

Texas Concert Reviews & Videos

Wednesday, 21 April 2010

Bass Hall, Fort Worth, Texas

April 20, 2010

The Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra Conducted by JOHN WILLIAMS

'John Williams - A Celestial evening' (Including Behind the Scenes Rehearsal)

VIDEOS

- News report (WFAA Video)

- Hedwig's Theme from Harry Potter - Rehearsal (YouTube)

- Adventures on Earth from E.T. - Rehearsal (YouTube)

- Williams briefly commenting on violinist Michael Shih's performance (YouTube) *NEW*

PICTURES

- Autograph signing

- Blog review including some pictures

REVIEWS

Rehearsal Review by Mark Olivarez

Well it wasn't a concert just a walk thru with the orchestra. I have no idea if tonight's concert will be filmed.

Unfortunately no photos were allowed during the rehearsal. Yes I did get pictures of Williams after, but not together because he was sitting on stage and signing. My wife did get a picture of him signing my Anthology booklet. I did get to thank him and shake his hand.

When people speak of Williams, they are not mistaken when they refer to him as a generous and humble man.

The rehearsal began with Williams walking out in a black turtle neck and gray slacks (surprise). He seemed, to me and John, to be surprised at the turnout for the rehearsal and genuinely moved to see everyone there. The first cue was a performance of The Cowboys suite, as heard on the By Request CD. The orchestra performance was almost perfect and Williams was very impressed. Next up was the CE3K suite, and again the orchestra nailed it to Williams' delight.

I can't remember if E.T. or Harry Potter came next, but Potter consisted of "Hedwig's Theme", "Nimbus 2000" and then "Harry's Wondrous World".

Up next was an abbreviated run through of "E.T.'s Adventure On Earth". Williams only hit certain sections of the cue, however we did get a full performance of the grand finale. I believe this was the point Williams stopped for a 15 minute break.

After the break we began with a section I believe I heard Williams call the "Monsters, Heroes and" which I could make out. It began with Max Steiner's King Kong, followed by Jaws, Casablanca, An Affair To Remember, Robin Hood (Korngold) and an abbreviated version of Superman. It was played to images on the screen.

Next up was "Indy's First Adventure" from Last Crusade, beginning at the point where young Indy runs out of the cave and ends with him running from the Caboose on the train. It was played in tempo with the clip being played on screen. Williams had a smaller monitor at the podium and I could see the clip being played with the time signature bars. After the performance, Williams had them play the whole cue again but not to picture. He walked them through the cue playing basically a section at a time to work out the kinks.

Schindler's List was next, superb and Williams was pleased by the performance.

Then he did a quick, short run thru of "The Imperial March" and "Princess Leia's" theme, only touching on certain passages. Next up was a solid performance of Memoirs Of A Geisha.

Then came a good performance of Olympic Spirit, set to footage / images from past Summer Olympics. Williams went back thru and touched on some areas that he felt needed improvement.

Then the finale was just a few passages of the "Raiders March" and we were done. Throw in the standing ovation for

Williams as well.

Williams appeared to be staying on stage so John and I made a mad dash toward the stage as well as a 100 other fans. Realizing this is/was probably the only chance I'm going to have at seeing Williams, I made up my mind that John and I were going to "politely" work our way to the stage.

This is where it gets somewhat amusing. Williams took a seat on stage and began signing. However he leaned over to one of his aides with a somewhat combo of perturbed/horrified look that he had all these autographs to sign. The as we got closer, someone walked on stage and Williams excused himself to greet this person. It was none other than Van Cliburn. The Mrs. managed to get photos of them together. Williams then resumed signing but mentioned to his aide that he was going to wrap it up soon, I was sooo close. However he leaned over to another person and expressed how moved he was by all the people lining up to get his autograph. Then he whispered that he might sign a little bit longer. I told John lets make our move and we got to front of the stage. I gave Williams my Anthology book to sign and at first the silver sharpie wouldn't write dark enough but Williams said let's try this again re-signed over his original, I shook his hand and thanked him.

Unfortunately my wife couldn't get a snapshot of him shaking my hand but did get one of him signing my book.

During the rehearsal Williams picked up a mike speak to us (audience) to let us know what he was telling the orchestra and so we could hear him make his adjustments.

Even though I'm musically illiterate I couldn't help but notice how easily he went thru each sheet making the adjustments.

The Ft. Worth Symphony is one of the better ones I've heard and Williams also seemed very impressed. It was an experience I'll never forget.

Williams, aside from not moving as quickly as he once did, still looked spry conducting.

