

Boston Pops honors prolific composer John Williams with new album

Wednesday

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By Keith Powers, Correspondent

BOSTON - Coming to grips with the accomplishments of composer John Williams takes some doing. Fifty Academy Award nominations. Twenty-three Grammy Awards. Music for almost all of the highest grossing films in history.

An amazing four-decades relationship with director Steven Spielberg, for whom he has written 27 scores. The Olympics. Presidential inaugurations. The nightly news. And (a little-known favorite), composing the music for the pilot of "Gilligan's Island."

So what could the Boston Pops do to honor its conductor laureate? Record his music, of course. In a special presentation, the Pops, led by Williams's replacement, Keith Lockhart, took the Symphony Hall stage Friday evening to treat an enthusiastic house to a smorgasbord of Williams' popular compositions, and to preserve the playing for an upcoming tribute album.

The album is scheduled for release on May 10, when the Pops officially opens its 132nd season. The entire season will be dedicated to Williams, who will make two guest appearances with the orchestra (May 31 and June 1).

This program was hosted by Karen Allen, who has starred in many films, including several of the Indiana Jones movies that Williams scored. While the recording will focus on scores that may not be among Williams' most well-known, this program also included film montages and selections from the Superman, Harry Potter, Star Wars and Indiana Jones films as well.

Williams is a musical chameleon. He wrote klezmer for "The Terminal." Yankee fife-and-drum for "The Patriot." Dissonant triads for the Devil's Dance, from "The Witches of Eastwick."

And of course, unforgettable motives for bad guys, princesses, chumps, Storm Troopers, robots, swashbuckling adventurers and superheroes. He even channeled Rachmaninov - well, Rachmaninov-lite at least - in the Love Theme from "Sabrina."

All of it appropriate to the character, or the action, or the emotion. There are few surprises when listening to such familiar music. Among them though, the theme to "Towering Inferno" - removed from its action - gets well developed through several moods, almost a symphonic overture. The Stargazers theme from "E.T." - lusciously articulated by harpist Jessica Zhou - set a beautiful atmosphere. The "Sabrina" Love Theme - carved out sweetly by pianist Vytas Baksys - brought out yet another of Williams's multiple styles.

Solos from Clint Foreman (flute), Cynthia Meyers (piccolo), Thomas Martin (clarinet) showed off the great quality of the Pops orchestra. And the sectional playing - the imitation bagpipes from the violins in "The Patriot," or the numerous fanfares coming from the horns at the back of the stage - also stood out.

But it was Lockhart himself who kept this tribute to his predecessor on track. Now in his 23rd year as Pops director, Lockhart always works hard. But this type of program - with scores from many genres, some conducted in synch to film clips, guest stars to manage, and the whole thing being recorded as proof - this showed the multi-tasking conductor at his best.

The 132rd Boston Pops season officially begins May 10, when Keith Lockhart welcomes Queen Latifah to the Symphony Hall stage. For complete concert information and tickets visit www.bso.org or call 888-266-1200.

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