Chapter Five

NOSTALGIA, MASCULINIST DISCOURSE AND AUTHORITARIANISM
in John Williams' Scores for *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*

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1 977 was a major year for Hollywood, ranking with 1915, 1927 or 1939 as a year of particularly significant 'event' films[1]. The release of both *Star Wars* (back when it was just called '*Star Wars*') and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (again, before it had any 'special' or 'collector's' edition amendments to its title) prompted Larry Gross to describe the moment as "the Year of Our Lord 1977" especially in relation to blockbuster action films (1995: 7)[2]. Gross goes on to trace a genealogy of what he calls "the Big Loud Action Movie", positioning *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters* as key influential films standing between *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the James Bond films and the Irwin Allen disaster movies, on the one hand; and then, on the other hand, leading to "Big Loud Action Movies" like the *Die Hard* trilogy or *Batman Forever*[3]. *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters* are also identified as significant, although not as groundbreaking as *Jaws*, in the important essay entitled 'The New Hollywood' written by Thomas Schatz (1993). Schatz cites the economic and marketing factors that transformed Hollywood filmmaking in the mid-1970s, most notably its turn towards the production of blockbuster films that, through front-loading and saturation marketing, were capable of generating massive profits for the industry. While both Gross and Schatz agree that several elements of production come together to make the New Hollywood blockbuster a cultural event, neither seem to regard music as an especially significant factor in the films' multiple successes. The films' successes can be measured in many ways: in terms of economics, they can

be seen as successful at generating revenue[4]; as entertainment for audience members, the massive ticket sales speak to the numbers of people desiring that filmic experience; and as rhetoric, these films must surely be respected for their success at conveying any number and type of values, the full implications of which we may never comprehend.

Yet music, and specifically the orchestral scores of John Williams, has become an important part of the New Hollywood. Williams' scores of the mid-1970s have been hailed as a kind of renaissance or re-emergence of symphonic music for cinema (Palmer and Marks, 2001). At the same time, the symphonic score never completely disappeared from Hollywood, and Jerry Goldsmith is one of several who might be annoyed to hear that Williams 'restored' the type of score he and others had been writing throughout the late-1960s and early-1970s. It would also be inaccurate to suggest that the symphonic score led to the removal of more popular musics from Hollywood's soundtracks. More than just returning to an older way of making musical sounds (using a symphony orchestra), Williams' scores are remarkable for their rhetorical power. At the heart of Williams' wildly successful scores for *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters* is an effective blend of memory, nostalgia and manipulative power for the films' less obvious arguments. Just as both films give the illusion of looking to the future while offering up reactionary arguments steeped in a desire for the values of the past, the two scores similarly resist radical musical languages in favor of the familiar sounds of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. What I want to offer in this chapter is a reading of these two film scores that reveals their seductive and, at least to some, unsavory arguments: in *Star Wars*, a particular (and central) melodic motif reinforces the film's overall masculinist imagery and focus; with *Close Encounters*, the dialectic between the modern and antimodern styles supports those critics who find the film's rhetoric authoritarian or even fascist.

Musical Codes and Masculinity in *Star Wars*
Williams' score for *Star Wars* sits at the heart of one of the great, unremarked paradoxes of the film and its reception. It is contrapuntal in the sense that the music does not, in certain ways at least, reflect the images. While Lucas's mise-en-scene was roundly praised for its illusion of a gritty realism – for example, the space ships and robots show evidence of wear via scratches and scuffs, equipment sometimes needs repairing, the menacing space station has a smelly trash compactor, and so on – the music could hardly be called 'realist' in any sense. As performed by the London Symphony Orchestra and channeled through a Dolby sound system, this music connotes something without grit; on the contrary, it gleams and shines. Williams employs a musical style that has long been encoded with associations of precision, power, and bourgeois subjectivity: namely, the post-romantic orchestral style of composers like Richard Strauss or Erich Wolfgang Korngold. That such a musical language felt natural for this film was no accident, given its clear connections back to the adventure films of the 1930s, like the Errol Flynn swashbuckling costume epics (scored by Korngold) and the *Flash*

Gordon and *Buck Rogers* serials[5]. Randall Larson (1985) is one of many who have observed that Williams eschewed electronic or avant-garde music, choosing not to equate 'alien landscape' with 'alien style', the mode used so often in 1950s SF soundtracks, where unfamiliar timbres like those of the theremin worked to destabilise a sense of familiarity[6]. Often contemporary reviewers spoke of the score as Wagnerian, or of the film as a 'space opera', and James Buhler's perceptive essay on the *Star Wars* score (2000) locates in Williams' use of the leitmotif the restoration of the mythic qualities lost in most film music, a loss identified and lamented by Adorno[7]. Still, the *Star Wars* score borrows from sources beyond Wagner; it is, as Kevin Donnelly (1998) has noted, a pastiche comprised of many styles and languages (Stravinsky, Holst, and Korngold are but three of the other influences that can be heard[8]).

