Interviews

Elmer Bernstein

Elmer Bernstein has scored over 200 movies, beginning in the early 1950s. He has worked with film makers of every generation, from Cecil B. DeMille to Francis Ford Coppola and Martin Scorsese. He has scored films of wide-ranging subject matter, from *The Ten Commandments* to *Animal House* and *Ghostbusters*. Some of his most well-known scores are *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Magnificent Seven*, *The Man With the Golden Arm*, *Airplane!*, and *My Left Foot*. Bernstein also teaches film composing at USC, and conducts performances of his film music with orchestras around the world.

How did you first get interested in film music?

I was a concert pianist, at first. I studied composition from the age of twelve, starting with Aaron Copland and finally with Stefan Wolpe. I was always interested in composition. Actually it was curious; I thought I'd be a composer but I never thought of composing for films. It was listening to the work of David Raksin and Bernard Herrmann in the forties—those two composers—that really made me sit up and take notice of what could be done with film music. I think the reason for that was that both Herrmann and Raksin had peculiarly American voices, and I found that voice appealing.

How did you get into jazz?

Well, the jazz thing came about in my own childhood. My father was a great jazz enthusiast, and I was brought up with the old Dixieland people like King Oliver and going on to people like Bix Beiderbecke and Louis Armstrong. There was a great presence in the house all the time, so I had a sort amateur interest in jazz. I myself was not a jazz player, but it was part of my upbringing.

How do you approach the actual scoring for a film?

Well, it differs from film to film. The first thing I do is spend a week just looking at the film without prejudice. When I say without prejudice, I say to myself, I'm not even going to try to think about music during this week. I just want to look at the film, I want to look at the film until the film talks to me and the film tells me things. So what I want the film to tell me is what it's about, and that's not always on the surface. What is the film about? What is the function of music going to be in this film? Why are we having music in this film and what's it going to do? So I start with those kinds of thoughts. It's a kind of intellectual process rather than a composing process. If the score's going to be based on highly thematic things, then I have to suffer out finding themes, so to speak [laughs]. Sometimes I get into the process and things are not going well for me, or I can't think of what I want to do. If I get desperate about time, I'll look at my 30 or 40 starts until I find a particular start that I can say, "I know what to do with this." Just sneak in the back door, so to speak.

Do you use synthesizers at all?

I do. I think every score I've written in the last fifteen years has some synthesizers in it, but I don't use them as an end in themselves. I use them for the obvious factor: they make sounds that other instruments can't.

How did you feel when they first started to creep into scores in the sixties?

Well, oddly enough, I was one of the first people to use them, although people don't generally associate me with that. In the score for *Hawaii*, the very first sound you hear is a Moog synthesizer—way back in 1961.

It's really exploded now, so are you fairly synth savvy? Can you find your way around them a little bit?

Not hands-on, no. I think about them; in other words, I will think of a use that I want to put a synthesizer to soundwise, and I will depend upon my people who do that kind of thing.

In general, how do you feel about the use of synthesizers in today's scores?

At the risk of sounding arrogant, I will have to say that film scoring has descended to a lot of gadgetry, in our time. For most people, there are too many gadgets and not enough music.

Could you speak about the concept behind the score for To Kill a Mockingbird*?*

Funny, before you were asking about the process and I said the first thing I do is to look at a film and try to determine what the role of the music is. Now, I had a big problem with that in *To Kill a Mockingbird.* If you look at the film without music, all you're looking at is a film with a lot of kids in it. But you're also seeing a lot of adult problems—problems of racism, problems of injustice, death and violence, violence to children. It took me the longest time to find where the music was going to go, how it was going to go, and what its specific use would be in the film. I determined, after a long time—it took me about six weeks—that the film is about the adult world seen through the eyes of children. All these problems—what we call adult problems—are seen as the children see them. This led me to childlike things: playing the piano one note at a time, music box sounds, harp, bells, things of that sort. So what really got me into the film was the realization that it was a film about adult issues seen through the eyes of children.

There's something about that score that is timeless. It could have been written today as well as almost 40 years ago.

The thing about *Mockingbird*, and the reason that worked so well, is that it's a wonderful film. It is an absolutely wonderful film—the film is timeless. The film is absolutely timeless. Even though it's about real things, the film has a fable-like quality that makes it timeless. Every once in a while, you get to write a score for something like that.

What are some memorable collaborations you have had?

To Kill a Mockingbird was a collaborative effort of director Robert Mulligan and the sadly late Alan Pakula. Those were really enjoyable relationships. I did about five films in a row for them. It was the kind of thing where we would talk about a project long before they even shot a roll of film. So I was constantly collaborating by just talking about it. That was an absolutely wonderful relationship.

If I had to pick the most outstanding relationship with a film maker, it would be with Martin Scorcese. I always said that I wish that every composer could have the privilege of doing at least one film with Scorsese. For him, film making is an art he respects. He's totally dedicated to what he's doing, with no phony ego stuff—no baggage of that kind. He has respect for other artists. It's just the most respectful and interesting collaboration because he's also very knowledgeable. When we were talking about *The Age of Innocence*, we decided that the sound or tenor of the score was sort of Brahmsian. Marty could then start talking about the Brahms sextet and stuff like that because he's so knowledgeable. That was a wonderful relationship—wonderful to work with. It was also wonderful to work with Francis Ford Coppola on *The Rainmaker.* Those were great collaborations.

Whose idea was it for the 6/8 jazz element with Hammond organ in The Rainmaker*? Was that you or was that Francis Ford Coppola?*

I have to credit Francis with the bluesy 6/8 idea in a roundabout way. What happened was, when I first got on *The Rainmaker*, Francis wasn't going to have a score, as we know a score to be. At first, he was going to go the B.B. King route—in other words, real Memphis stuff with some very minor connective things in scoring. But as he began to develop the film itself, he began to feel that he needed to depend more on score. So it was my decision to use the Hammond B3 organ, but it came out of his idea of Memphis ambience. I retained, out of that ambience, the three instruments you hear a great deal of: the Hammond B3, the muted trumpet, and the guitar. But that came out of Francis's original concept.

When I came on *Rainmaker*, it was in rough-cut form, and the version I finally recorded to was version #26. It went through some amazing changes. The interesting thing about Francis is that each time he changed the film, it was for the better. He wasn't just fooling around; he was just "finding" the film, so to speak.

How do you handle a situation where you've signed on and you find out there's a director that doesn't really communicate very well musically?

Well, most directors do not communicate well musically. It's rare that they do. You kind of hope they'll let you do your thing, so to speak, and get on with life. But if they're ignorant and invasive you just have a miserable time. There's not much you can do. You try to be as diplomatic as possible, but sometimes you get your score tossed out or you walk out.

What about when you're spotting a film—what are the kinds of things you're really looking for?

I spot a film strictly as a dramatist. I'm not thinking of music at all when I spot a film. I look at the scene and say, Should this scene have music? Why should it have music? If it does have music, what is the music supposed to be doing? So that's my process.

What is your advice to aspiring film composers?

Learn everything you possibly can about all kinds of music—ethnic, pop, classical ... everything. Be prepared!

Terence Blanchard

Terence Blanchard has dual careers as film composer and jazz performer. He has composed original film scores for *Jungle Fever, Malcolm X, Clockers, Eve's Bayou, Gia, The Promised Land,* and *Till There was You,* and played trumpet on *Mo' Better Blues* and *Malcolm X.* In addition to composing, he keeps a busy touring schedule, appearing around the world with his jazz group.

WHAT'S YOUR COMPOSITION BACKGROUND IN TERMS OF BOTH ORCHESTRAL AND JAZZ COMPOSITION?

I've studied composition and I'm still studying it. I studied when I was in high school and when I was playing with Art Blakey, although I never really had the chance to write for orchestra until I started working in film. But I would write piano pieces and stuff like that. And I was always writing for jazz ensembles.

Studying orchestral music is really great because it helps me understand the relationship between different musical lines, and how those lines define their own harmony. It's different than writing from a jazz perspective where the lines are related to certain chord changes.

HIGH SCHOOL WAS IN NEW ORLEANS?

Yes, I grew up in New Orleans. I moved away from home when I was eighteen and I went to college at Rutgers University. I played with Lionel Hampton while I was in college, joined Art Blakey's band when I was nineteen, and stayed in New York for fifteen years. And then I moved back home.

SO YOUR FIRST FILM-SCORING GIG HAPPENED IN NEW YORK?

Yes. What happened was, I was actually a session player on *Mo' Better Blues* and I had been coaching Denzel Washington. We had to do some pre-records so the actors could play along on the set. One day, while we were taking a break in the studio, I went to the piano and started playing one of my compositions. Spike came over and said, "What is that?" And I said, "This is something I'm working on for one of my albums." He asked if he could use it, if I could write an orchestral arrangement for it. I said yes, even though I had never done one before. When he heard it, he said I had a future writing for film, and he called me to do *Jungle Fever,* which was my first film.

DID YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO ABOUT TIMINGS AND ALL THAT STUFF?

The interesting thing about *Jungle Fever* was that I didn't have a video to write to at the time. Spike didn't really want music to be specific to the scenes. He didn't like it when things happened right on point, right to the frame. There were some mistakes done in *Jungle Fever* in terms of the score because of that. There were certain things that would happen emotionally in the scene where things would shift, but I wasn't given those timings on the original sheets. But he recognized those problems, so for *Malcolm X,* I had a video.

I WAS WONDERING IF YOU COULD TALK A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THE FLASHBACKS IN MALCOLM X, AND WHAT YOU WERE THINKING WHEN YOU HAD TO SCORE THOSE TYPES OF SCENES.

You know, the interesting thing about doing Spike's movies in general is that I never really have to worry too much about period stuff because he covers a lot of that with his source material. What I tried to do with those flashbacks was to have an essence of the period. That's why some of those arrangements are jazz arrangements, a couple of them are big band arrangements. And I tried to

make sure that I had a blend of the period music along with the thematic material that we were using throughout the film. Spike is a guy who wants strong melodic content for his scores.

How specific is Spike in giving you direction of what the sound should be?

In terms of what the sound should be, he's very specific. Spike is a very traditional film maker. He likes big lush orchestral scores. Let's use *Malcolm X* as an example. He said, "I keep hearing orchestra with a choir." So I said, "Okay, fine." And when we got to one of the jail scenes where the camera pans across the faces of the inmates, he said, "I just want to hear the voices right there." So he gives me that kind of direction, but he never really stands over my shoulder while I'm doing it.

As I remember it, that was a traditional classical music sounding choir, not a gospel sounding choir.

Right. You know, in Hollywood, and America in general, there's a very limited view of what African-American culture is all about. The thing that we've been always trying to do with Spike's movies is to broaden that, in terms of making people understand that there are many different facets to who we are as a people in this country. And one of the things that was great about that movie is that we used the Boys Choir of Harlem. They're really great. Really professional. Really on top of it.

***Was that you playing trumpet in* Malcolm X?**

Yeah. I play on some of the stuff on *Malcolm X* because it really called for having some kind of jazz improvisation. Branford Marsalis plays on it as well.

What's your composing process? Do you write to paper or are you using a synth?

It really depends on how much time I have to write. Lately, I've been doing a bunch of television things, and television doesn't have the luxury of giving you the kind of time you have when you write for films. With television, I generally write from the keyboard because I only have a week and a half or two weeks to write maybe 60 minutes of music. If it's Spike's stuff, I like to use paper and pencil. I like looking at the music.

Do you orchestrate yourself, or do you use people to do that?

To me, orchestration is the most joy I have in writing a score. Because coming up with thematic material is one thing, but to me real composition lies in the combination of instruments, creating the textures and colors of the sound. It's not just the notes. It's learning how to paint with those instruments. Whenever I'm writing a cue, I generally hear the orchestration in my head. I'll hear the cello playing the solo, or I'll hear violas carrying the lines in certain spots combined with a bassoon, or English horn—something like that.

Do you find that it's easy to switch back and forth between a jazz style and a traditional style where you're writing?

The two styles are really in the process of merging. I won't say that it's totally there yet, because I still feel that with my jazz writing there are some issues that I'm trying to work out in terms of form and structure. In terms of how to not be bound to a 32-bar form, a 12-bar blues form, or any of the traditional forms of jazz composition. I'm trying to get to the point where the melody lines really define the structure of the tune.

Do you find that you get labeled an African-American composer? Does that happen a lot?

Yeah. It's a big problem. I suffer from that because the first thing that people wanted to know when I did *Malcolm X* was, "Is he

black?" That's what they asked my agent at the time, which I thought was kind of an odd question. And when people began to realize that I am black, then I started to get called for a lot of those types of movies. I turned down a lot of those projects, because frankly, they just weren't things that interested me. I just didn't want to be labeled that. So my agents now have been working really hard to turn that around—which they are accomplishing. I've done a lot of different things like *The Tempest* with Peter Fonda, and *Gia*.

You know, it's not only race and gender, it's also cultural background. And that's the thing that I see that happens a lot in Hollywood, though I know people don't talk about it. I've noticed sometimes when I walk into a meeting, there's a certain kind of tension in the air already. And I'm not that kind of person. I consider myself to be a very easy-going kind of guy, easy to get along with. But I went into a meeting one time with another composer, and I saw immediately how he got hired. He was a great composer, don't get me wrong, but there was a certain type of cultural camaraderie that happened between the director and the composer that immediately made the director feel comfortable. I do understand it to a degree because there's a lot of money on the line in these projects. But at the same time, there's a lot of talented people out there who are probably not getting hired.

