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uperman: *The Movie* started as a flight

of fancy, became a blockbuster, and is today regarded as a classic. Produced by Alexander and Ilya Salkind, the picture was directed by Richard Donner, a former television helmer faced with the near-impossible task of convincing modern audiences that “a man can fly.” Donner and his colleagues not only accomplished this feat, they captivated audiences with a marvelous combination of humor, heart, myth and drama.

The plot and production details of ***Superman: The Movie*** have been so well documented—most recently in a lavish DVD collection released by Warner Home Video—that they scarcely need to be recounted in great detail. Briefly, the first ***Superman*** film tells the story of: **Superman**’s origins on the doomed **Planet Krypton**; his coming of age in the heartland of America; his debut in Metropolis, where he fights the villainous **Lex Luthor** (who seeks to destroy most of California with nuclear weapons to manipulate real estate prices); and his love for **Lois Lane**, a newspaper reporter (like his alter ego, mild-mannered **Clark Kent**) whose imperfection yet indomitable spirit is, to him, as wondrous as his super feats are to the rest of the world. The film starred a combination of “name” actors like Gene Hackman as **Lex Luthor** and Margot Kidder as **Lois Lane**—indeed, no name in cinema was as significant as Marlon Brando, who portrayed **Superman**’s father—and an unknown, Christopher Reeve, whose pitchperfect portrayal of the **Man of Steel** was surpassed only by the real-life courage he would show later in life after a terrible accident.

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hile Williams was writing these scores

the overall state of orchestral music in films was uncertain. The symphony was still used regularly, but the emphasis over the previous decade had been on pop tunes and a modernistic approach, with the occasional theme usually written in a song structure. Among its many achievements, *Jaws* brought true film scoring back into the public consciousness—but with only a third of the film containing music, it too was minimalist and composed with a modern sheen. “I would say this about *Jaws*, that I really felt that that would be a very successful film,” Williams told Warner Home Video. “I couldn’t predict the trend as a result of its success in any way, or even for that matter *Star Wars*, but I felt just looking at the film, just naked without any music, that this was something especially good, as an adventure film. And even though it was pre-computer, in the sense that the shark was just a sort of rubber duck, so to speak, it was

a plastic object that couldn't move around very much, the music could act as a kind of atmospheric portent, if you'd like, of the shark's arrival and disappearance."

In the prolific years following *Star Wars*, Williams reteamed with the London Symphony Orchestra and engineer Eric Tomlinson on **Superman** as well as *The Fury*, *Dracula*, *The Empire Strikes Back*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Monsignor* (starring Christopher Reeve) and *Return of the Jedi*. Stateside Williams recorded *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *Jaws 2*, *1941*, *Heartbeeps* and *E.T.*, which earned him a Grammy and a fourth Academy Award. In the midst of this high-profile period Williams succeeded Arthur Fiedler as conductor of the Boston Pops Orchestra in early 1980. Meanwhile his **Superman** score lived on in Ken Thorne's adaptation for the first two sequels.

The version of *Superman II* released in

1980 (June 1981 in the United States) features a rather awkward music credit: "Music Composed and Conducted by Ken Thorne/From Original Material Composed by John Williams." By way of translation, Williams's score to the first film was adapted and rerecorded by British composer Ken Thorne to fit the new picture. The change of directors in 1979 was a traumatic experience that upset many of the cast and crew, and Williams was among the collateral damage, although that was never intended to be the case. "He was coming over to do *The Empire Strikes Back* in a couple of months, but we had a very rough cut of **Superman II** and he needed to see it because he was going to be very busy," Ilya Salkind remembers of Williams. It was October 1979: Williams's year had included music for *Dracula* (recorded with the London Symphony Orchestra from April 24 to May 16) and Steven Spielberg's *1941* in Hollywood, which he had just finished. "He told me he was taking over the Boston Pops but that he'd be able to do **Superman II** when he came back to play the Royal Albert," Salkind recalls, referencing Williams's appearance at the annual Filmharmonic concert, which took place a year later on October 18, 1980. "So we paid for his trip. I picked him up at the airport, and then introduced him to Richard Lester. The two of them went into a room to look at the movie, and after a while John came out and said to me, 'Ilya, I'm sorry, but I don't think I can work with him.' He was very calm and professional, as he always is, but that was the end of it. I don't know exactly what was said, but I knew from working with Michel Legrand and Lalo Schifrin on the *Musketeers* pictures that Richard is very opinionated when it comes to music in his films."

Presentation of the complete orchestral

score for **Superman IV** requires a combination of the cues recorded in Munich and those recorded in London. In addition to having two orchestras on two stages

recorded by two engineers, the microphone placement and track layout was different at each location. The score was handicapped by a rushed schedule rarely allowing for more than two or three takes per cue. For two decades the original 2" 24-track analog masters remained vaulted, now serving as the source for this complete premiere of the score. With every recorded take available, the entire score has been mixed and seamlessly assembled from the pristine first-generation source material, a triumph for both **Superman** fans and film score collectors. For the songs and source music, presented after the score, composer Paul Fishman located his original multi-track master tapes and personally remixed and remastered the tracks for this premiere release.

Superman celebrated his 50th birthday

in 1988. While the feature films went on hiatus following **Superman IV: The Quest for Peace**, the comic book was going strong thanks to a 1986 reimagination by veteran comics creator John Byrne, who modernized and simplified the **Superman** universe after decades of tangential inventions. The "new" **Superman** was very much the basis for a 1988 Saturday morning animated series by Ruby-Spears Productions, a major player in children's animation in the late 1970s and 1980s with series such as *The Plastic Man Comedy/Adventure Show*, *Thundarr the Barbarian*, *Mister T*, *Rambo*, *The Centurions* and many others. Particularly important was the hiring as story editor of Marv Wolfman, a longtime comics writer and editor who had collaborated with Byrne on the 1986 **Superman** revision; it was Wolfman's suggestion to change **Lex Luthor** from a mad scientist to a wealthy industrialist, an idea replicated in the 1988 series. With character design by longtime DC Comics artist Gil Kane, the 1988 production showcased a "real world" approach to the **Superman** character (compared to his previous appearances on Saturday morning cartoons like **Super Friends**) and anticipated the revitalization of Batman, **Superman** and other DC characters by Warner Bros. animation in the 1990s. Especially memorable were the "**Superman's** Family Album" segments—five-minute mini-episodes that followed the main portion of each show and featured a vignette of **Clark Kent's Smallville** childhood from the time of his adoption by the Kents to his debut as **Superman** in Metropolis (bypassing the "**Superboy**" character). The Ruby-Spears **Superman** cartoon debuted on CBS on September 17, 1988. Despite the high production values and attention to detail, the program lasted only 13 episodes, and has been unavailable ever since. The series is fondly remembered by **Superman** fans for its Japanese-produced animation, charming "Family Album" segments and feature-quality music by Ron Jones, interpolating the famous John Williams theme for the main title.