Concert Review by 'Musica42'

This was a completely exhilarating experience for me and a day I'll remember forever. Maestro Williams' arrival was greeted with a roar of applause and after acknowledging the sizable audience that had gathered for this event he stood on the podium and mentioned to the orchestra that many of the pieces were likely very familiar to them already so he'd like to simply run through most of the program. Thus he launched into The Cowboy Overture and it was gloriously performed. I cannot heap enough praise on the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra. They performed the vast majority of the music exceptionally and Williams' gift for orchestration was really highlighted by them and the warm sounding hall. That horn trill at the end of Cowboys was electric! Even better than the one on the ...By Request CD.

Next up was Close Encounters. Most of this piece was played phenomenally as well although I noticed the trombones folded pretty badly at their tutti section near the beginning (the rapid part where they go down to their extreme blatty low register). Following this performance Williams said he was extremely impressed with the caliber of playing in the orchestra and quipped it sounded like they'd all grown up playing the music. This was of course greeted with another round of applause much to Williams' amusement.

Third up was a trio of Harry Potter pieces (Hedwig's Theme, Nimbus 2000, and Harry's Wondrous World). The string runs at the beginning of that piece...holy crap. Clean as a whistle from where I sat. Again FWSO blew me away with how well they performed. The celeste player was a tad uneven on the second solo with all the runs and likewise the strings followed suit a bit on the dirty side as well. Fortunately Williams' addressed this issue and we all got to hear that passage a second time much improved. Very very cool to watch.

The Nimbus 2000 was the all woodwind arrangement that appears in the Signature Score edition which was VERY exciting for me because as many times as I'd looked at it, I've never heard a recording of that particular version. I kicking myself for not realizing what this piece was before it started and letting my camera record the audio. Oh well. The woodwinds knocked it out of the park (and if anyone has a decent recording of this movement could you PLEASE PM me). Lastly came Harry's Wondrous World which for me is one of the greatest things Williams has ever done. This piece suffered a bit here and there (I think the orchestra was beginning to get a little fatigued) and Williams took the time to address a few issues mostly related to the second section (starting around 2 minutes on the recording from the OST). To convey that he wanted the background material in the winds to be lighter he said to play it like little kids riding around on brooms, which was of course fitting. The ending also got another run through to fix some tempo issues. I

should also mention that I may or may not have let my camera record the audio on this last piece.

Rounding out the first half of the rehearsal Williams finished with *Adventures on Earth*. At this point he began saying the players needed to save something for the evening concert so he only rehearsed parts of this piece. We did get the ending though and it made for an exhilarating end to the first half. Williams' vanished backstage at this point while I gushed with my friends who'd come along about how amazing this all was.

While Williams was away a techie was setting up a monitor for him on his podium and when he returned he began a piece titled "Monsters, Damsels and Heroes" ... or something to that effect. I'm amused that none of us seem to be able to remember what the hell this piece was called. The music was good enough but I detested the visuals that went with it. It looked like a Powerpoint presentation of still images that were synced to the music. My only recollection of this piece beyond that was I hated the way the tom-tom drum sounded during the *Jaws* segment (me being a percussionist I notice stupid things like this) and was happy to hear *The Adventures of Robin Hood*. Williams made a comment about bowing like a singer would sing the piece during one of the slower tunes and also corrected the rhythmic accuracy in the Robin Hood segment (happily resulting in another partial play through of this portion of the piece).

Being a little "meh" toward this last piece I was brought back to rapt attention with Williams conducting live to picture the "Indy's First Adventure" cue from *Last Crusade*, a whirlwind orchestral tour de force if there ever was one. After the run through Williams had the picture turned off and reran the cue piece by piece. This was one of the highlights of the entire rehearsal simply from a technical standpoint. I would suspect that what I saw was very similar to how Williams would rehearse for film score recording.

After this piece the concertmaster raised his stand and I knew we were in for some *Schindler's List*. Next to the *Cowboy Overture* this was the other completely transcendent moment of the rehearsal. The violinist started out decently enough (although through the entire first statement of the theme I kept thinking Itzhak Perlman did a better job with it). Then he got to the second half and his playing completely transformed for whatever reason. By the end of the piece I was stunned with how beautifully unique his performance was. A simply masterful job and one Williams' clearly appreciated greatly as well.

Next up were a few snippets from *Star Wars*. He started by playing the *Imperial March* and cut off after 2 measures. The sound of the audience behind me deflating at this was hysterical (although I'll admit it was tragic that we didn't get to hear even ONE run through of the *Imperial March* theme). Next he moved onto *Leia's Theme*, again he only played a small section but we were at the very least blessed by the beautiful horn solo (which was PERFECTLY played). I assume the *Main Title* is on the program but he didn't address it at the rehearsal. I did catch him saying to the orchestra that he wasn't going to begin conducting until measure 4 and I *think* this was in reference to the *Main Title*. Ah well, who wants to hear Williams conduct his signature piece live anyway? (me, that's who. Boo.)