Much has been made of *Star Wars'* obsession with the past. In his famous 1983 essay 'Postmodernism and Consumer Culture', Fredric Jameson speaks of the "nostalgia film", a type of film about the past whose style depends upon a pastiche not from high culture but rather mass culture. After marking Lucas's first financial success, *American Graffiti* (1973), as one of the inaugural nostalgia films, Jameson goes on to complicate the category by suggesting that *Star Wars* is also, metonymically, a nostalgia film:

> *Star Wars reinvents this experience* [of the Saturday afternoon serial] *in the form of a pastiche: that is, there is no longer any point to a parody of such serials since they are long extinct. Star Wars, far from being a pointless satire of such now dead forms, satisfies a deep (might I even say repressed?) longing to experience them again: it is a complex object in which on some first level children and adolescents can take the adventures straight, while the adult public is able to gratify a deeper and more properly nostalgic desire to return to that older period and to live its strange old aesthetic artifacts through once again. This film is thus metonymically a historical or nostalgia film: unlike* American Graffiti, *it does not reinvent a picture of the past in its lived totality; rather, by reinventing the feel and shape of characteristic art objects of an older period (the serials), it seeks to reawaken a sense of the past associated with those objects.* (Jameson, 1983: 116)

Just what was so attractive about that older period, though? *American Graffiti*, to cite but one example, used rock music to evoke "a culture before the Beatles, the Kennedy assassination, Vietnam, and Watergate" (Smith, 1998: 179), in short, a time before the loss of innocence that so traumatised the generation of the US baby boomers. Calling the 1940s and 1950s a 'golden age', a time before a loss of innocence, is to overlook the many positive changes that happened concurrently with the disillusionments of Vietnam and Watergate. To name but one, I would point to the altered social and political roles permitted to women in the United States. The setting of *Star Wars* is "a long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away" with regards to its gender roles, for the central focus in this narrative – made clear for us by the music – is the coming-of-age of Luke Skywalker.

That the female experience is omitted, marginalised or recast into traditional subservient roles is an observation that commentators quickly made about *Star Wars*. Dan Rubey wrote about the film's foregrounding of the male relationships and male-oriented viewpoints:

> *Women exist primarily to provide motivations for male activity, to act as spectators, or to serve as mediators between different levels in the male hierarchy. When Luke's aunt isn't stuffing artichokes into the Cuisinart, she serves as a mediator between Luke and his uncle and then as a motive for revenge when Luke returns home and finds her charred body... Princess Leia, despite her attractive spunkiness and toughness, basically fills the same male-oriented roles. She is the traditional damsel in distress – it is her capture by Darth Vader which begins the film and provides the motivation for Ben Kenobi's return and Luke's rescue mission. Although she does grab a laser at one point and fire a few shots, she is dependent on her male rescuers, and the only action she initiates during the rescue almost gets them killed in the garbage crusher. Her most memorable line, repeated over and over by her holograph image, is "Help me, Obi-Wan Kenobi. You are my only hope."* (1978: 18)

The boys' club was not limited to the fictional world of the film. In his unauthorised biography of Lucas, Dale Pollock reports that Carrie Fisher, often the only woman on the set, was required by Lucas to flatten her breasts with electrical tape in an effort to conceal her femininity; and Pollock also quotes Lucas as saying that Leia was "'sort of a drag and she's a nuisance, just like most little sisters" (1983: 165). And in case Lucas's screenplay did not make clear Leia's role as a relatively passive object, Williams' motif for her (slow, alluring, with the rising major sixth suggesting a passionate longing) further confirms that her character is associated with these reactionary gender roles: Leia's motif, quite unlike Luke's, undergoes little transformation or development[9].