I wonder, could it go back the other way? Could a white composer work with Spike?

Oh, I think so, because that's one of the big misconceptions about Spike. People think that Spike is so pro Afro-American that he doesn't hire other folks, but if you ever go to one of his sets you would see that is not true. One of the first things I noticed when I went to the set was the set wasn't full of black people. Not at all. And I was really amazed at that, and it made me feel really happy to be a part of that because it was so inclusive. I'm going to tell you a story. We were doing *Mo' Better Blues* and I had to be on the set everyday. There was a certain crew that didn't do their job and these guys were black. They were gone the next day. They were fired. Spike's thing is that he tries to give the best people the opportunity for the job.

On another note, who are some of your favorite film composers?

Elmer Bernstein. I love John Williams. I love Thomas Newman, Jerry Goldsmith, Michael Kamen.

What is it that makes their scores so great?

To me, it's all about the sentiment. It's all about the emotional content and how it matches with the picture and the story. When I watch *Shawshank Redemption*, to me, Thomas Newman's score really elevated that movie. The thing that I always say that's great about Thomas is that he brings both the orchestral and electronic world together in a way that's unique. Because a lot of times, guys will use the electronic world to emulate the acoustic world, and that's a big mistake. He's one of the guys who really understands both worlds and understands that the electronic thing has its own strengths that can be utilized in a unique fashion.

What advice do you have for young composers who are just starting out?

Pray, because everybody I know who got into this business fell into it backwards. You've got to be flexible. The biggest thing that you've got to do is put your ego aside. It's not like working in your own band, or having your own musical situation. The music is there to enhance and support a story. In some cases, the music is there to take a lead role, but more times than not it has a supportive role. You have to put your ego aside and understand the task that you have at hand. And you've got to study. You've got to listen. You've got to do your homework.

Alf Clausen

Alf Clausen began his career playing bass and French horn. He studied at North Dakota State, the University of Wisconsin, and Berklee College of Music before moving to Los Angeles. Well known since 1991 for his music in the television series *The Simpsons* (for which he received two Emmy awards), Clausen has also written the music for *Moonlighting*, *ALF*, *Fame*, *Harry*, *Police Story*, and *The Critic*. His compositions and orchestrations have appeared in feature films such as *Naked Gun*, *Mr. Mom*, *Splash*, *Airplane II: The Sequel*, and *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*. He is also very active as a jazz composer and arranger, with performances by the bands of Ray Charles, Stan Kenton, Buddy Rich, and Thad Jones & Mel Lewis.

LET'S TALK ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND IN MUSIC, HOW YOU MADE THE JOURNEY FROM NORTH DAKOTA TO HOLLYWOOD.

I grew up in Jamestown, North Dakota. I came up through the concert band and concert choir programs in school as a French horn player. I was exposed at a very early age to some pretty high-quality musical taste, for which I am very, very thankful.

In addition to that, I was basically a rock 'n roller. I grew up with the early roots of rock 'n roll, loved rock 'n roll, loved r&b, I loved Chubby Checker. I loved Little Richard and Elvis Presley and all of those people forming the roots of that music.

I first majored in mechanical engineering at North Dakota State University in Fargo because my college entrance tests all told me that I should be a mechanical engineer! I eventually graduated with a BA degree in Music Theory. I started my master's degree at Wisconsin, but didn't like it and wound up transferring to Berklee. So I packed my acoustic bass into my VW bug, got a U-Haul trailer for the rest of my belongings, and drove out from Madison to Boston. I didn't know a soul, but I decided that this was going to be the deal. I did all sorts of gigs, and taught at Berklee as well.

I eventually realized that if I was going to make the writing career happen the way I wanted it to, it was not going to happen in Boston. In Boston, you have to have three jobs to make ends meet. So my wife and I decided that L.A. would be a better place to raise kids than New York, and we moved out there. It turned out to be a fortuitous move because a lot of the work at that time was also moving out there. TV variety shows like *The Carol Burnett Show* and *The Merv Griffin Show* moved to L.A. This was the late '60s, when there was a lot of work going on, and I was at the front of the wave as everything started moving here.

So, when I got to Los Angeles, I started working all sorts of kinds of jobs. I played six nights a week playing bass in clubs, and worked as a music copyist quite a bit. I started doing some ghost arranging for a Vegas singer or show, I did some jingles. I just kind of kicked around doing all sorts of stuff.

DURING THAT TIME OF "KICKING AROUND," DID YOU EVER FEEL LIKE YOU WERE LOSING SIGHT OF THE ORIGINAL REASON FOR COMING TO LOS ANGELES?

There were many times when I felt like I was losing sight of why I had originally come here. When I first arrived, somebody had told me that you should give yourself five years and then evaluate your progress. I did re-evaluate, and I thought that maybe I should find another way of doing things. I had gotten some little things thrown my way here and there, but all of a sudden, five years went into ten years. I thought, it's coming along, it's coming along, but it's taking a lot longer than I expected. I just had a lot of faith that things would come the way I wanted them to. I developed a lot of patience and was willing to just wait for the next step to happen.

What was the first significant thing for you?

Through a series of strange circumstances I got a gig arranging for the *Donny & Marie Show*. After two seasons with that show, and a season with *The Mary Tyler Moore Variety Hour*, I decided I wanted to get into films. But no one would talk to me. I had gotten pegged as a variety-show arranger/conductor.

So I decided that I would play the game their way, and I would have to start from the bottom again. I had to work my way through the ranks, and start to orchestrate for whatever composer would take me on. I needed some experience, to learn the ropes and see how things were done in that segment of the industry.

Eventually, I started orchestrating for Bill Goldstein. I met him on a recording date where I was doing the booth work. Bill came over and introduced himself and asked me if I had done certain orchestrations. I said yes, and one thing led to another. It turned out he had two pictures going at that time and he asked me to orchestrate on both pictures.

Soon after that, he got the *Fame* series over at MGM, and I started working on that. I did a lot of orchestrating and ghost composing. At the same time, I did some ghost composing for David Rose on *Little House on the Prairie* and *Father Murphy*. One thing led to another. I started orchestrating for Lalo Schifrin and Lee Holdridge. Lee and I struck up a really, really close friendship, which still exists to this day. We worked together on many successful films, including *Splash*, and *Mr. Mom*. His focus with an orchestrator/composer is that if he finds a guy with some talent, he finds a way to help him work his way into the system and get his own gigs. His whole focus was to find a television series, write the theme, and then turn it over to me. This was without me asking!

He called me one day and said, "I've got this pilot over at ABC and it looks really, really good. What I'd like to do is have you orchestrate the pilot, and then let me introduce you to the executive producer so that you can do at least part of the series." This was

Moonlighting. And his plan worked. ABC was very high on the show, public acceptance was very, very good, and I soon ended up as the sole composer on the show. It was a major hit for four seasons. All of a sudden, my identity was established in the film scoring business. That's all it took. Even though I had been slaving away behind the scenes for years, it took the vision and aggressiveness of somebody like Lee to make it happen. I am eternally grateful to him for that.

How did* The Simpsons *begin for you? You've been doing that for how long now?

This is my ninth year. Actually, when *Moonlighting* and *ALF* stopped, my career stopped. I went for seven months without a show. Even though I had some income because those shows were in reruns, the cash flow was actually secondary. It was too quiet and I was not a happy camper. The creative mind likes to be busy, the creative mind likes to be assuming the responsibility and the challenge of regular projects. Because I love doing stuff.

Simpsons broke the drought. They had done 13 shows with Danny Elfman's theme and Richard Gibbs doing the underscore. During my dry spell, I was talking with a good friend of mind who is a percussionist, and coincidentally he said that he just had dinner with his nephew who was working on this new show, and they were looking for a different composer. So he gave his nephew my number, he called, we met, and then we spotted the next show—the very first "Treehouse of Horror" episode. I recorded it, and they loved what I did.

In that original meeting, what was the discussion like regarding the concept of the music for the show?

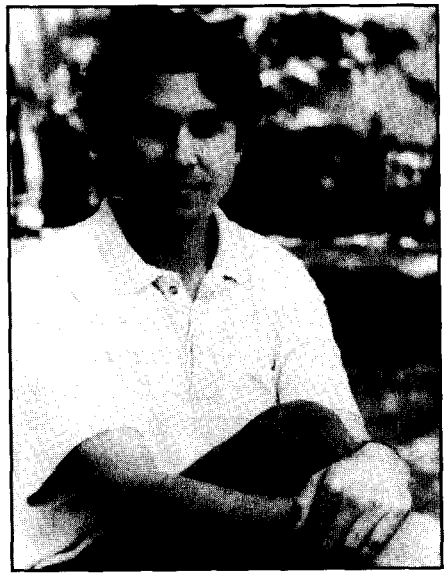
Matt Groening and company told me in that first meeting, "It's not a cartoon, it's a drama where the characters are drawn." And when in doubt, he said to score it like a drama, not like a cartoon, not to mickey-mouse everything. Matt was the one who made the

request for the acoustic orchestra. He said, "I hate electronics, I think they cheapen the sound. I want the real orchestra."

WHAT DO YOU SAY TO MUSICIANS WHO ARE JUST GETTING STARTED IN FILM SCORING? DO THEY NEED TO BE IN L.A.?

My own way of doing it was to continue moving up rather than moving down. I started from very humble beginnings and took it step-by-step-by-step. Going from North Dakota to Wisconsin, going to Boston and then to Los Angeles. I know that if I had gone from North Dakota to Los Angeles, I would have been swallowed up, spit out, and I wouldn't have survived without putting in those dues beforehand.

There are a couple of schools of thought about how to get started as a film composer. One is move to where the action is and get involved in doing low-budget films under your own name as a composer. The other is to move to where the action is and start apprenticing with other composers, practicing your craft on a daily basis, which is what I did. I'm a firm believer in the second method. The thing I say to guys who want to do it the first way is: If you can you exist on one or two $500 dollar films a year and not practice your craft in the meantime, then be my guest. The guy who is going to practice his craft on a weekly basis, doing all kinds of stuff, to me is going to end up having much more of an advantage and much stronger chops in the long run.



Cliff Eidelman

After studying composition and orchestration at Santa Monica City College and USC, Cliff Eidelman received his first break at age 22, when he scored the feature film, *Magdalene*, starring Nastassja Kinski. He has gone on to score many feature films including, *One True Thing, Triumph of the Spirit, A Simple Twist of Fate,* and *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country.* Also active as a composer and conductor of concert music, he has appeared with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, The Munich Symphony and Chorus, and the Toronto Symphony Orchestra.

DO YOU RELY ON AN AGENT TO GET YOU WORK, OR DO YOU DO SOME LEGWORK YOURSELF?

My agent helps, but I also have to do my part in contacting people, having meetings, doing demos. But it's an odd thing, I've never gotten a gig by seeking it out initially. I may have to pitch my music, but someone always finds me; at least the first contact, they seek me out.

Sometimes I get the *Hollywood Reporter* and I circle the projects that look interesting. I may circle five of them, and I'll call my agent and say, "What's going on with this one ... this one ... that one ..." And then my agent will most likely say, "This one's taken ... this one's taken ... you don't have a chance at that one because the director has a long-standing relationship with another composer ... but I'll check on this one, I don't think anyone's on it." That's where it starts.

But I have never actually gotten a gig from doing that. Gigs have come because of other reasons. Because of a previous relationship, or because they heard a score of mine from a previous film, or somebody "temped" my music into some film, and they loved the temp and the next thing I know they're seeking me out. I personally have never had any luck with seeking out a film and getting it. It's always been the other way around.

For people at the very top of the field, like John Williams or Jerry Goldsmith, I think calls come in for them. Their agents are basically fielding calls, and presenting gigs to them. There is a point where they get offers all the time. But when you're in my position, where there has been some success and high profile projects, but not that one hit, blockbuster film, you really have to continue to pound the dirt yourself. It becomes one of those things where you have to just do the effort.

I think that in order to turn heads it takes a very great film where you can write a fabulous score that gets acknowledged. It has to be an association with a great film that gets great reviews and is also a good moneymaker. So it's a combination. All the pieces have to fit together right.

How do you prepare your score? Do use Cue or Auricle to lay out the score?

I use Auricle to lay out the tempos as I compose to picture. First, I conduct through it a few times with the video, feel the scene, and make sure that all the things that I want to hit are there. Then I create a click that is close to the slight variations of tempo that go with free conducting. If you were to look at my tempo map for a two-minute cue, you might see as many as 20 slight tempo changes. I am very particular about it, about those tempos and about the accelerations and the decelerations and all of that. The click is pushed slightly here, laid back slightly there. In fact, I've got some click maps where it could have been a 24-0 click. But instead, in order to achieve what I was feeling while I conducted to video, the tempo map might end up changing from 24-0 to 23-7, 23-5, 23-1, 24-7.

How do you determine what to hit and what to leave alone?

