

Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

### **Class policy regarding AI generators:**

This course aims to develop creative, analytical, and critical thinking skills. Therefore, all assignments should be prepared by the student working individually or in groups. Students may not have another person or entity complete any substantive portion of the assignment. Developing strong competencies in these areas will prepare you for a competitive workplace. Therefore, using AI-generated text, code, or other content is prohibited in this course, will be identified as plagiarism, and will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

## **Statement on University Academic and Support Systems**

### **Students and Disability Accommodations:**

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. [The Office of Student Accessibility Services](#) (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at [osas.usc.edu](https://osas.usc.edu). You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at [osasfrontdesk@usc.edu](mailto:osasfrontdesk@usc.edu).

### **Student Financial Aid and Satisfactory Academic Progress:**

To be eligible for certain kinds of financial aid, students are required to maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) toward their degree objectives. Visit the [Financial Aid Office webpage](#) for [undergraduate](#)- and [graduate-level](#) SAP eligibility requirements and the appeals process.

## **Support Systems:**

[Counseling and Mental Health](#) - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

[988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#) - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline consists of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

[Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services \(RSVP\)](#) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

[Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX \(EEO-TIX\)](#) - (213) 740-5086

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

[Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment](#) - (213) 740-2500

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

[The Office of Student Accessibility Services \(OSAS\)](#) - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

[USC Campus Support and Intervention](#) - (213) 740-0411

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

[Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#) - (213) 740-2101

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

[USC Emergency](#) - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

[USC Department of Public Safety](#) - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call

Non-emergency assistance or information.

[Office of the Ombuds](#) - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

[Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice](#) - (323) 442-2850 or [otfp@med.usc.edu](mailto:otfp@med.usc.edu)

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.