In contrast, it is made apparent from the opening moments of the film that Luke is at the centre of *Star Wars*, as Williams' score presents the heroic title theme, a melody that becomes Luke's leitmotif throughout the film. Commenting on his motif for Luke, Williams has said that he "composed a melody that reflected the brassy, bold, masculine, and noble qualities I saw in the character"[10] (quoted in Matessino, 1997: 11). Certainly as we first hear it, during the opening credits, when it is not yet clear that the motif will represent Luke, the music sounds brassy, bold, noble and, even, masculine. The martial duple rhythms, the trumpet timbres for the melody and the leaping, disjunct quality of the melody's shape (ascending first a fourth, then a fifth and finally, twice, up a seventh, before coming to a resting point) are all ways that many composers have earlier connoted masculinity through music. Many of the features of the *Star Wars* main title music resemble the main title music in Korngold's score for *Kings Row* (1942). While the films'

diegetic settings are literally worlds apart, they both share an important similarity: both films are coming-of-age narratives about a male protagonist, and both scores imply that character's importance by adopting the character's motif as the film's title music[11]. Many commentators have remarked on the similarity between the Luke and Parris motifs – see, for example, Adams, (1999); Flinn (1992); Gilliam (1999b), Lerner (2001) and Scheurer (1997) – and Williams follows Korngold in using different forms of the motif to represent varying stages of the character's development. In one of Korngold's most efficient examples of leitmotific technique and character development, Parris, the main character from *Kings Row*, walks over a turnstile, away from the camera, as a child. Then, after an elliptical edit covering the passage of ten years, he walks back towards the camera and over the same turnstile only now as an adult. His motif is heard first in the woodwinds, slowly, softly, without a clear sense of pulse, and thinly orchestrated. Then the adult Parris's footsteps follow, underscored by the brass, in a much louder and rhythmically decisive fashion. The shifts in tempo, rhythm and, most importantly, timbre subtly alert the audience to Parris's maturation.

Williams extends that technique throughout *Star Wars* where Luke's motif goes through considerable development. The motif occurs several times beyond the opening titles. As we first see Luke, and hear his name called out by his aunt, his motif occurs in the French horn, slower and more smoothly than during the main title. The melody comes back in later scenes (for instance, as Luke sells his landspeeder), often in the woodwinds, as Luke is defined as immature and whiny. During the scene where Luke and Leia escape from stormtroopers by swinging across a chasm, the motif returns as it did in the title music, loudly and heroically, with the melody back in the trumpets, where it creates one of the most euphoric moments in the film (could some of the excitement be from the kiss – "for luck" – that Leia gives Luke right before leaping over the abyss?).

Luke's motif also figures prominently in the music accompanying the rebels' attack on the Death Star, where Williams sometimes shifts it to the minor mode. Both in terms of the narrative, as well as through its visual symbols, the attack on the space station marks the final step in Luke's growth as a man in this film. The earlier rebel briefing scene, where the pilots are shown a film instructing them how and where to place their missiles, bears an odd resemblance to a sex education film, showing as it does how one tiny but precisely-delivered missile can set off the chain reaction that can bring about the explosive climax of the relatively huge and spherical Death Star. The symbolism is barely symbolic: X and Y material (X-wing and Y-wing fighters)[12] are sent off to the giant sphere/ovum; and we watch the faces of the all-male pilots scrunch up and grimace as they enter the Death Star's trench. Some of them deliver their missiles prematurely and externally, and thus ineffectually since they do not penetrate. But Luke, with the help of Han and the coaching of Kenobi, remains in the trench long enough to send the missiles to their destination, which causes his face to relax as he takes

long, heavy breaths in the afterglow created by the Death Star's massive detonation[13]. Williams' music – building, sequencing, ultimately climaxing – conspires with the images to announce this significant step towards Luke's achievement of (one type of) manhood.

It is not hard to imagine why this preoccupation with manhood and masculinity would have been so popular in 1977, so shortly after the patriarchal power structures in the United States were challenged both domestically and abroad. The success of the music in *Star Wars* is not just in the way that Williams revived the dormant swashbuckling sounds of Korngold and Hollywood's 'golden age', but more importantly, the ways that the music works so seamlessly with the rest of the film to sate a nostalgic appetite for so-called simpler times[14]. Film and score return us to a time of unproblematic masculine dominance.

Politics, Science Fiction and Aesthetic Modernism in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*

Close Encounters was *Wünderkind* Steven Spielberg's follow-up to the industry-transforming *Jaws*, the 1975 film that nearly single-handedly established and defined the emergent New Hollywood marketing practices of the front-loaded summer blockbuster (Schatz, 1993). Coming out in mid-November 1977, only a few months after the first US release of *Star Wars* (late May), *Close Encounters* engaged rather different conventions of the Science Fiction genre than its light-sabre-wielding neighbor. *Close Encounters* offers up a type of spectacular cinematic salvation in response to a middle-American suburban life that is represented as banal, materialistic and claustrophobic – in a word, alienating. The film acknowledges its generic ancestors, particularly the alien invasion (or Bug Eyed Monster – B.E.M.) Science Fiction film so popular in the 1950s. Indeed, Spielberg's early working title for the film was 'Watch the Skies', the closing lines from 1951's *The Thing from Another World*, an early and important alien invasion film[15]. One of Spielberg's more radical transformations of the genre followed upon the important model of Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), which presented the optimistic possibility offered earlier (and rarely since) in 1950's *The Day the Earth stood still*: that humans were being watched by benign extraterrestrials, heavenly creatures who care and just want to get to know us better. As the tag-line went on promotional posters and in trailers, 'We are not alone'[16].