So much is by feeling. For me, it's whenever the chill occurs and however it's felt. In fact, I think it's detrimental to use a click for music that is more expressive or more lyrical. Especially when the musicians have the clicks in their ears while they're recording, there's a feeling of this perfect click going on. I think that that detracts from the emotion of the music and what the music really wants to do. So I try to conduct with streamers, for that kind of music. I know with *Triumph of the Spirit*, it was all by feel. If I was a little bit early to one streamer, I just knew I had to just slow down slightly so that three streamers later I'd be right on. And I knew it didn't really matter with that picture, because the music was floating, it wasn't commenting on anything specific, it was always floating above.

How do you feel about doing mock-ups?

In many ways they're helpful. If you can give the director mock-ups as you go, and get quick at laying out certain sounds—not flesh out every little detail, just give some good examples—I think that takes away the risk of disagreements when you're on the scoring stage. Mock-ups allow you to finish most of the work at home, and give the director the chance to have some input before the recording session.

What is your process in arriving at the concept for a score?

Dramatically, many of my ideas for a picture have to do with color and orchestration, which I have studied in depth. Orchestration is so much a part of music's conceptual design. First I compose the melodic themes, and once the melodies come to me, the orchestration begins to quickly reveal itself.

An example is what I did for the film, *One True Thing*. I had this idea of time changing, the changing of seasons. The feeling of wind passing through trees and then leaves blowing off in another

direction. This wasn't music yet; it was just a feeling I wanted to add to the whole effect of the score.

I set individual instruments apart from the orchestra, separated into their own isolation booths. Like three cellos in one room, or three violas with two woodwinds in another. They were off in their own rooms and the orchestra was in the center. Now, my concept was that the piano should be the main idea, accompanied by a small orchestra so that it felt intimate, and never too large. An introverted mood.

I also wanted it to feel like wind was carrying the music this way and out that way, creating different perspectives. The music wasn't just coming from the center of the room. It was coming from over here, and it shifted over there, and then it would come back over here. So, early on, this conceptual approach merged with the themes.

How much input did the director have at this stage of your process?

Actually, the reason I got this particular job was because I demoed some thematic ideas for him. That was before I came up with this special idea. So the director was very involved in the creation of the broad emotional and thematic ideas, but less so in terms of the specifics of the orchestration. I mocked up a great many of the cues, but because the ultimate orchestration and setup of the musicians was so unusual, I really wasn't able to demonstrate the final orchestration that included the unique perspective of these isolated groups until we got on the scoring stage with the real players. I didn't want to blow it by trying to make that in my synth studio.

Did you ever have a problem seeing eye-to-eye with a director?

Did I ever have a real disagreement? I can think of two occasions, where it wasn't so much a disagreement as it was that a director had gotten so used to a temp score that he couldn't hear anything else. I was writing something that took us in a different direction. Once a temp score is thrown into a movie, what tends to happen is

that the director gets used to it. To have him get unused to it and then used to something new is difficult. The temp process can be very detrimental. It can be the end of all possible creativity that could have come to that movie through music.

It's gotten to the point where some composers of the final score copy the composers whose music was used in the temp track, sometimes even ripping them off just because the production people get locked into the temp. I've heard thematic ideas from my scores used in other people's scores. It's infuriating. I honestly would never consciously sit there and rip someone off. I wouldn't be able to sleep at night.

What kind of time frame do you normally work under?

I've actually been very lucky in that way. I've had to write a lot of music really fast only a few times. The kind of thing where I had to stay up and do twelve-hour days, seven days a week. On *One True Thing* I had two and half or three months to write it.

How would you like the production team to view your process?

That they really understand the intense emotional self that I put into it. It's everything I have.

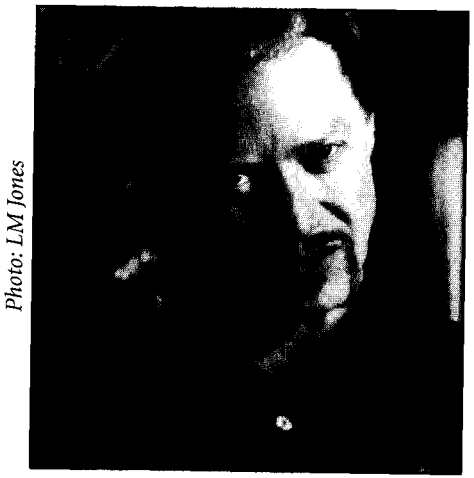


Photo: LM Jones

Danny Elfman

Danny Elfman comes to the world of film composing via the rock band Oingo Boingo. It was through Oingo Boingo that director Tim Burton first heard his music, and ultimately asked him to score *Pee Wee's Great Adventure.* Elfman has gone on to score over 30 films, including *Men In Black, Batman, The Nightmare Before Christmas, Mission Impossible, Midnight Run,* and *Good Will Hunting,* which earned him an Academy Award nomination.

LET'S TALK ABOUT HOW YOU GOT STARTED. DID YOU ALWAYS WANT TO WRITE FOR FILMS?

I was a big Bernard Hermann fan as a kid, in the '60s. I guess what you'd call kind of like a film-music nerd. My training was spending every weekend at the movie theater—I didn't play sports, I didn't really go out in the sun—I hated being out in the sun. I loved being inside a theater; it suited me well, and I lived around the block from one. I loved films and I loved film music. I knew that if Bernard Hermann did the music that it was going to be a great film.

WHAT WAS YOUR ENTREE INTO SCORING FILMS?

It was a fluke, actually. I was with the Mystic Knights of the Oingo Boingo when we were still a musical theatrical troop, between '72 and '78. I was asked to score a midnight film, a cult film for my brother called *Forbidden Zone,* and that was my first time putting music to film, but it was far from a legitimate orchestral film score. It was performed by the Mystic Knights just before they retired, and the rock band Oingo Boingo began.

The fluke was getting asked to do *Pee Wee's Big Adventure.* [Director] Tim Burton was a fan of Oingo Boingo, and he just had a feeling that I could do more than I did with them. Paul Reubens was a fan of the *Forbidden Zone,* so when he heard that score he made a mental note to track me down. My name crossed paths between the two of them and it eventually all tied together.

COMING FROM A ROCK BACKGROUND, HOW DID YOU GO ABOUT DOING THE SCORE? WERE YOU SEQUENCING OR WRITING THINGS DOWN?

I wrote down everything, I didn't start using MIDI notation until '96. In a rock band like Oingo Boingo there's never any point to write music down. I mean, other than basically scribbling out a horn part every now and then, there was no writing involved because that's not the way rock bands work. On the other hand, the Mystic Knights did a lot of original material and it became necessary for me to learn how to notate. The Mystic Knights did a lot of kind of crazy ensemble stuff—real early jazz like Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, and Django Reinhardt—and I began transcribing some of that stuff. That was my early ear training and from there I began to notate my own original compositions.

When I got offered *Pee Wee's Big Adventure* I knew I could create the music, but I also knew I would need help logistically with the orchestra. I knew what sounds I wanted because I loved orchestral music; I loved Stravinsky, I loved Prokofiev, I loved Charles Ives. So I called Steve Bartek, the guitar player from Oingo Boingo, and I asked him, "Have you ever orchestrated?" And he said, "Umm, I took some classes." And so I said, "Good, you'll do." And we both learned by doing it, as did Tim Burton. It was interesting, *Pee Wee* was Tim's first film, he'd never been to film school. It was my first score, I'd never been to composing school. And Steve orchestrating, he'd only taken a couple of orchestration classes at UCLA. We all learned our craft by doing it and the thing we had in common was we all applied ourselves really intensely to it, and we all had those kind of obsessive personalities. That "If I'm gonna do something, I'm gonna do it really, really well" kind of attitude.

Do you hear specific instruments as you write, or do you write something and then think about who could best play it?

I work both ways. Sometimes, when I'm hearing a melody, I'm also hearing the ensemble. In that instance, I look at a scene and I hear all the instruments right away. For example, in the opening sequence of *Mars Attacks*, I heard it dead-on the first time I saw the scene. I mean, I heard it almost note-for-note just like it was playing out of a radio in my head, and I ran home and I wrote it all down. I consider that one of the lucky moments. However, the more usual process of experimentation and working things out by degrees gets me more excited and involved. Although it is a lot more difficult, it can be more rewarding.

In those cases, at first I don't really hear exactly what I'm going to end up with; I get just a vague idea. First I see the film and then I start improvising. I start with a feeling, and I do maybe a dozen improvisations on piano without looking at the picture. Then I start going through the footage and I pull up different scenes to see how the improvisations work. Sometimes I improv for six, seven, eight minutes and then I pull out the ideas I like and focus on them.

And so, if there is any lesson I've learned over 35 scores, it's not to ignore the earliest impulses and not to lose anything. Because what early on seems like the most broad, poorly played, ill-conceived notion sometimes becomes what I'll look back on as one of my best ideas. You know, the raw material.

Do you enjoy working out the musical details of a big score?

It's great when I hit a certain section where things get really intricate, and there's a lot of detailing, and I'm satisfied with the way it comes out. That's the hardest work, and when it pays off, it feels really good. I also write songs, and when I'm writing songs, it's all inspiration based. It only takes a moment, once I get inspired to write a song. But writing an orchestral score takes so much time, and it's so easy to get it bungled and to get twisted up. When I start getting into the mode of detailing, and it doesn't turn into a cluttered mess, I'm really happy because I think my biggest weakness as a composer is sometimes I tend to overwrite. Sometimes I don't know when to stop and before I know it, what I thought was a good impulse or a good idea has become clouded into a big mess. I guess it's like when you're painting and you put a few too many layers of colors and suddenly you're looking for the image.

How do you deal thematically with the big picture of doing 30 or 40 cues?

At first, every score is a big puzzle and I have to know where my common links are in that puzzle. There's a start, a middle, and an end—I can't do the in-between stuff unless I know how the melodies are going to work in any situation. I want to know before I start that they can turn quirky, big, sad, melancholy, melodramatic, silly—whatever I'm going to be reaching for in that particular score. In those early improvisations, I'll be taking melodies and fragments of melodies, turning them inside out, and putting them through a rigorous testing to see what they're capable of.

After you come up with your material, do you work chronologically?

In general, I like to work chronologically. However, I usually start working on two or three major scenes that won't be chronological at all. I like to go for the biggies first, and then having those blocked out, I know where my major themes are, how I'm gonna use them. Then I like to go back to the start, and go chronologically from the beginning to the end, if I can.

How many films a year do you do?

Recently, I've been doing four or five a year, but the first ten years I did two films a year because the other months I was touring and recording with Oingo Boingo. Everybody's got their own way of working and I admire people who can get up in the morning, do their day's work and then take off, and, you know, have a family or

social life. But I can't do that very well when I'm composing. Composing becomes full-time, there's almost nothing else for me.

DO YOU SEQUENCE EVERYTHING?

When I first started, I was sequencing my ideas, playing them for directors, and then notating them—it was like double work! Even with MIDI take-down making my job a little easier, I still end up spending the first part of my day in organizational work; I'm working with my own performances, I'm working with samples. A lot of people don't realize that a lot of each score is actually me performing. All the percussion in almost all of my scores, all the synth work, and the percussion work is me. That's a lot of extra work because that part of it is neither getting transcribed, nor written down, nor replayed; it's going in the score exactly as I'm playing it. That means that I have to put in the time to tweak all the performances and get them to sound right. So I usually start writing late afternoon into evening, and I try to stop at around two in the morning. But my best hours are really six, seven at night until around two in the morning.

ONCE A ROCK 'N ROLLER ALWAYS A ROCK 'N ROLLER, RIGHT?

Yeah, right!

I HOPE YOU DON'T MIND MY ASKING, WHY DO YOU THINK PEOPLE CAME DOWN ON YOU SO HARD TOWARDS THE BEGINNING OF YOUR CAREER?

Well, there's a lot of jealousy and I totally understand it, by the way. You get somebody like me that comes from nowhere, and I made the mistake of saying in interviews early on that I was self-taught. In music, there's no such thing as self-taught.

It's always been a weird thing about music, unlike any of the other film arts. Because a director can be self-taught, a writer can be self-taught, but a composer can't be, and that's just the way people think. Some people are skeptical, but maintain an open mind. And some people are skeptical and get into this very vicious thing. I don't know what makes music different than the other parts of the process. If a writer who didn't go to film school decides to direct, and does something brilliant, they praise him. They don't sit there and go, "Oh god, he can't direct at all. Obviously he didn't go to film school." But musicians and composers tend to be more hard-core skeptics.

Now that I'm kind of like a veteran, sometimes I hear a new composer who comes out of pop music and I'm incredibly skeptical. I think they must keep a closet full of ghostwriters and stuff. So, I see myself doing the same thing that other people did to me, and I totally understand it. If I see somebody doing an orchestral score, and they came from a rock band or pop music, I don't believe it.

In my case, there was always the smoking gun that everybody was searching for, hoping to prove I wasn't really writing everything. And the thing that was most interesting was that the fingers never pointed at the one person who worked with me for all these years. People were always saying that so-and-so really wrote my stuff. Or that such-and such a person was ghosting all my cues. But of all the names that came up, no one ever mentioned the one person that has done the most, my orchestrator, Steve Bartek. And in the final analysis, I've written over 35 hours of film music, and only fifteen minutes of that was ever written by others when I was in a pinch—and they were always credited. People accused me of not knowing how to write music, but I have a four-foot high stack of sketches that I've done over the years.

