

PROGRAM NOTES
WEST VALLEY SYMPHONY
WITCHES, WIZARDS AND THE MUSIC OF HARRY POTTER
DANIEL WILEY, MUSIC DIRECTOR/CONDUCTOR
FEBRUARY 15, 2026

Paul Dukas (1865 – 1935) was one of the most highly self-critical composers who ever lived: there are only twelve works extant; a much larger body of work was consigned to a fire. He stopped composing after writing the ballet *La Péri* in 1912 but went on to be one of France's most respected professors of composition. Dukas was both a romantic and classicist; he admired Wagner as much as he admired Debussy. His music embodies a strict mastery of form suffused with generous lyricism, highly chromatic harmonies, and splendid orchestral color.

His scherzo for orchestra, *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, was written in 1897 and is easily his most popular – maybe his only popular – work. The work was based on a ballad by Goethe of the same name. The plot is simple: an apprentice, left alone in the master's house, tries his hand at casting spells by commanding a broomstick to fill his bath with water. The broom springs to life and fetches bucket after bucket, until the tub overflows. He realizes that he doesn't know how to stop the broom, so he takes a hatchet and chops the broomstick to pieces, where to his horror, the smaller pieces come to life and continue flooding the house. The master makes his return, stops the broomsticks, then kicks the apprentice out!

Critics and film aficionados all agree: 1939 was the greatest year ever for movies. The list of superb 1939 movies is unparalleled. A few of them: *Gone with the Wind*, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, *Son of Frankenstein*, *Stagecoach*, *Of Mice and Men*, *Wuthering Heights*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *Gunga Din*, and ... *The Wizard of Oz*. A record of ten films were nominated for Best Picture that year, which *Gone with the Wind* won. But of all the great films from that year, the MGM production of *The Wizard of Oz*, based on the L. Frank Baum book, remains one of the most loved films of all time, generation after generation. The musical score was written by Wisconsin native **Herbert Stothart** (1885-1949). Composer, arranger, conductor and songwriter, Stothart desperately wanted to write the score for *Gone with the Wind*, but that job was given to Max Steiner. Good thing, because Stothart would win the Oscar that year for his superb score for *Oz*. There's really very little original music by Stothart in the score: he borrowed freely from Mendelssohn, Schumann, Mussorgsky and even Stravinsky, ingeniously weaving them into songs written

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for the film by the team of composers Harold Arlen (1905-1986) and lyricist Edgar "Yip" Harburg (1896-1981). Arlen and Harburg would win the other Oscar that year for the film's signature song, *Over the Rainbow*, definitively sung by 17-year-old Judy Garland. *The Wizard of Oz* opened in Hollywood on August 15, 1939, and nationally on August 25. So, join Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, the Cowardly Lion and Toto too, move down the Yellow Brick Road as we hear *We're Off to See the Wizard*, *If I Only Had a Brain*, *Merry Old Land of Oz*, and *Over the Rainbow*.

If **John Williams** isn't the greatest film composer of all time, he is certainly the most successful. His music for films like *Jaws*, *Star Wars*, *Close Encounters*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Schindler's List*, *The Cowboys*, *Jurassic Park* and many more has become a part of our pop culture. He has won 26 Grammy Awards, five Academy Awards, seven BAFTA Awards, three Emmy Awards, and four Golden Globe Awards. Williams has been nominated for 54 Academy Award nominations, a record surpassed only by Walt Disney. At 94 years of age, Williams remains active as a composer although recent health problems have forced him to limit his conducting.

J.K. Rowling's series of Harry Potter books were transferred to the silver screen to world-wide acclaim. The first film, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (2001), was scored by John Williams who would also write the scores for the next two films, *Harry Potter and Chamber of Secrets* and *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. Patrick Doyle wrote the score for *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, then the job went to Nicholas Hooper for *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* and *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. Alexandre Desplat scored the last two films, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, parts one and two. Williams was nominated twice for the Oscar category of best score, but neither won. But his influence permeates the entire series as the other composers made use of his thematic material.

~~~ Marty Haub