The initial release of *Close Encounters* sparked two divergent responses: as the film enjoyed commercial and financial success, being cheerfully consumed by millions of filmgoers, a relatively small group of writers were quick to draw attention to Spielberg's manipulative cinematic techniques. Robert Entman and Francie Seymour turned to Susan Sontag as they outlined a number of authoritarian or even fascist traces in the film's ideology (Entman and Seymour, 1978; Sontag, 1975). They noted connections between Weimar Germany and the Carter-era US in the film's attacks on the governing authorities, its resignation to authoritarianism and elitism and its elevation

of irrational dogma over scientific reason. Tony Williams took the argument further, memorably referring to *Close Encounters* as "a Disneyland version of *Triumph of the Will*" (1983: 23). A study of Williams' remarkable score can enrich this ideological critique.

Although it is not normally read as a critical aesthetic manifesto, Steven Spielberg's film (and John Williams' score for) *Close Encounters* contain, among other things, a familiar rendering of a certain kind of musical modernism that encodes that which is meant to be perceived as 'alien'. Music plays a significant role in the film's diegesis, acting as the most important of several nonverbal languages, teasingly connecting some characters while alienating others (in ways not at all unlike the alienation of some listeners with concert hall modernism). The film has already been fruitfully interpreted as one of several post-Watergate, post-Vietnam texts appearing in the middle and late 1970s, offering up a US middle class distrustful of the government, the military and patriarchal authority in general – a populace ripe, as several have argued, for an authoritarian message. Classed generically as a Science Fiction film, *Close Encounters* addresses some of the traditional questions of the genre – questions of moral and metaphysical speculation, of cultural identity and one's position in the cosmos (or, at least, the suburbs) while projecting and personifying collective anxieties onto the easy target of an alien. It is a Science Fiction film that is aware of its generic ancestry, for in it we can find a number of references back to earlier films, including the genre-transforming *2001: A Space Odyssey* as well as a host of alien invasion films from the 1950s. Beyond, or underneath, the film's political and metaphysical discourse, however, lurks Williams' richly eclectic music, persistently pulling us towards the film's infantalisingly epiphanic conclusion.

The *Close Encounters* score employs several characteristic techniques of high musical modernism, including aleatoric passages and the use of tone clusters, in addition to the overarching modernist musical eclecticism championed by Richard Strauss in 'Der Rosenkavalier'[17] (Gilliam, 1999a: 89). A close analysis of Williams' score for *Close Encounters* can enhance our understanding of the overall cinematic text. Spielberg's seemingly inevitable movement from darkness to light, from mystery to enlightenment, from suburb to celestial paradise, is powerfully underscored as the music shifts stylistically from cues with a pointed lack of melody early in the film (emulating the progressive/modernist tone cluster pieces of György Ligeti and Krzysztof Penderecki) to later cues featuring a clear, familiar melodic theme (frequently Disney's *When You Wish Upon a Star*), harmonised with a post-Romantic tonal language. The score thus sets up the more experimental musical style as strange by associating it with the aliens, and ultimately it rejects this modernist musical language, substituting tonality for atonality just as it substitutes a non-descript heavenly existence for middle-American materialist banality. As a film existing in several versions and rich in intertextual allusions, *Close Encounters* offers up a peculiarly disturbing response to life in the United States of the 1970s. To look past the visual and musical

spectacle of the film's conclusion is to realise the extent to which Spielberg infantalises both the diegetic and the non-diegetic viewers and inscribes an authoritarian (or to some, fascist) ideology. The stylistic metamorphosis present in Williams' score – the movement from a high modernist vocabulary towards a more familiar melodic vocabulary – serves as a powerful semiotic, rhetorical, and critical strategy.