ALL OF THIS MUST HAVE BEEN VERY HURTFUL TO YOU.

It was, but at a certain point I just said to myself, "This can't matter to me anymore." I realized I was imitated so much. At that time I did think it was ironic that I was so trashed, but I was also so imitated.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR YOUNG COMPOSERS?

Here are some contrary pieces of advice. If you want to be successful, learn to imitate. I think the entire industry right now revolves around plagiarism and imitation, and unless you're willing to plagiarize you may find it difficult to proceed. On the other hand, if you want to be a good composer, or a real composer, learn to resist that tendency. That can be hard, and it can also mean you may not get certain kinds of jobs that you want.

But I could also say this: I think imitation is the easy way out, although it is very tempting, and very seductive. Once you go down that path, it's really hard to turn back. You may say you'll reverse yourself, but it's hard to.

Do your own work, work hard, and be original. I don't regret for a moment that I had to write 20 scores without any kind of help. That work was phenomenally hard for me, especially with being self-taught and writing relatively slowly. But, I think that if I didn't do that, I wouldn't have developed certain skills that I've developed. So, at the risk of sounding like a Quaker or something, I think just the beauty of committing to the hard way out, or the harder road, is usually the best one, and the most rewarding.

Richard Gibbs

Starting his career as a keyboard player for such acts as Chaka Khan, Robert Palmer, and the rock band Oingo Boingo, Richard Gibbs has scored many feature films including *Dr. Dolittle*, *Fatal Instinct*, *Say Anything*, *Ten Things I Hate About You*, and *Natural Born Killers*. He earned a degree in composition from the Berklee College of Music before moving to Los Angeles where he played studio dates, in addition to touring. Gibbs has also scored many television movies and episodic television shows, and served as music director on *The Tracey Ullman Show*, and *Muppets Tonight*.

YOU HAD A CAREER AS A PLAYER BEFORE GETTING INTO FILM SCORING. WHAT WAS YOUR FOCUS?

Keyboards. I always refer to myself as a keyboard player because there are guys who are pianists who I could not pretend to keep up with. I really wanted to be a fusion player, and my heroes were Joe Zawinul and Jan Hammer. Programming and playing on synths was my thing. Plus, at one time, I was a pretty decent trombonist. I graduated from Berklee College of Music with a degree in classical composition, so I had a lot of bases covered.

WHERE ARE YOU FROM, ORIGINALLY?

Daytona Beach, Florida. I'm a surfer boy. That's why I moved out here to L.A. After I graduated from Berklee, I thought, "If I'm going to be a session musician and go try to find bands to hook up

WERE YOU INTERESTED IN FILM SCORING AT THIS TIME?

I had no plan for it, but it was a vague idea in the back of my mind. I had taken a class in film scoring at Berklee and figured, maybe I would do it when I turned 50. In the meantime, you know, hey, rock 'n roll, girls, and all that fun!

I got into film scoring through session work. At the same time I was working with Oingo Boingo, I started doing a lot of session playing in town, primarily as a synth player, which was a pretty small category at the time. An engineer friend of mine called me and told me of a feature film from Tristar pictures called *Sweetheart's Dance*. The director was looking for someone who could translate old Elvis songs into score. So my friend arranged a meeting with the director, Robert Greenwald. The first words out of Robert's mouth was, "I don't really like to use a film composer." I said, "That's okay, I'm not a film composer." He hired me on the spot, and eventually, I talked him into letting me score a couple of scenes in addition to the adaptations. The end result was that I had screen credit on a major studio motion picture.

[redacted]

Not really. It took some time. In the meantime, I got a gig as music director on *The Tracey Ullman Show*. I ended up staying on that show for about three years. That was decent money and became my base of operations. And that show was the beginning of *The Simpsons*. *The Simpsons* started as a one-minute cartoon that would occasionally appear on *The Tracey Ullman Show*.

[redacted]

What are some of the memorable collaborations you have had?

Working on *Fatal Instinct* with Carl Reiner was a wonderful experience. He was looking around at different composers that were available, and I went and gave an interview. I liked Carl right away; we just hit it off. I could tell we connected, and that I knew how to make him happy. And I could tell he knew it. At the time, I didn't have much of a résumé, but I just felt good walking out of the meeting, and I thought to myself, "I think I got that job."

In that film, we were lampooning so many different films, and I got to score some scenes in the style of Bernard Herrmann. It was hilarious to me. And the irony is that it sounded like I was twisting it and turning it, but I wasn't. I was scoring it as if I was Bernard Herrmann, as if the scene was straight. The comedy was all in the movie; I didn't have to touch on the comedy at all.

There is a postscript to the whole *Fatal Instinct* experience. One day, when we were dubbing the movie, I was hanging out having lunch with Carl. I had to ask him just for my own edification why he hired me. He said, "Well frankly, I hated your tape. I didn't like your music at all, and it was totally inappropriate to what I wanted. But your ideas were great, and I somehow thought it would be fun." And it was fun, it worked out great. We ended up going all over the map, musically. That was one of the more pleasurable experiences I've had.

I'd have to say 95 percent of the work I've done has been a blast. It's been a real pleasure for me. I've talked with a lot of composers who are very bitter, and they think that it's really hard, and people don't appreciate them. They've become tortured souls. Frankly, I don't get it. I'm of the school that thinks, "This is fantastic, I can't believe I'm getting paid to do this."

ship between music and image, getting excited about the work of Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Bernard Herrmann, and Nino Rota, and really thinking of it as yet another medium in which to apply a musical craft. It became a passion of mine, along with theater. I really loved the interaction between acting or dance and music. I got involved working with theater, creating scores on the spot along with actors, doing experimental theater and dance, also composing incidental music for plays throughout the United States in theaters like the ART in Cambridge. I was working in several theaters around the country doing these kinds of things, and at the same time I was composing chamber music. And then I was doing more complicated types of theater, like musicals. I composed three musicals, two of which were performed at Lincoln Center and had extended runs, one of which continues to play throughout the world.

WHAT LED YOU TO YOUR FIRST FILMS?

My first films were back in the 1970s. They happened along with the other alternative kind of stuff back in New York. There were German producers and directors who worked with the Fassbinder school of film making. There was this film that I did with Andy Warhol, I think called *Blank Generation*, about the birth of the punk movement in New York in the seventies. I really had a good time with that score. I was working in film in those days, but chamber music and theater were pushing me in more compelling directions. So I just followed that direction until the late eighties.

SO WHAT HAPPENED THEN? WHAT WAS THE FIRST MAINSTREAM FILM YOU GOT INVOLVED IN?

Drugstore Cowboy, which happened concurrent to working on *Pet Sematary*. Those films were a direct result of Gus Van Sant hearing the scores of my earlier works. At the same time, I was also working on various symphonic works, one of which was for the 70th birthday celebration of Leonard Bernstein. I just felt really comfortable about that *Drugstore Cowboy* situation.

WITH ALL OF YOUR COMPOSITIONAL BACKGROUND AND ALL OF YOUR STUDIES, DO YOU STILL PUT PENCIL TO PAPER?

It depends on the cue. For example, if it's a type of thing where you know there's a theme, a big theme that's going to be used in over 50 types of scenes, then I prefer to be alone with a piano, and a pencil and paper, because I can generally have a feeling for the tone of how the theme is going to work throughout the movie. But with the advent of MIDI synthesis with video lock and all of that kind of thing, if I'm working on a scene that involves tremendous amount of synchronization—an action scene or a scene that you have to make a musical statement on the 21st frame—I find that the actual experience of working with the computer, the synthesizers, and the video all locked up is very, very similar to working with actors live in a studio. Very similar to my theatrical experience.

YOU MEAN THERE'S GIVE AND TAKE.

Yes, it's like I'm moving along with them at the same time. As opposed to pausing, reflecting, and going back to see if it works. The nature and the type of a theme, or the use of that theme, determines the way I like to work.

HOW DO YOU FIRST APPROACH WRITING THE MUSIC?

Well, first of all, let me preface this by saying that before I approach anything, I have a very strong concept of what I want to pull off, whether it works out or not. That might include limiting the choice of pitches or a very clear choice of orchestration. So I don't go into something and just start improvising, I find that if I do that, I just sort of waste my time. I stay away from the piano, away from the computer, away from the pencil. I think about the scene and I say, how can I achieve the dramatic effect that is necessary for the scene and have it still sound fresh? How can I make it sound like you haven't heard that before, you haven't lived that before? Sometimes the answer can be surprisingly simple. In *Alien 3*, for example, I used a solo piano to underline the scene with the

little girl because I thought that having a piano way out in space would remind you of the most domestic of all instruments—it would remind you of home. Just things like that. That's a concept.

The other thing is that the study of orchestration is extremely important because it's not just the tunes, it's not just the melody; it's who plays it, what's the concept, what's the orchestral concept. And the sound, the development of electronics is all part of orchestration, of what that thing actually ends up sounding like.

How about* A Time to Kill *where the score used textures that were very different than those in your other work?

On *A Time to Kill* I used a lot of thick orchestral clusters that fit the sense of this agonizing racial struggle. But I also used instruments that were very rural, in a sense of folk music, such as harmonica, hammered dulcimer, and also penny whistle. I used those instruments in an unconventional way; they were accompanied with the type of clustery orchestral writing that one would associate with the Polish avant-garde.

Whose decision was it to use the gospel song in the scene where the Samuel Jackson character guns down the two rednecks?

Yes, "Precious Lord." [Director] Joel Schumacher and I came up with that. That was three young girls called the Jones Sisters. They were about the same age as the girl that was raped. They were taped down in the Deep South, not in a studio. It was the sound you would hear if you went to a Sunday meeting and heard three girls get up and sing "Precious Lord." So I had this a capella three-girls situation. They were all 11 years old or so. And then I pitted it up against this heavy orchestral, clustery setting. It was almost as if the orchestra swallows up the a capella singing. This was something that was highly conceptualized even before the scene was shot.

Was that was part of the script?

No, it wasn't part of the script; it was part of the conversation that I had with Joel on how to do the scene.

So in this case, you were involved in the film in the script stage, which I imagine doesn't always happen.

It has always been that way in my work with Joel. I would always come on the project in the script stage, or even while we were shooting. Then I'd go down to the set and there would be discussions. This does help me because it gives me a chance for my subconscious to think about concepts of how to approach something so it seems fresh.

What about the use of temp tracks?

For a young composer, or a new composer who doesn't have a strong enough background or backbone, it could be dangerous because they'll say, "The temp is working so well. I don't want to lose my job so I'll compose it just like the temp." But if you don't care about losing your job, and you're willing to go your own way as opposed to following something, you can come up with an original solution. There are fifty or sixty things that can work in a scene, so what you have to do is really be clear to the director about how much of this or that you think is right. You have to get intimate with the director so you don't make the mistake of just copying the temp track, which many directors would feel is ridiculous because they hired you to be creative.

What's your advice to young people coming up in this crazy business?

My advice is not to keep your head stuck in film. Open your horizons to what you really want to express in music. And no matter what it is, whether it's a rock background or whether it's chamber music, keep those avenues open. When anybody asks me how to develop their chops for movies, I say, do theater. I spent over 10

years doing theater before anything significant happened movie-wise. And that was like 100% preparation. In the situation with *Batman* or *Interview with a Vampire*, where it's the last minute, and you have three or four weeks to do the film, and you know that whatever you write any particular night, an entire orchestra is going to be there in a couple of days. It's going to be recorded and then 2 billion people are going to listen to it. You can't second-guess yourself, you can't backtrack, you can't be afraid. The way that I learned to overcome that fear was in theater, where you have to make those kinds of decisions and you have to be very, very, very clear. You go into rehearsal and it either works or it doesn't. But the theater world, it's sort of a Gold's Gym of dramatic composing.

Michael Gorfaine & Sam Schwartz

Michael Gorfaine and Sam Schwartz are two of the most well-known agents for film composers in Hollywood. The Gorfaine-Schwartz Agency, formed in 1983, represents people such as John Williams, James Horner, Michael Kamen, Elliot Goldenthal, and Ennio Morricone, among others.

How did you get started as agents for film composers?

SS: From about 1978 to 1982, Michael was the co-director of the West Coast office of ASCAP. In 1980, he hired me to begin a film and television division with the priority of building up the film-music repertoire. While we were at ASCAP, we became familiar with many composers and the process that they live through writing the music and getting work. One thing leads to another, and we decided to go off on our own.

MG: I have always loved films and film music, but I never focused on it until I worked at ASCAP. That is where I started meeting composers, and that is where I met Sam over 17 years ago. I enjoy working with these people. Across the board, film composers are just interesting, good people.

Can you explain the role of the agent as it relates to your work?

MG: The way we define it, there are many overlapping duties and roles that the agent performs. It's really a relationship between management and more traditional agenting.

First and foremost, we advise and counsel career direction, and look for opportunities in which our clients can fulfill their career goals. We peruse the film and television world for the jobs for our composers to compose their music. And we also advise our clients about lawyers and business managers with whom they are to work.

DO THE JOBS ALWAYS COME THROUGH YOU, OR DOES THE COMPOSER SOMETIMES GET THEM ON HIS OWN?