Next up was the *Signature Score* edition of *Sayuri's Theme* from *Memoirs of a Geisha*. It got one quick restart after Williams suggested the flutist take a bit more time with the opening solo and otherwise was a gorgeous run through.

Second to last was a piece I rarely hear these days: *The Olympic Spirit* synced to a video of Olympic clips. This was very very rousing and, although I didn't feel most of the hits landed where they should, a few certainly did and it was great fun nonetheless. Williams made a point of mentioning at least twice that the piece was very difficult to conduct/perform properly because of all the hits and from what I saw I believe him.

Lastly we got a few bits of *Indiana Jones* and then the rehearsal was over. Williams received a standing ovation then I made my way to the front of the stage as quickly as I could to see if I could get a signature. I was among the first to make it and was very happy to see him have a chair brought over and pen handed to him. I saw someone have their *Star Wars* double LP signed and I think I saw a *Towering Inferno* LP in there too. Williams was exceptionally gracious to allow for this time and when I went up to him I simply said he was the inspiration for my doing music and I handed him my copy of my favorite score of his (A.I.). He signed the inside booklet with his pen and I handed him a silver paint pen and he was nice enough to sign the disc itself as well. Then my wife shouted for a picture and we both turned and in a couple of tries got one of the greatest photos of my life.

In all the experience was precisely what I had always dreamed it would be. Williams was beyond humble and ... what else can I say. It was a very good day.

Concert Review by 'Kenzal_Ozzel'

I'm worn out from lots of driving and very little sleep, but I had to share my thoughts too, although Mark and John seem to have touched on a lot of the same things. Forgive my rambling!

I too thought this was cooler than an actual concert in a lot of ways. Instead of talking about the films in generic terms to

the audience, we got to hear him talk to the orchestra about very specific musical stuff. Some of it went over my head, but I thought it was interesting when he pointed out spots for improvement that I had noticed too. (Hedwig's Theme comes to mind.) But that's not a knock against the orchestra—as he said, they were very minor issues, and the orchestra really was fantastic! Great acoustics in that hall, too!

Something I thought was funny. The announcer at the beginning said to hold applause until the end of the rehearsal. After the first piece, The Cowboys, there was a partial applause, but I held mine back, as ordered. But (and I don't remember if it was after this or CE3K), Williams waved his hand and encouraged the audience to go for it, and from then on, they got a well deserved applause after every one.

Another thing about the rehearsal: don't get me wrong, I love the "hits", and them conducted by the man himself is awesome. But really, I was fine with him skipping over the Star Wars suite and the Raiders March, and what we got of Adventures on Earth plenty satisfying. I'll probably never get to hear "Indy's Very First Adventure" live again, much less twice! That was my favorite part of the show, actually. Totally unexpected!

And that arrangement of Memoirs of a Geisha was gorgeous. It wasn't until it was almost over that I realized I had gotten completely swept away in it and hadn't even realized it was a unique arrangement! I so want to hear that again!

And after all that, the one piece I couldn't get out of my head after the show? Korngold's Robin Hood. Heh.

But yeah, when the show was over, I rushed outside and tried to find where I might be able to catch him afterwards for an autograph. (This was the case the other time I saw him in Boston in '08, but I didn't manage to get one then.) Come to find out he had stayed on stage and was signing for everybody! So I ended up near the back of the line—but I still got one! But first...

I didn't get to meet any JWFanners, but I had to have seen some. Guy with the Raiders LP sitting on the right aisle of the left side, right across from me, perhaps? I think may have overheard part of a conversation between two meeting in the line at the end, also. But I had to have seen Mark while in line. When I heard the call for a silver Sharpie, and I had my own to offer, but then it apparently wasn't needed. Anyway, back to the me part:

When I got up the man, I handed him the cover of the CD I had chosen for him to sign: The Fury. It was tough for me to pick one CD. Do I go with my first, TPM? Or one of the best, E.T.? Or the big one, A New Hope? Or the lesser (but lovely) Sabrina? Or maybe How to Steal a Million? But ultimately I decided to go with an older limited edition score that I really liked. So when I handed it to him, he said something to the effect of "Ohh, The Fury. Wow! Very interesting cover artwork." Or something like that. The moment's a blur in my mind, but he was certainly very surprised by that album. Meanwhile, I mumbled something unintelligible about loving the score. Then I shook his hand and thanked him, and that was it!

And then I got home to find that LLL was releasing The Poseidon Adventure!

So, yeah. Today was awesome.

ETA: Musica's wasn't on here when I started my post. Totally agree with you, and it can't be said enough: the orchestra was excellent!

Also, to what John said: I too thought that was interesting the couple of times when he said that he should have written something a different way.