Besides its obvious Science Fiction antecedents, the film also has less obvious roots in the genres of the religious epic film popular in Hollywood in the 1950s and 1960s and in the Disney magic film, especially *Pinocchio* (1940) but also, to a certain degree, *Peter Pan* (1953). A number of writers have noted, in one way or another, the film's religiosity and its theological tone – see Entman and Seymour (1978), Torry (1991) and Williams (1983). The central lesson of the parable of Roy Neary is, like Peter Pan, to dismiss the adult world of responsibility in order to chase one's childhood dreams. Indeed, it serves to underscore the relative profundity of the moral lesson in Spielberg's next alien film, *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), which is conveniently if not necessarily simple: to "be good." Some examples of the Judeo-Christian religiosity in *Close Encounters*: Roy behaves as a sort of Moses figure, leading his chosen people out of the suburbs and to an important promised encounter at a mountain (in his first scene, the crossing of the Red Sea sequence from the film *The Ten Commandments* is playing on Roy's television set)[18]. Roy is also configured as a kind of Christ figure (Moses's typological equivalent). His very name, Roy, contains an old Shakespearean pun ('Roy' = 'roi' = 'king', *Henry V*, iv.1.49), hinting at his regal character while also creating certain ironies as both a 'king' (he is an ineffectual, even impotent patriarch within his family) and as someone 'near' (he is alienated from job, wife, and family). Spielberg's decision to include part of the Budweiser jingle 'Here comes the king' was a financially costly one, according to Fred Karlin, who saw its presence only as a way to increase an illusion of realism (1994: 137). However, it was also a clever way to reveal Roy's kingly status and also his connection with material consumer culture – we hear "The king is coming, let's hear the call/When you've said Bud you've said it all" just a moment before Roy has his televisual epiphany that connects his living room mountain with Devil's Tower, the site of the aliens' arrival. One of the 'disciples' running up the mountain with Roy succumbs to the army's sleeping gas, like the sleeping disciples in the garden of Gethsemane. Roy is selected from a group of twelve red-suited 'pilgrims' and led, arms extended, in the shape of a cross, up to his ultimate communion with the heavens. Other biblical stories invoked in *Close Encounters* include: Saul's conversion experience on his way to Damascus (Roy too is lost on the path and the blinding light burns and transforms him); the Tower of Babel and the issues of communication (the government workers are ineffectual in reaching up to the heavens, in part because of their language barriers, while characters like Roy and Barry are able to intuit messages from the aliens); and the parousia-like return of the dead as acted out by the Mothership's returning of the abductees.

Roy's earlier enthusiasm to take his children to see *Pinocchio* follows Spielberg's Christological narrative. A Christ figure, the character of Pinocchio finds himself uncomfortably torn between two worlds, that of being a wooden puppet and that of being a 'real' boy. After wishing upon a star, his father gets his wish that his (only begotten) son be transformed from wood into flesh. Along the way, Pinocchio faces the temptations of Pleasure Island, the acting life and that nagging conscience in the form of Jiminy Cricket, who sings the most famous song from the score, *When You Wish Upon a Star*, a melody that was later adopted by Disney as the theme for their weekly *Wonderful World of Disney* television series. The melody appears diegetically in *Close Encounters* (a music box plays some of it in the Special Edition) and also non-diegetically, as Williams quotes it several times in the final scenes (as well as in the closing credits of – only – the Special Edition). In early drafts of the screenplay, Spielberg intended to have Ukelele Ike's original version of the song from *Pinocchio* playing as Roy entered the Mothership. Spielberg's novelisation of the film makes clear something that may not be as obvious from the screenplay or finished film: the song *When You Wish Upon a Star* is what Roy is hearing as he enters the Mothership (Roy "was thinking and hearing a song in his head" and it goes on to print the words)[19]. The fact that the music is intended to be heard within Roy's head is but one example of how Roy's experience and positioning is strongly set up as the intended subjective positioning of the audience – we are all supposed to be Roy.

The music participates in the film's authoritarian rhetoric; it leaves little ambiguity as to how the film demands that it be read. Williams' score masterfully manipulates the audience through its careful use of a number of widely understood musical codes, some of which are quite old. A recurring chase motif in the film consists of obsessive, Herrmannesque repetitions of the first part of the *Dies irae* chant (a melody Williams used before briefly in *Star Wars* as Luke and Obi-Wan find the charred remains of Luke's aunt and uncle, the moment of the famous allusion to John Ford's *The Searchers* [1956]). This motif is sometimes blended together with an alternating (rocking) two chord pattern (often a D-flat major with an added sixth to a C seventh), privileging a rising tritone melody. This music accompanies most of the early observations of the recurring shape that will eventually become identified as the United States' first national monument and site for the close celestial encounter, Devil's Tower. Could Williams have purposefully attached the old *diabolus in musica* (the tritone) to Devil's Tower?