MG: Sometimes, if there was a preexisting relationship, a producer or director will approach a composer directly. When you've got people who have worked together and know each other, often that relationship has great communication in it, and they will talk directly to each other. This is a wonderful thing. However, eventually it will come through us so we can hammer out the details of the schedule, the fees—the whole deal.

SS: The way that this is normally operated is through protocol, through the agency. Normally, we sit down with the composer to find the potential creative opportunities, and plan the next move.

MG: It's an overall career-strategy approach that we take. It's not just building momentum, or making deals. It's our job to make sure that, at any point in time, we are manifesting the best possible opportunities for our clients, and advising the best next step. And certainly it's different in different times of an artist's career. In the beginning it about getting opportunities, period. Once you have the momentum it's about choosing properly. The funny thing is, it gets harder and harder once you get established. You want to make sure that the right choices are being made.

MANY COMPOSERS GET PEGGED AS DOING ONLY ONE STYLE OF MUSIC. HOW DO YOU BREAK THEM OUT OF THAT KIND OF PERCEPTION?

MG: I don't think any musician I know wants to do the same thing over and over again. No actor wants to play the same part over and over again. No director wants to make the same movie over and over again. The same thing holds true for composers. Any great composer can do a multiplicity of things. We know that. But they can become known for certain things and asked to do those things again and again. One of the things that we want to do is make sure that the people out there that will hire these composers know their multifaceted nature, and what they are able to do. We try to get in very early on projects—as early as the script stage when they are developing a project. We find out whether it's a music-driven project, like an animated musical with songs, or not. Most often it's not; most movies just need a good score. So we find out very early on what the musical requirements are. We get that information to the client we would like to see on the project, and we pitch that client to the project.

WHAT ABOUT PACKAGE DEALS? HOW DO YOU APPROACH THOSE?

SS: In the mid-'80s, around the time of *Airwolf* and *Miami Vice*, we began this process called "packaging." This actually started with television films because of the fact that some of our clients, like Jan Hammer, had their own electronic studios where they could produce all the music. This was unique at that time. We felt that we could take the budgets that were being offered and have the composers just take all the money in exchange for doing all the production in their studios.

Now, 12 years later, almost all television music is done as a package. In the last three years, many of the motion picture projects are packages as well, even if the budgets are rather large. What this does is protect the producer from cost overruns, and it puts the responsibility to maintain a very specific budget on the shoulders of the composer.

MG: Yes. In addition, unless the client is really self-contained with his own facility and is set up to package, we veer away from that. If it's a big orchestral score, there is really little packaging. Especially when you are up against potential changes that almost always occur.

HOW DOES THAT GET HANDLED?

MG: We have a provision in our regular deals and in package deals that any rescoring is the responsibility of the producer's studio. We are very clear about that.

DO YOU SEE ANY DIFFICULTY IN THE BUSINESS FOR SOMEONE WHO IS A MINORITY OR WOMAN COMPOSER?

MG: Not that I am aware of. I think that opportunities are available, and we are not aware of any kind of difficulties. I can't tell you why there are not more women composers, I don't know why.

WHAT KIND OF THINGS ARE YOU LOOKING FOR IN AN UP-AND-COMING COMPOSER? WHAT'S THE COMPLETE PACKAGE?

MG: We are looking for real musical vision, real ability to marry music with images. Thankfully, there are a lot of wonderful musicians, writers, and composers out there. But it is a very special gift, this gift of being able to compose for film.

SS: There are so many talented musicians. But their musical gift is anchored by being film makers first, and their expression is made though music. The musical gift that is necessary to succeed today is to have a great traditional foundation combined with a sense of the abstract future. In other words, being able to express musical thought on computers and machines, on top of a foundation of a classical, traditional gift.

WHAT ARE THE THINGS YOUNG COMPOSERS SHOULD DO TO FURTHER THEIR CAREERS?

SS: In one word: anything. Student opportunities, student film opportunities, student television opportunities, commercials, even local commercials, whatever they can take. I would even suggest that they have their own computer operations going on. That they take videos of some of their favorite and most influential films, shut down the sound, and lay in their own music to show how they would approach a project. And having a CD demo of film music available is important.

But there is one thing that is even more important. In their professional milieu you know their musical gift is a given. What separates those who succeed from those who don't is their ability at the human relationships. It's the way they are perceived by others, and the way they handle meeting any number of people that they encounter—in particular, producers, directors, and studio people. There can't be a better piece of advice than to work on those basic human skills of communication. There are such gifted musicians out there that don't have the burgeoning and remarkable careers that they should at this stage in their lives, just as a result of this area being a complete, utter weakness.

MG: Film and television are collaborative mediums, and it's not one person, it's many people who make a movie or a television show. What Sam is saying is key because it is mainly about collaboration and communication. The composer sits with the director and spots a film, and they determine together where the music goes, and what it is supposed to do. The composer then goes off and uses his musical gift to create the score, but ultimately the score has to be married to the images. I keep repeating it, but it is so important: it is very much a collaboration on many levels.

WHAT DO YOU ENJOY ABOUT WORKING WITH FILM COMPOSERS?

MG: I find them to be great people. With different kinds of musical backgrounds, all of them got to where they are in slightly different ways. Because of the journeys they have taken, they are very responsible and interesting people. Films and television shows provide a wonderful canvas for composers. All that great music would never exist without the kind of inspiration the composers bring.

Photo: Jennifer Lewi

Mark Isham

Mark Isham has a diverse career as jazz artist and film composer. He has composed the scores for over 50 films, including *A River Runs Through It, Nell, Fly Away Home, Quiz Show,* and *Blade.* Beginning his professional career in the Bay Area, Isham played trumpet in the Oakland and San Francisco Symphony Orchestras. He has eight Grammy nominations for his work as a solo artist.

WHAT WAS YOUR MUSICAL BACKGROUND BEFORE YOU GOT INTO FILM SCORING?

When I was a kid growing up in the Bay Area, I wanted to be one of the cool guys in the back of the orchestra, so I picked the trumpet. But then, I think by early teenagerhood, I discovered more popular—not real "pop music"—but I discovered jazz. And I discovered it in two ways. Actually, Henry Mancini was probably the first commercial sound that really sparked my interest. It's only in very long distance hindsight that I realize that his music was for film, also. What was important at the time is that it was jazz-influenced music. That's what I found intriguing. And then, within a year or so, I discovered real jazz: Cannonball Adderly, Miles, and Monk. That was it. My life was over at that point—I was hooked—I was the jazz guy.

Then I discovered Morton Subotnick and the early stuff done with Moog and Buchla synthesizers. This was in the early '70s. That was the other seminal point for me; it defined the next ten to fifteen years of my own musical learning experience. I figured out pretty soon that the average college music department wasn't going to give me what I wanted to know. So I took it upon myself to study privately. I studied with some really excellent trumpet teachers. I even took some private composition lessons for a while from a guy who was sort of a rebel. We would dissect everything from a Herbie Hancock piano solo all the way to the Bartók string quartets.

HOW DID YOUR FIRST FILM-SCORING GIG HAPPEN?

By the end of the '70s, I was a fully eclectic guy with a pretty wide view of music, and a pretty good working knowledge of a lot of it. I was a good professional trumpet player for many years. I was based in San Francisco, and I played in bands that did all sorts of things. I supported myself, and started buying synthesizers when I had some extra money.

In 1982, a director had gotten his hands on a tape of some music that I had written with a friend of mine. It was a project that combined electronics and Chinese instruments. My friend was the Chinese instrument player, and I was the electronica guy. We didn't get that deal, but we made a number of tapes, and one of them was given by my friend to this director. He literally tracked me down and said, "Look, this is the sound I want for my movie." And that was *Never Cry Wolf.*

Understand that this hardly ever happens. I've never actually heard anyone else get their first film out of the blue like this. But to have someone who is totally unknown—I mean, I was not really successful yet making records. I was doing okay, but it wasn't like I had big-selling records or anything. I never set out to be a film composer. And I just happened to write music and someone heard it and said, "I want you to do it for a film." And all of a sudden I had another career.

HOW DID YOU HANDLE THAT FIRST PROJECT?

I had a lot of help. I had two great, experienced music editors to guide me through the process. I did the whole thing on a Prophet

5 with a little hand-held sequencer and multitrack tape. It took about four months to do 60 minutes of music. The idea of doing a film now with that kind of equipment sends shivers down my spine.

You have an extensive electronic setup now. Do you write at all to paper, or do you rely completely on your keyboards and sequencer?

I'm still working off of the basic "thrown in the deep end" process of *Never Cry Wolf*, where this guy just said, "I want you to do it." So my basic compositional process at that time was that I would just come up with some ideas looking at the picture. The pictures themselves are always the inspiration.

And that's why I think a lot of us pump so much money back into the sampled sound world—so it's as good as it can be. I wasn't up to par in that regard a number of years back. The accepted level of quality in the demo world had gone quite a bit ahead of me, and I had not been paying attention. There have been a couple of composers in town who have spearheaded this. They use many, many, many samplers and many, many, many high-tech samples. I think it's actually a good thing. I had to rebudget things that year to get back in the game, but getting all that kind of gear has been real helpful for me. I see the difference it makes when it sounds so good that I get certain producers who come in and say, "Why are we spending money on an orchestra?" Yet I would never condone substituting samples for a real orchestra. But if the music is communicating to the extent where people are actually getting that little rush, getting that little tear in the eye even with a sample, then I know I've done it. I go to the scoring session and just have a great time because I'm not worrying whether or not I got the theme right.

Do you do mock-ups for every cue?

Absolutely. I try to mock-up the entire score if time permits. I hate going in front of the orchestra and having the director hear it for the first time. There may be some macho thing about that, and in the old days they had to do it that way. God bless them for surviving. But really, the greatest boon the electronic fake orchestra has given us is the ability to check it out. It gives a sense of what you're doing before any money is spent on musicians and a studio, and you find yourself in that $10,000-an-hour "I've got to fix it right now" scenario.

What about temp tracks?

I think a well-done temp, along with a really excellent communication line with the director, is invaluable. Then I really understand when he says things like, "This is what we're learning here in this scene," and, "What I'd like to bring from that scene is another feeling."

I know there are certain composers who hate temp tracks. I understand that point of view. With certain directors temp tracks can be confining, because he will have made up his mind about the music, and unless you do something very similar to the temp, he's not going to be satisfied.

For *A River Runs Through It*, I only had three weeks to do the score. First, I heard a temp score and most of it was unmemorable. But there was one thing in it that validated exactly what I had been thinking. I was sitting there watching the work print, and about half-way through the film I was saying to myself, "I know what this needs. I know what I can do for this." And the last piece in the temp score was exactly that—a Celtic folk song. And I thought, "I'm right. I need to write five or six beautiful folk songs in the Celtic vibe, and choose one for the theme."

Do you find that being a jazz musician influences the way you approach writing for films?

Yeah. I have a definite point of view. I mean, this is what composition means to me: Composition is actually being able to get down a great improvisation. It's the same act, as far as I'm concerned. You're making up music. You're creating something. The jazz world puts you in front of an audience, and you create something there with a few signposts that have been put up to guide you.

Composition is the same thing, except that you are allowed to go back and revise and improve and restructure. To me, the high-tech way of composing is great because I can just improvise scads of stuff, and then the music editor in me can come in and just say, "Well, let's rearrange. We've got to get to that point in the film sooner, so let's take those eight bars out." I'm improvising in the style of late Romantic orchestral music. And when I get a good improvisation, I can fine-tune it, and that becomes a composition.

Do you conduct your own stuff?

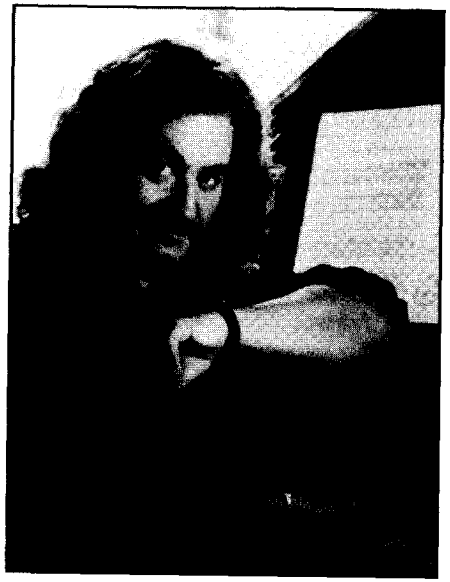
No. First of all, I'm not a conductor. Second of all, I think it's inefficient. The sound in the room is one thing; the sound out of the speakers is usually something very different. And, if for no other reason, contractually I'm paid to write and produce the score. So it's really my responsibility to make sure it sounds right on tape. If I'm out there with the orchestra getting used to the sound of the room and tuning that up, I can come back in the control room and it can sound miles from what it should really sound like. Besides, the director's in there already listening, and already going "Oh god!" I would rather be there holding his hand and saying, "No, no. We're going to do this differently. Engineer, bring that down." So, my orchestrator conducts, because he's the guy that's decided exactly how the bassoons are going to handle that tricky thing there and how to crescendo the cellos. He's made all those decisions, so he should be the one out there handling the orchestral interpretation of that. He knows the score as a written thing much better than I do. I'm the one that has to make sure that the sound on tape is exactly right.

Do you accept package deals?

I do, it's necessary these days. The important thing to remember is that everything is negotiable. You can negotiate for gross points. You can negotiate for album points. You can negotiate for publishing. You can negotiate for how many musicians you guarantee to employ. Every aspect of a package deal is negotiable. And make sure you do your homework, because if you miscalculate, and you agree contractually to supply 20 strings for 40 minutes of music, you better know what that's going to cost you. And you better do things like go to the director and say, "I will accept this on the terms that you sign off on everything that I play for you in demo form." Sometimes the director is sitting on the scoring stage and says, "What if this were faster?" Then you're looking at writing more music, changing your tempo, and somehow getting new music on the stand while the musicians are waiting for you. That could eat up your profit right there. So it's very crucial that you have a good line of communication with your director. Even if you can't get it in writing that they'll sign-off on the mock-ups, at least, man to man, get them to agree that this is a package deal, and you're going to try to help each other.

You seem to focus a lot on the communication between the composer and director.

I think more than 50 percent of the gig of the film composer is verbal communication. There are genius composers who couldn't survive in this business if their life depended on it. That is because they're not willing to work in a committee-type environment where you have to discuss, you have to duplicate someone else's point of view, and you have to be willing to create that point of view and somehow fit it in with your own. On the other hand, you can find people who are average composers who have a great ability to work in that environment who are very successful. It's the game. You are working in a group, and you're bringing a musical part to something that isn't all just music. You've got to be able to play in the group, to play in the game by the rules of the game.



Michael Kamen

Michael Kamen's film scores bring the pop, film, and classical music worlds closer together. He has also written several ballets and symphonic works. He is a songwriter and record producer who has worked with artists such as Sting, Eric Clapton, George Harrison, and Bryan Adams. His film credits include *Robin Hood, Prince of Thieves,* the *Lethal Weapon* series, *Don Juan de Marco, Brazil, Mr. Holland's Opus,* and the *Die Hard* series.

How did you get started, making the journey from being an oboe student at Juilliard to a composer of film scores?

Through a rock 'n roll band—that great archetypal, educational institution. I learned more and got more experience in the New York Rock and Roll Ensemble because it was our own. Because of the time and place we were in, we were, not surprisingly, asked to perform with orchestras. And because nobody else in the band wanted to do it, and I did want to do it, and I didn't know that I couldn't do it, I wrote the orchestra charts. It seemed easy at the time, something I could do. So I wrote bunches of charts for orchestra and found that I really liked it—those were for major orchestras, such as The Boston Pops with Arthur Fiedler.

Did you always want to compose for films? Was that a goal, or was it just something that happened along the way?

I would have composed for an ice cream truck. I composed all the time, and I wanted to be a composer when I was a kid. I remember sitting in front of the piano one day when I was eight or nine and looking at all the busts of Beethoven, Schubert, Bach, and Mozart sitting there on the piano, and realizing with much disappointment, "They're all dead! Maybe it's not a job anymore. Maybe it's just one of those things that happened in the olden days, when the world was black and white." It occurred to me that I'd have to do something else; I couldn't be a composer because that job was no longer a job. Then suddenly, through a rock 'n roll band, I wound up being a composer.

How did you get your first gig on a film?

The rock 'n roll band was managed by a guy whose partner made *Dog Day Afternoon* and *Serpico*. He was a film producer named Marty Bregman, and I knew him because we shared offices. I was very visible in the office; I don't have a shy personality, and I suggested that he pick me to do a film score. He asked me to do a film called *The Next Man*. Then I did a film for another friend of mine, and the rock band also did some television films. One was called *Christina's World*, based on an Andrew Wyeth painting. It became easy for me to do these projects because I was able to continue doing what I loved to do: invent music every day.

In those early films, did they want you as a rock 'n roll musician or as a composer?

No, I was always a hybrid character—a classical musician that played rock 'n roll, or a rock 'n roller who was also a classical musician, depending on which end of the street people met me. But it was clear that I was always in both worlds, and I've always brought that feeling into my work. I haven't seen those early films in a long time, but I remember I made a quite classical job out of it, and freely mixed classical music with a set of drums and a rock 'n roll spirit.

Has your composing process changed much over the years, especially with the advent of new technologies?

Well, technology is more of a memory device for me. In the old days when I used my brain completely to remember things, and pencils to write it down, I felt smarter, but I think everybody feels smarter when they're seventeen. I have an inbred mistrust of technology making the way simpler for us. I don't think it answers questions. I think it provides some solutions and I'm all for it now. I use it all the time. I'm definitely hooked. The difference between banging things out on a shabby piano and banging things out on a shabby Kurzweil is that the shabby Kurzweil remembers what I play.

In terms of synchronization, just from having been around a little bit while you've been working, it seems like you're very instinctual.

Yeah, it's instinctive. I have never depended on any of those devices like Auricle or whatever. They are systems that enable you to look at a piece of film and compute what the best click track would be. But I really hate math so much that I don't get myself involved. For years, I did try to get click tracks right, but inevitably I'd get them wrong, and I just punched my way out of that paper bag.

So how do you synchronize something like Lethal Weapon *or an action sequence that requires a lot of synchronization? Are you still just feeling those spots?*

Again, I do have an instinct for it, and I have to trust that instinct. That's one of the things you do as a composer: Trust your instincts, and have confidence in what it is you're saying. There are always ways to get it perfect, to refine it, and make sure that that big downbeat hits the explosion or misses the explosion, as the case may be. And certainly there are also music editors who can fix anything that needs fixing. But my job is to make music, and not equations.

What about the times that you've crossed over from writing more classical scores to more rock 'n roll things? How does the process work with Eric Clapton, or David Sanborn?

It's the same thing. It's just relating to a musician in language that those musicians can understand, so I'm not confused or confusing. Eric is able to carry melody in his head and improvise better than any 15,000 people I know. Same with Sanborn. So when you're working with genius, you just allow them to be themselves. You don't try to constrict them or control them. Every once in a while you'll say, "I really *need* you to play guitar or sax on top of this." When you provide them with a track, they'll figure it out. If they don't figure it out, then you say, "Try this ..." and you can demonstrate and so forth.

I would imagine that your experience in being a rock 'n roll musician assists you in that whole process.

That's because I realize the real value in not being educated to death and not being overly regimented in the way you think. Rock 'n roll is a great liberator in that there are no rules, and if there were you'd get rid of them. That's what it's about. That's why it was invented. I was really lucky to be around at that crucial period when it was being invented. It's been a little sad for me to see it go down such a predictable road, as it has done, and become a cash cow where the money is the all-important end product, and the music is secondary.

Have you ever written a song where the director says to you, "Here's a scene in the movie in which we need a song, not underscore." Have you been in that situation, where you had to compose a song that had really dramatic impact?

No, unless it's a montage sequence, I don't think a song is very good news. You're trying to tell a story with action, colors, and characters and you don't need somebody singing in the background telling you what you're seeing. I don't actually agree with that, and very rarely do I think a song contributes positively in

that way. There are some notable examples where it does work, however. The songs "Mona Lisa" and "Brazil" are deliberate attempts on the part of the director, not on the part of the composer, to be intrinsic motivations for the characters' actions. That's why we used them. It's not because we wanted a hit record.

Most often, songs in movies are there for commercial reasons. The great lesson of a lifetime was taught to me by Joel Silver, [producer of the *Die Hard* and *Lethal Weapon* series] when I said to him one day, "Joel, you have great taste and wisdom about art and culture. When are you going to make a great film and stop making this shit? " And he said, "I make shit. I buy art!" Movies are art as commerce, and to some people like Joel, that works very well. For me art is art, and commerce is commerce.

WHAT DO YOU THINK MAKES A GREAT SCORE? WHAT MAKES A SCORE STAND OUT IN YOUR MIND?

Melody. A great piece of music is qualified by its melody. There are great scores that are brilliant orchestrations or this and that, but they sound *like* other pieces of music, they're not great pieces of music. There's a difference. A great piece of music is like an invention. It's like a very rare jewel, or a beautiful vista. Even if you create a melody deliberately and say I want it to do this, or I want it to do that, as opposed to conceiving it instinctively, there still must be some degree of inspiration. There's no way on Earth that I could claim to really be in control of the melodies that I write. I'm just inventing stuff. It's a bit like fishing.

SO YOU WOULD NEVER SIT DOWN AND SAY, "I NEED A BITTERSWEET MELODY, SO I'M GOING TO GO UP A MINOR 6TH," OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT.

No, I don't really think of minor 6ths when I'm playing. But I do sit down and improvise a lot. In that sense, improvisation is really a starting point for an idea. I have some training, just enough to get me in trouble, but not enough to screw me up forever. I can recognize somehow what I've done, but I don't define it in musical terms. I never say, "This is serial technique," or "This is a 10th," or anything else. It just has a shape in my mind, and it's very difficult to describe what a shape is. It's blue, yet green. I wouldn't be a very good teacher in that regard, but I would be a very good teacher if I were just able to encourage people to express their own personality. That is what we do, that is the gift of music—being able to express a feeling and an attitude and a vibe confidently, and with some beauty. Believing it to be good enough to make beautiful things.

DO YOU ORGANIZE YOURSELF AS FAR AS THEMES ARE CONCERNED? DO YOU PUT IT ALL TOGETHER AT FIRST, OR DO YOU JUST START AND SEE WHERE IT TAKES YOU?

No, I never list things. However, the spotting process is a very crucial one; I often can see what the architecture of a score will be by talking about it with the director, or the producer, or whoever I'm spotting with. I learn more as I'm working on it, and sometimes I change my mind. But it's really the architecture of a score that you're talking about, and that is a very complicated, and yet quite simplistic design. Nobody goes to the theater to listen to the score. The score is assisting them in watching the film. The score is a component of the story and of the characters. So I don't want people to be sitting there going, "Wow, what a great ii-IV-V progression." That's not what I want, and I don't believe it's an important consideration in making music for films.

As far as themes are concerned, coming up with a theme, having several portions to that theme that you can assign to separate characters in the movie, and being able to bring the theme out with the character is important to me. But that's more mechanical to me than artistic. To say, "If Mel Gibson's on the screen I need the guitar, and if he's being angry and aggressive, I need a big orchestra behind it," that's a no-brainer.

WHAT IS YOUR ADVICE FOR THE UP-AND-COMING FILM STUDENTS, IN TERMS OF GETTING STARTED IN THE BUSINESS?

Getting started in the business is always a dilemma because you can't advise people on getting lucky, and there is a great deal of luck. It's about the work that they do, and it's not about being in the right place or meeting the right people or going to the right party—though all of that can contribute to it. But there is no single thing I could say, other than make the best music you can, and be the best you can be at what it is you do, and what you do uniquely. There is a need for the individuality for each of us to rise to the surface, and for us to take our own work quite seriously. You should have fun while you're doing it. A really great musician doesn't convey their technical brilliance on stage. What they convey is how easy it seems to be playing this incredibly difficult stuff. The more relaxed you are as a human being and as a musician, the more effective your performance will be. This is far short of saying that if you want to work in film do this, do that, do the other thing. I'm afraid that kind of advice is not going to come from me. The kind of advice that I'm going to give you is to be yourself, find your own brand of music to make, and work hard. It's about the work, it's about the work, it's about the work. Your work will come to people's attention, and if you can produce more good work, you're onto something.

Mark Mancina

Mark Mancina composed scores for three of the top-grossing films of recent years: *Speed*, *Twister*, and *Con Air*. He won a Grammy for his work on *The Lion King*, and was music producer for its Broadway stage version. Additionally, Mancina has led an active career producing songs for such artists as Phil Collins and Elton John.

NOW THAT YOU'VE HAD SOME SUCCESS IN YOUR CAREER, DO YOU HEAR FILM SCORES DIFFERENTLY?

When I first came into film composing I used to be pretty critical of people's scores. I'd listen to some scores and go, "That guy's terrible," or, "This guy's brilliant." Now, I've changed my whole viewpoint. I feel that anyone who does this for a living—successfully completes a score, and goes on to his next score—has accomplished an incredible achievement because there's so much that goes on behind a movie score besides the music. Fielding the politics, the pressures, the emotions, and the wants and desires of some directors who think that they have something on screen that maybe they don't have—all those kinds of emotions are extremely challenging. So I have a huge respect for anybody that does this job. I think it's extremely difficult. In reality, sometimes the music is the *easiest* part, while everything else you have to deal with is really the hardest part of the job.

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN IN A SITUATION WHERE YOU REALLY DISAGREED WITH A DIRECTOR?

Oh yeah, every movie!

[LAUGHING] WHAT HAPPENED?

The majority of the time, we end up with a cue that the director likes better but that I think wasn't as good as my original cue. But that's from *my* perspective. The director probably would say that we ended up with a better piece of music. I would write a cue that I thought was the best that could be for that scene. Then the director comes in and says, "No, I had a completely different thing in mind for this." So where do you go? Who's right, who's wrong?

SO YOU DO MOCK-UPS FOR EVERY CUE?

It depends. I try not to because mock-ups really back you into a corner. But directors and producers are getting much more used to having things mocked up because they can hear what it sounds like before they hire the orchestra to play it.

HOW DID YOU GET STARTED IN FILM SCORING?

I started out as a classical player, as a classical guitarist. I went to school and studied composition—I went through that whole process. I also played in bands and did all kinds of different stuff—playing at night and paying the rent doing music.