Beyond using ancient religious musical codes for the satanic (the tritone and the *Dies irae* melody), Williams also plays with certain modernist vocabularies in order to emphasise the frightening nature of the aliens (before we learn their true benevolent intent, they are set up as mischievous and even menacing: they mess up our refrigerators and steal our children). In interviews, Williams speaks of two musical vocabularies, one atonal and one Romantic (Bouzereau, 1998). Hollywood's stylistic hegemony of musical vocabularies has generally avoided avant-garde modernist practices except when underscoring horror and Science Fiction (there are exceptions to that

as well). The horror film in the 1930s and the Science Fiction film of the 1950s both turned to modernisms of timbre. Kubrick's famous temp track/score for *2001* brought the post-tonal tone cluster sound of Ligeti to a wide audience, implicating that sound with images and ideas of the profoundly unknown and unknowable (the alien). Williams' tone cluster cues for *Close Encounters* follow that precedent. Referring to the most (traditionally) frightening scene in the film, where Barry is abducted from his mother's house[20], music editor Ken Wannberg has recalled that, "the one piece I remembered that it was temped with was the Penderecki" (quoted in Bond, 1998: 28). Even though Wannberg does not name it, it seems plausible and likely that the specific work was Penderecki's famous and heavily anthologised *Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima* (1960), whose tone clusters and non-traditional string playing techniques can be heard in Williams' abduction music. Extreme dissonance, unfamiliar timbres and atonality have long been associated with representations of negative states and emotions, and Williams' use of this post-serial atonal vocabulary here acts only to heighten the sense of terror associated with the abduction[21]. This scene (and its music) marks one of those points where Science Fiction and horror conventions are identical.

Like many carefully crafted verbal arguments, the score's most powerful rhetorical maneuvers occur right at its conclusion. In general terms, the music in this film progresses from a more abstract, melody-less atonal language (the 'alien' modernism) to one that is more familiar, melodic, and tonal. The visual motif of darkness and light, perhaps representing a drive towards spiritual enlightenment, finds a musical parallel in this movement from melody-less music towards a music of clear, even famous, melody. Formlessness yields to form; the threatening yields to the familiar as Penderecki yields to Disney. The closing scenes depict Roy's assumption to the heavens, as the government officials who originally prevented his attendance at the event mysteriously decide to include Roy among the twelve other red-suited 'pilgrims' and as the child-like humanoid aliens choose Roy from the group as the sole human who will ascend with them.

The music begins in the style of the earlier abduction scene but Williams gradually interpolates the melody from *When You Wish Upon A Star* into an increasingly tonal and melodic symphonic section that rhapsodises through postromantic harmonies and satisfyingly familiar voice-leading and cadences. Early drafts of the screenplay reveal Spielberg's diegetic placement of the song and his early conception of Roy as a sort of Pinocchio figure. Spielberg later wrote that when Roy Neary walks up the ramp to the Mothership, "he becomes a real person. He loses his strings, his wooden joints, and he goes on that ship knowing what he's doing" (quoted in Durwood, 1977:118). The extra scenes in *The Special Edition* let us, along with Roy, gaze upon the womb-like interior of the Mothership. Williams' music for this sequence in *The Special Edition* repeats the larger progression from abstract to melodic, actually juxtaposing the two vocabularies during a tilt shot showing the aliens behind windows. Since one of the main

connecting themes in Disney films of the 1940s and 1950s (such as *Pinocchio*, *Peter Pan*, and *Dumbo*) is the constant reassurance of the comforts of familial and particularly parental bonds, the music of Disney and Pinocchio makes the radically different style of the anti-melodic modernist tone cluster music resonates strongly as the appropriate music to accompany the abduction of a child, the disruption of the familial bonds, for it sets itself in opposition to melodic, tonal music (the music associated with the Disney model of family). After Roy's ascension to the Mothership, the music becomes lovingly tonal and melodic. Williams crafts a new melody here and harmonises it through chromatically-inflected tonality; he also brings back other melodies from the score, including the five-note 'communication' motif. Furthermore, the 'Mountain' motif refers back to Hollywood's characteristic timbres for representing epic religiosity and grandeur: harps and textless female choirs[22]. By the final scenes in the film, Williams' music demands that we regard the extraterrestrials as not only benevolent but both familiar and familial. Beyond simply suggesting an anti-modernist critique of the tone-cluster modernism of Ligeti and Penderecki, Williams' score for *Close Encounters* brings together the traditional musical signifiers for that which is alien next to the signifiers of epic religiosity. Williams' brilliantly effective music for *Close Encounters* fortifies the film's authoritarian rhetoric and helps to prepare the way for Reagan's 1980s.

It is important to note, however, that Williams, like virtually all composers working within the commercial film industry, provides music that fits the specifications of the director. Hollywood composers almost never get to rewrite screenplays or dictate issues of editing or cinematography. If one composer does not or cannot provide the music desired by the director and/or producer, another composer will be brought in who can supply the desired effect. What is so remarkable about Williams' scores – and they are considerable achievements in the history of musical style – is the way that they so effectively limit any oppositional readings of the films they accompany. In *Star Wars*, the music makes it difficult to identify any other character besides Luke as the central hero, and in *Close Encounters*, the music communicates no sense of dread or remorse over Roy's abrogation of his duties as husband/father. In this way, both scores contribute to what Robin Wood has termed "The Lucas-Spielberg Syndrome" (1986: 162–174). Wood stresses the centrality of the concept of reassurance in this syndrome – the reassurance that comes, for instance, from repetition and retreat into a child-like perspective. Williams' sweepingly nostalgic music reassures, persuades, and above all else, lulls us into being uncritical.

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Notes

1. *The Birth of a Nation, The Jazz Singer* and both *Gone with the Wind* and *The Wizard of Oz* were the important event films of those years.

2. A brief note on editions: by *Star Wars*, I will in this essay be referring to the film that is

now known as *Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope*. When pertinent, I will distinguish between *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind: The Special Edition* (1980). These films now exist in multiple forms, sometimes with significantly different scenes, edits, and musical scores. In the Newer Hollywood of Lucas and Spielberg, any film is now subject to continual and constant revising and updating, as budgets and technologies progress. The director may claim that issues of quality motivate these revisions, but it also provides for a planned obsolescence (and the consequent repackaging and reselling of the original text) that leads Gregory Solman (2002) to equate "movie" with "software".

3. Gross categorises the influential innovations of Lucas and Spielberg into four points crucial to the new action movie: 1. B movie genre plots are elevated into elaborate and expensive production; 2. narrative complexity is reduced; 3. the Cinematic, the Image and Technology dominate the narrative experience; 4. self-deprecating humor. There is a subdued elegaic tone behind Gross's analysis, one that is perhaps not unlike 'The Silver Swan'.

4. Jeff Smith reports that:
   the overwhelming success of Star Wars *would help to revive the commercial fortunes of the classically styled film score. Released by 20th Century-Fox's record subsidiary, the* Star Wars *soundtrack sold over four million copies and made a household name of its composer, John Williams.* (1998: 216)

5. Richard H. Bush (1989) describes the 'tracking', or stock, music used in the *Flash Gordon* and *Buck Rogers* serials that Universal Pictures produced between 1936 and 1940. Besides using many of the late Romantic works that had become standard fare during the pre-synchronised sound era (Liszt, Tchaikovsky, and Wagner all surface with regularity), there was also considerable recycling of existing film scores such as Franz Waxman's *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935).

6. Almost all Science Fiction films from the 1950s deployed some sort of electronic timbres (often the theremin) to signify the 'alien'. The practice extends to Elmer Bernstein's score for *The Ten Commandments* (1956), where the music accompanying the plagues contains theremin and novachord.

7. Buhler rightly draws attention to the binary sunset sequence, where Luke stares out dreamily at the Tatooine horizon and we hear the Force/Ben theme. Buhler finds that moment remarkable since at that point in the film, the Force theme has not been explained. Although the Force motif has been heard once already (in the opening sequence, as Leia loads the Death Star plans and her plea for help into R2-D2), the musical signifier is still undefined in relation to either the Force or Obi-Wan Kenobi, and so Williams returns to the musical-dramatic techniques of Wagner (2000: 44). Irene Paulus (2000) has also written of the connection between Wagner and Williams.

8. Donnelly uses two scores by Danny Elfman, *Batman* and *Batman Returns*, to note the presence of pastiche in what he calls the post-classical film score. He refers as well to Williams and writes that, "both composers [ie Elfman and Williams] could to some degree be dubbed neoclassical in that they value the classical and use it as a model while also differentiating their music from it" (Donnelly, 1998: 150). He further delineates them by writing that "while both composers' music could be characterised as neoclassical, John Williams' work is best described as a pastiche of classical film scoring, and Danny Elfman's music for the Batman films as a parody of the film music of the past" (ibid: 151).

9. Leia's motif is nearly always played by woodwinds and reflects the ways that timbre has become loaded with gendered associations and meanings; woodwinds can suggest the feminine or the unmanly. Consider this speculation: "you can even imagine that if Princess Leia played an instrument, it would be a flute" (Kendall, 1997: 23).

10. Williams has also been quoted as describing the Luke theme as "flourishing and upward reaching, idealistic and heroic…. a very uplifted kind of heraldic quality. Larger than he

is. His idealism is more the subject than the character itself I would say" (quoted in Adams, 1999: 22).

11. Michael Pisani noted that the Luke motif has become the signature music for the entire *Star Wars* film series – in that every film opens and closes with that music – in a paper entitled "Building an EMPIRE: Levels of Communication in John Williams' Film Music," presented at the national meeting of the Society for American Music, March, 2003, in Lexington, Kentucky.