When I was 22, a friend who was a cameraman called me and said he was doing a documentary for this guy that does these dog training documentaries; he does dog training, deer gutting, and marlin fishing—and he needs music for these shows. I said, "Absolutely." I had a little sequencer—a Roland—and a couple of keyboards. I put all this stuff in my car and I drove to this guy's production studio and set up. There was no sync or anything. Everything had to be written or clicked, and I had to just freewheel it. I wrote these documentaries, and, for way back then, they came out all right. I had a big orchestral sound in one of them and I wrote some songs, I was singing and playing all the instruments—this was all on an 8-track Fostex. I started to see the magic of putting music up against picture and running them at the same time. That's a whole school; I learned it by doing it. Nobody was there telling me, "That's really stupid what you're doing there." I learned it by doing it, and I did it for years. I really got a sense of what music does, what it can do, what it should and shouldn't do, and all those kind of things.

I did low-budget films and documentaries for nine years. Then Hans Zimmer heard something I did. He called me up and he said, "What part of Europe are you from?" And I said, "I'm not from Europe, I'm from Santa Monica." Then he said, "Well, your writing is really European and I would really love to work with you. Why don't you come down to my studio?" That day I went down to his studio. Trevor Horn was there, and Billy Idol was there, and they were doing this movie called *Days of Thunder*. I just dove right into it as an arranger, writer, and player.

Then *The Lion King* project was looming. Hans was doing the score, and he asked me to produce the songs, and be in charge of that. I said okay, and then dove into that without knowing that it would become the most successful animated motion picture ever made. At the same time I was working on that, I was doing films like *Monkey Trouble* and other little fun family films. While I was finishing up *The Lion King*, Jan De Bont came to me and said, "I want you to do my movie *Speed*, it's just a small movie." This is like a $30-million dollar movie. I told him I'd love to do it. They had me audition cues for them, though. Eventually I got the movie and those two movies—*The Lion King* and *Speed*—came out the same week, and everything just went crazy after that.

WHAT IS YOUR WRITING PROCESS NOW?

Basically what I've been doing now is playing a lot of the instruments myself while writing the cues and playing all the percussion. I collect instruments and any instruments I can get my

hands on I'll learn and develop a part and write from that standpoint. Then I'll add the orchestra over the top of it. So, when I play a mock up, it's not really a mock up. What you're really hearing is all of the acoustic instruments that I've recorded, and vocals done myself. The orchestra is the only thing that's mocked up, to a point, or a piano track. Then we go in and record the orchestra and get rid of the synth stuff. So eventually, what you end up having is me playing a series of percussion instruments and a series of stringed instruments, then doing vocals, and then finally an orchestra playing. It becomes this hybrid. There is a certain randomness and air that is created when you play an acoustic instrument, and you cannot create it on a keyboard of any kind. I don't care how good your samples are.

How do you handle the business stuff?

At the beginning, when I first start work on a film, I think about the music and what I want to do with it. But there is also a logistical side—a business side—to it. I came from being a producer on records, and an arranger, and that really helped me because part of writing a film score is producing a recording. And producing means being in charge of the entire outcome—the budgets and credits and everything. It can be extremely difficult for the studios to get all that together.

So you're in constant communication with a lot of other people?

You know, it would be wonderful to say that the composer has the final say on everything but that's not the truth. So many times, you'll hear a score and you'll say, "Man! I don't like that cue at all, how could he have written that?" And to be fair, it most likely wasn't the composer's doing. Who knows how it ended up there? Basically, when it all comes down, film composing is a service job, and there isn't a composer out there who would argue that. Everybody has to bend and learn to change things that they don't necessarily want to change because they're not the executive producer of the film, they're not the director of the film, they're only the composer. It's not the composer's film, it's the director's film. You always have to keep that in mind. And that can make it difficult because sometimes the composer really does know best!

David Newman

David Newman has scored over 55 feature films, including *Hoffa*, *Anastasia*, *Heathers*, *The Nutty Professor*, and *Matilda*. Coming from a Hollywood music family—brother Thomas Newman is also a film composer, and father Alfred Newman was the head of music at 20th Century Fox for many years—David Newman studied violin, and received a degree in conducting from USC.

You grew up in a Hollywood music family. Was there always music around at your house, or was it something your dad would leave at the office?

My dad worked at home while we were growing up and there was a lot of music around. Music was a big part of the house, we always heard him banging away on the piano. We were also brought up very traditionally, studying music. My brother Tommy and I, we both grew up studying violin and piano from very young ages. We took theory, counterpoint, and orchestration at 11, 12, 13 years old. A traditional, sort of Germanic musical upbringing.

Did you rebel against that?

No, no. I loved it. I always loved music. It was never a snotty or snooty or upper crust thing around my house. It was something my dad and his brother Lionel talked about with so much love. It wasn't just work for them. It was, in a sense, the only thing that they really talked about. They talked about music with love more than they talked about anything.

Did you always want to write music for films?

When I was young, I never wanted to write music for film. I didn't start writing until I was 29. I was studying conducting all through my twenties. I had gone to USC as a violin performance major; then, I got a masters there with Dan Lewis in conducting.

For a while after school, I was just doing studio work playing violin. There got to a point in my life when I wanted to change what I was doing. I wanted to be a conductor, but I wasn't doing what it would take to do that. I was just kind of floating around. I was playing violin, I was making a living and everything, but it wasn't satisfying. And film scoring was an option to me. I just decided to do it, and I made a demo, and went through this three or four year process to get going. It took me a really long time.

WHAT'S YOUR COMPOSING PROCESS NOW? ARE YOU SEQUENCING OR USING PENCIL AND PAPER?

For the past three or four years I've been sequencing. But I've done around 60 films, and about 40 of them I wrote directly with piano, and orchestrated at the same time. I never sketched because I was really sloppy. Sketching was really a hard thing for me to do because no one could ever read it.

SO WHAT IS THE PROCEDURE TODAY?

What I do is start to compose and orchestrate into the Erato software program. Then I have to mock-up up everything for the director. I use Logic Audio to sequence the stuff so people can hear it back. I've got several samplers and synthesizers, so I can get a really good sound here in my studio.

DO YOU PREFER TO WAIT FOR A FINISHED WORK PRINT OR DO YOU LIKE TO GET INVOLVED AT THE SCRIPT LEVEL?

I like to be involved early on, if possible. I have a really good relationship with Danny DeVito. I've done all the films he's directed since *Throw Momma From the Train*, and I generally get involved with those earlier on. In general, at that early stage of production, I find that it's better to be intellectually involved—not to start writing—because things tend to change so much. I find that the scripts are very much rough plans for what the movie is going to be. They very often don't pan out. To see the color, the imagery, and the visual sort of ambience of the whole thing is such a big part of conceiving the music that it is best to wait for the work print before writing. This is especially true today, where often the music that is wanted is just colors and tones—more textures than melodies.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE DOING THE UNDERSCORE FOR *Anastasia*?

I really liked *Anastasia*. I had a great time. I really liked Bluth and Goldman and it was really a fun thing to do. It was scored just like a traditional film. It wasn't quite finished when I got it; it was all animated but it wasn't colorized. So it was all there, a little hard to see, but not really any different from a regular work print.

DID YOU HAVE TO WORK WITH THE SONGWRITERS AT ALL, OR WERE YOU ON YOUR OWN?

I used all material from the songs because I thought that would be the right artistic choice for the movie. That's what my dad (Alfred Newman) would do with all those Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals like *Carousel* and *The King and I*. I really liked how he interwove the score right with the song, and then right out from the song back into the score. It's one of my favorite things. The seamlessness, taking of themes and developing them into other things, and making the movie seem really unified appeals to me a lot.

WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR THOUGHTS AND EXPERIENCES ON WORKING WITH DIFFERENT DIRECTORS?

Some directors are really good to collaborate with, and some aren't. The ones that are good—you don't always know that they're good to begin with—tend to push you in a way that you end up with something better than you would have. My collaborations with DeVito have been really good and he pushed me to do different things. But more often than not, you find directors saying, "This scene doesn't work, let's put some music in it." Then it becomes non-collaborative. It can be okay, but you're not really adding anything, you're just getting from one place to another. Mostly they're looking for you to write a melody they really like.

What do you do when a director hears the mock-ups and doesn't like the direction you've gone?

You just talk to them. Nobody's nasty! But if they say that it's definitely not right, that it just doesn't work, then you must talk to them and listen for clues to tell you what they mean by "doesn't work." They're usually not complicated. Most often, it's something like: It's too fast, or too slow; it's too dark, it's too light; I don't like this instrument, it sounds too sentimental, or it doesn't have enough emotion. It's more stuff like that.

What happens when you get somebody who is not a musician, and can't make the leap from listening to a standard mock-up to envisioning how it will sound with a real orchestra?

You have to explain to them. You have to educate them a little bit. It's surprising, the music is so much cleaner than it used to be. It often translates just fine. I don't find so much that directors are shocked when they hear the orchestra. That's the way it used to be—you'd play it on the piano, and when they heard the orchestra it was a complete shock. Now I find that it translates actually pretty well.

What's worse is the temp-music phenomenon, where they get so in love with the temp track. In fact, they might not even like the temp music, but they are so used to hearing it that anything else is completely jarring to them. That's more difficult to deal with, and they often won't admit it's the temp score because it's so unhip to say that. It means that their movie is just the same as everybody else's movie. But you learn to listen between the lines.

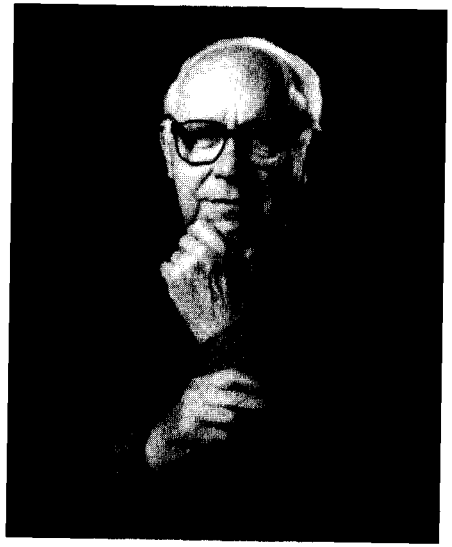
It's like in record production with the "rough mix syndrome." Even if there are wrong notes, they've heard the rough mix so many times, they don't hear them anymore.

Right. It's the same thing. It takes a really strong director to fight that. Most of them, even the strong ones, can't really fight that. With the temp scores they have so much at stake because that's what they use when they preview their movie. There's no scarier time. Because that's when the studio either signs off or doesn't. The scariest time for them is when they are testing their movie.

But as a composer, you have to deal with it. You can't ignore the temp track. Unless you have a really brave director.

Are you content? Do you like doing what you are doing?

You know, I'm not the most calm, contented person in the world. But, composing to me is a relatively new thing. I really love music, and I really like where I am now. It doesn't mean I wouldn't like to do other things, but I really love writing music. I feel that the choice I made to switch from playing to writing was the right thing to do.



David Raksin

David Raksin has been active writing and teaching film music for over 60 years. His first major project was with Charlie Chaplin on *Modern Times*, and he also composed one of the most well-known songs of all time, "Laura," for the movie of the same title. He was one of the most innovative composers in Hollywood during the 1940s, '50s, and '60s; many composers today are still influenced by his scores, as well as his straight forward, honest, and enthusiastic approach to film scoring.

YOU'VE BEEN INVOLVED IN THIS FIELD SINCE 1935, FROM THE EARLIEST DAYS OF FILM SCORING ...

No, no. Remember, there was music in films all the time. As a matter of fact, I remember when it was accompanied by a piano or an organ. Sometimes the organ players were incredibly brilliant.

Later they had orchestras. My father played in one in Philadelphia, and eventually became a conductor of music for silent films. So I was around this stuff from the time I was seven or eight years old. When sound films came in around 1926 things changed. Music became marginally more sophisticated, but not much. Remember there is a tradition around these things, and when one thing moves forward, it doesn't mean everything else does also. When Henry Ford invented the Model T, it didn't mean that horses stopped running around.

THE "ERAS" WE DESIGNATE FOR CLASSICAL MUSIC STYLES ARE LIKE THAT. WE TEND TO WANT TO PUT LINES OF DELINEATION AROUND SIGNIFICANT EVENTS, BUT IT DOESN'T ALWAYS WORK THAT WAY.

Absolutely. The point is that there were composers who carried over from the silent days, as would naturally be the case. They would be accustomed to standing in the pit and playing scores based upon pieces that were already written, which is what my father did. And they brought their own predilections for music, so there was a preponderance of European-derived music. It took a while for things to begin to look up. Eventually, guys like Max Steiner came in, and even though his was a European influence, he started to make some changes. For example, his score to *King Kong* was way ahead of its time. Then Waxman came in, and Korngold came in, and there were a number of other guys.

WHAT WERE THE SCHEDULES LIKE UNDER THE OLD STUDIO SYSTEM?

We did tremendous amounts of music. For instance, when I composed the score for *Forever Amber*, that had about 110 minutes of music—about 100 of those I composed myself. The rest was music of the story's time. Originally I had twelve weeks to do that, but they were messing around with the movie, and by the time they got finished doing that I had eight and a half weeks to do that tremendous amount of music. And I did it!