12. I am grateful to Jim Herrick for sharing that observation with me.

13. Further examples of this thinly-veiled psychosexual imagery come from the obsessively repeated symbolic castrations, in the form of arms being forcibly removed from masculine bodies (C-3PO and the would-be assailants in the bar both lose their arms, as Luke and Vader will, in later films, lose their hands), and Buhler has noted the fetishising of the phallus that occurs with the light sabre, a "relic of the Father" (Buhler, 2000: 49). Jane Caputi has written about the pervasive negative masculine qualities of *Star Wars*, noting that it presents "an all-white, all-male world and, like the Westerns and war movies it is modeled on, [it] reserves its principle commitments for violence, male bonding, and war." (1988: 496) I am grateful to Paul Miller for introducing me to that essay.

14. The musical language that Williams develops in *Star Wars* finds its way into later films like *Superman: The Movie* (1978), *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) and their sequels, as well as numerous derivative scores by other composers.

15. That Spielberg's ambition was to be "the Cecil B. DeMille of Science Fiction" was reported by *Firelight* crewmember Jean Weber Brill (quoted in McBride, 1997: 463).

16. It is likely a coincidence that this five-syllable phrase could fit with the five-note 'communication' motif. Spielberg was insistent that the melody not be too long, like the seven notes of *When You Wish Upon A Star*, but rather something more compact, like a doorbell chime; Williams generated somewhere from 250 to 300 melodies until Spielberg settled on the one that made it into the film (Bouzereau, 1998).

17. Gilliam's observations about Strauss's modernist ahistoricism, his disinterest in stylistic uniformity, rings true for Williams as well, as when he writes that with Strauss, "we may see a composer who keenly recognised the disunities of modern life and believed that such incongruities should not be masked by a unified musical style" (1999a: 89).

18. The rampant allusions to earlier films by many Hollywood directors in the 1970s is discussed in Carroll (1998), and although Carroll only mentions Spielberg's references to cartoons in *Close Encounters* (the "flying saucers [that] zip along the highway like Road Runner") or the ways the ending "feed[s] off the 'Night on Bald Mountain' sequence of *Fantasia*") (251), the significance of *The Ten Commandments* to *Close Encounters* should not be underestimated.

19. The song appears in Roy's head in both the original novelisation of the film (Spielberg, 1977) and the revised 1980 novelisation, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind: The Special Edition* (Spielberg, 1980).

20. It might be argued that the final scenes of infantalised scientists and government officials, frozen with wide eyes and slack jaws in the presence of a mysterious higher power, is in fact the most terrifying image from the film.

21. Williams employs a similar dualistic score, setting atonality in opposition with tonality, in Robert Altman's *Images* (1972), described as "one of film music's outstanding creations" by Royal Brown (178). At present, this film is hard to find (although copies sometimes appear on eBay), and facsimiles of a few pages of the score are reproduced in Bazelon (1975: 303–307).

22. Debussy and Holst are two composers who earlier used wordless choirs to similar effects.

Chapter Six

SOUND AND MUSIC IN THE *MAD MAX* TRILOGY

REBECCA COYLE

In the beginning, my approach was very straightforward. I saw film purely as visual music and I became fascinated as to how we take little bits of celluloid and join them together like notes on the piano. For me, my first feature Mad Max *was a piece of visual rock and roll. I cut* Mad Max *like a silent movie trying to get the rhythms working just for the eye. Only later did I add the sound.* (George Miller, interviewed in the documentary *White Fellas Dreaming* [1993])[1]

In the above quote, director George Miller suggests that his first feature film – *Mad Max* (1979) – was edited without sound. Yet, despite this emphasis on an original 'silent cut', premised on durational elements of action and visual rhythm[2], sound is a key (and foregrounded) aspect of the film and its sequels *Mad Max 2* (1981) and *Beyond Thunderdome* (1985, co-written and co-directed with George Ogilvie). The *Mad Max* film trilogy has been widely reviewed and critiqued. Curiously, the music and sound of the films are rarely mentioned, much less analysed in depth[3]. Yet the film sound tracks, apart from serving the visual and narrative elements, significantly construct their own narratives, refer to their own generic conventions, and have their own production stories. These, in turn, contribute to the aesthetic aspect of their operation in the audio-visual texts. Furthermore, as reflected in Miller's comments quoted above, musical concepts and metaphors have influenced the director's oeuvre, commencing with the aesthetics that informed the production of the first *Mad Max* film in the late 1970s, and which developed in its sequels.

Miller was born in 1945 and raised in Chinchilla, a small town in rural Queensland. Although television was introduced in Australia in 1956, Miller