There were all kinds of crazy things. For instance, one time they were doing a picture called *The Goldwyn Follies*, and George Gershwin was the composer. Right in the middle of it he died, and they brought in Vernon Duke to complete the score. Vernon wrote the various songs, and he also wrote a ballet called *Undine* for the middle of the picture. When Gershwin died, the production had been effectively stopped; the sets were ready, the company was ready, but there was no music for George Balanchine, the choreographer, to work with. So I got a call that afternoon from Eddie Powell to meet him and Hugo Freidhofer at Zardi's Restaurant. After dinner, the three of us went into different rooms at the old

United Artists Studio, and overnight we orchestrated that ballet. That was some job. We got done at 3:00 a.m. and it was recorded later that morning.

How did you break in to working at the studios?

Charlie Chaplin had made a movie called *Modern Times*. He was a violinist, and he had plenty of musical ideas, but he didn't really know how to develop them. So he always had a composer working with him, you know, a real composer.

How did you work with him, did he play and you transcribe?

No. He would have ideas, mostly fragments, and then we would discuss them. And he didn't always like that, so after a week and a half of that he fired me. I was brokenhearted and about to go home, when Alfred Newman [head of music at United Artists] said to me, "Don't go home. I've been looking at what you've been doing with his little tunes, and he'd be crazy to fire you." So I got a call from the head of Charlie's studio and he said, "We want to hire you back." I said, "No way, not unless I can have an understanding with him." And we came to that understanding. I told him that I wouldn't work for him if I was just going to be a yes man, and he accepted my terms. So I worked four and a half months on that. It is a co-composed score, and that's what started me off.

I had all kinds of offers after that. I had one from Steiner, who wanted me to be his assistant, but I didn't want to be anybody's assistant, so I turned it down, went back to New York, then went to Europe and worked on a show. Then I got various offers, so I came back.

Were you contracted to a specific studio?

Oh yes, I had several contracts. I was at Fox for quite a while from around 1937 to 1946 when I left. Before that, for about six months, I was under contract to Universal, but we really couldn't stand one another. I thought that their schlock way of doing things was absolutely indefensible. They were very glad to get rid of me, and I was very glad to get the hell out from under.

I also had a contract for a while at MGM, but that was only because I was broke and needed the money. MGM was a hellhole. It was a place where all the bad things said about Hollywood came close to being true. I think that whether it was conscious or not, they wore composers out by pitting the composers against their system.

I'd like to ask you about the shift away from the European style of composing to a more modern sound that included influences of Bartók, Stravinsky, and others. What was your experience of this change of styles as it was happening?

There were other people that influenced it greatly. Our country had a period where it was the world's leading and greatest source of great melodies. It was a time that began in the early twenties and continued into the middle fifties. That was the time of Jerome Kern, and Harold Arlen, and Richard Rodgers, and George Gershwin. There has never been such a time in the history of music anywhere, and I think it is the great glory of our country when that happened, because there has never been such a flowering anywhere else. So we were all influenced very much by these American composers, and we were also influenced by some of the Russian composers, such as Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Rachmaninoff, and people like that. They wrote a kind of music that deserves respect, and we loved it. We would have been idiots not to be affected by it.

And so generally, I am accused of being the guy that started the change going. I doubt very much that I am, but I was one of the very first to do things a completely different way. For instance, in 1936 or 1937 I was working at Universal, and there was a guy there named Lou Forbes, who was so fascinated with what I was doing that he told his brother Leo Forbstein, who was head of music at Warners. And Leo started to employ me there.

WHAT EXACTLY WERE YOU DOING THAT WAS SO DIFFERENT?

The nature of my music was very different. It had all kinds of other influences because I was a guy who loved the music of our time and I was also a jazz player.

I would go over to Warners on the weekends when I wasn't working at Universal, and I would only do chases and fights. I would never see the rest of the picture. One of those was a 58-second montage of boxing. Later, I actually reorchestrated that piece for Leopold Stokowski, who was working at Universal at that time, and he ended up doing it with the Philadelphia Orchestra a few months later. It was probably the first film piece played by a concert orchestra—a jazz piece in 5/4.

WERE THERE PROBLEMS CONVINCING THE MORE CONSERVATIVE DIRECTORS AND PRODUCERS OF THE VALIDITY OF WHAT YOU WERE DOING?

I was very lucky in that when I was working at Warners, Leo Forbstein was fascinated by what I did. As a matter of fact, I finally got too fascinating for him. I wrote a piece where right in the middle of an *alla breve* meter, I had all these bars of 3/4, and he couldn't conduct it. He asked me if I could, so I did.

WHEN DID YOU FIRST START TO USE ATONAL AND 12-TONE MUSIC?

I used twelve-tone rows here and there. I did a picture at MGM in 1949 or '50 called *The Man With a Cloak*, and the people at MGM utterly hated the score and wanted to throw it out. Johnny Green, the head of music at the studio, said, "Guys, you don't know what you're doing; this is an extraordinary score." It was also done for a crazy little orchestra. And they wouldn't listen. But all of a sudden, the producer of this film said, "There's something remarkable about this score," and they kept the music in, after a second preview.

Man With a Cloak had a 12-tone row, the first five notes of which spelled E-D-G-A-R. The R became D♭. I saw Johnny Green the next day and he said, "Gee that's a remarkable score, what's that crazy god-damned tune you've got there?" And I said, "Johnny, it's a 12-tone row." He was astonished, and wanted to know why I used a row. I told it was because in this picture you don't find out until the last 45 seconds or so that the hero, the man in the cloak, is really Edgar Allan Poe. So I thought I would start the main title with those five notes because I had the vision of Dore Schary, the head of MGM, coming out and saying, "Fire that son-of-a-bitch, he gave away the secret of the picture in the Main Title."

I had a great time doing the things I was doing. Sometimes I was motivated by jazz, sometimes by contemporary music. You would have to be deaf not to feel the enormous effect of the music of Stravinsky. For me, it was Stravinsky and Berg. So I wrote just the way I thought I should be writing. It was not unanimously accepted.

HOW DO YOU SEE THE EVOLUTION OF FILM-SCORING STYLES IN TERMS OF PRODUCERS, DIRECTORS, AND AUDIENCES ACCEPTING NEW SOUNDS?

The interesting thing about film music is that, as a composer, unless you have some idiot for a producer, which happens about two thirds of the time, you can do things that you could never do in a concert hall. There is a counter-validation between the screen and the music. If they heard it in a concert hall, the audience would run screaming, but when they hear it with a picture, the music and the image counter-validate one another. For example, if you have a really violent sequence and you write something that is really dissonant, they might not like to hear that as a piece of music. But they will accept it if it is the right music for a film sequence. That kind of thing opened up the world for a lot of people. So the first generation that was susceptible to films was prepared for newer music by the scores they heard in movie theaters.

AFTER THE SUCCESS OF LAURA, *WERE YOU PLAGUED BY PEOPLE WANTING YOU TO DO IT AGAIN?*

Oh yes, everybody wanted me to write another *Laura*, but I would say, "First you have to make me one."

WITHIN A DECADE AFTER LAURA, TV HAD HIT FULL FORCE. HOW DID THIS AFFECT YOU PERSONALLY?

There were times when I wasn't working anywhere else, and I was lucky to get television. I think I did my first television in 1950 on *Life with Father*. We all preferred film because it was much more civilized. I once described television as an industry where they manufacture debris. Television really is sad, although it employed the talents of some very, very good people. Many good composers did it, including Jerry Goldsmith, John Williams, and Johnny Green.

WHAT IS YOUR COMPOSING PROCESS, HOW DO YOU GENERATE IDEAS?

What I'm trying to do is to catch the spirit of a picture. And that means sometimes I go contrary to what's on the screen, and sometimes I go with what's on the screen. It's a matter of instinct. If your instincts are good, it's going to work for you.

Photo: Dana Ross

Lolita Ritmanis

Composer and orchestrator Lolita Ritmanis has worked on more than 30 films and television shows. She has worked as arranger and orchestrator for Michael Kamen, Basil Poledouris, David Benoit, Shirley Walker, and Mark Snow on such projects as *Lethal Weapon 4*, *X-Files: The Movie*, and *Robin Hood, Prince of Thieves*. She has composed regularly for Warner Bros. animated series, *The New Batman and Superman Adventures*, as well as *Batman Beyond*. Her concert works include choral, solo, ensemble, and orchestral works that have been performed in cities around the world.

WHAT LED YOU TO FILM SCORING?

I grew up in Portland, and the first trip I took down here to Los Angeles was with my parents in my senior year of high school. I had a whole demo tape of songs, and I had stars in my eyes. I wanted the Hollywood experience. I ended up coming down here to go to a small school called The Grove School of Music where I studied jazz arranging and composition. I don't really even know if I ever made a conscious decision, I'm going to be a film composer. I knew I *was* a composer. All my life I was a composer. As a child, when I practiced the piano, I was making up my own little pieces when my mom wasn't looking. After the film-scoring program at Groves I studied composition and orchestration with Mauro Bruno. And I started to get jobs, some more glamorous than others, but to me they were all exciting.

Bruce Babcock gave me a shot at orchestrating a little bit for him on *Matlock*, and that was thrilling. I was also playing in a Top 40 band and working with a community choir. While I was doing all these other things, glad to be making a little bit of money, I got a job at the Warner Bros. music department Xeroxing violin parts. I was thrilled about that. The first day I had to be there, my boss, Joel Franklin, said, "Be here at 9:00 a.m." which is a late call for music library. I was outside the studio gate at about 7:00, with my briefcase and ready to go! From there I progressed to proofreading and orchestrating. All along the way, I had this demo tape I used whenever opportunity presented itself.

As an orchestrator, what is it like working with different composers who have very different working styles? Some give you very complete sketches, and some are bare-bones.

It's very different in each individual situation. There are certainly composers that are incredibly gracious and grateful, and they acknowledge you, even at the scoring date. They might announce to the orchestra, "Oh so-and-so orchestrated this cue. Let's hear it for so-and-so." They sometimes acknowledge the soloists in the orchestra, and the good work of many people involved.

There are some orchestrators that tend to think that, because they have been given only melody and chords, they are writing the music. I'm not one of those. Whatever you're going to hum after hearing a particular cue, that's usually, hopefully, the composer's work. Every situation is different. There are many composers who don't really need an orchestrator—their sketches are absolutely complete. And some of the composers who run into the time crunch are also capable of doing very complete sketches. It is merely that the accelerated post-production schedules often do not leave time for detailed sketching.

I am only recently getting into the world of computers—MIDI files and notation programs. When I'm orchestrating from digital files, first I listen to a DAT that the composer provides, and get a feeling of the music. Then it's my job to translate it to make it

work for the orchestra. And it's really exciting. I don't think that there is even one step in this whole journey that I've been on that I've really just been pulling out my hair, "Oh, how horrible this is." I've really enjoyed a lot of it, most of it, and I feel very fortunate.

Do you still use pencil and paper?

That's my favorite way to work. I can't imagine giving it up. It's so much faster for me. I can see the score right under my hands. If you've done it that way I don't know if you can ever completely switch to computers.

Has digital technology affected the final product?

Yes, and with digital editing for picture, they can makes changes so close up to the last minute, you have to be ready for that, and be able to make changes at the scoring session. It's frustrating though, because many of us try to do things the right way, the proper way, sketch nicely, figure out accurate timings on either Auricle or Performer, and make things right. Not too late, not too early, just right. It can be frustrating when people make changes and your score gets all marked up. A cue gets completely changed around from what you originally thought it would be because the picture has been altered at the last minute.

It sounds like you've come to a place of detachment about the work that you do, knowing that anything could happen to it.

On some of the really high-profile kind of pandemonium moments, you have to be detached. It's part of the job to apply yourself 100%, and let the chips fall where they may. Because if you get too worried about it, it's not going to do anyone any good. You are hired not only for your orchestration abilities, but for your professionalism in stressful situations.

IT MUST BE A REAL THRILL TO HEAR YOUR MUSIC, AS AN ORCHESTRATOR AND AS A COMPOSER, PLAYED BY SUCH INCREDIBLE MUSICIANS.

It is. I forget and sometimes I have to pinch myself and realize "Oh my goodness, this is amazing." These are the best players, and the best sight-readers, in the world. Absolutely the best sight-readers. The mistakes quotient is: there is hardly ever a mistake.

DO YOU ENJOY ORCHESTRATING?

Yes. And I do have to say that I'm not ready to give it up. There usually is a time for a composer where you have to say, "That's enough, I need to be the composer now." But you do say good-bye to quite a bit of income at that point. And I know several people who have done that.

IT'S HARD TO MAKE THE TRANSITION?

Yes, because there are only so many hours in the day. And if you're orchestrating on a feature for a couple weeks, that's full time. If you're under a deadline as a composer, that's full time. What to do? There are only 24 hours in a day.

There are people who will swear to you that if you're a TV composer you'll never get to do features. "Don't do this and don't do that." Well, it's hard because when a gig comes along and it's offered to you, and you have a chance to use your craft and your skills and do something other than waiting tables. And if it's in TV, why not?

DOES BEING A WOMAN IN THIS BUSINESS ENTER INTO THE EQUATION AT ALL?

I do know that, for me as a woman composer, sometimes there has been a request made, "We want a tape from a woman composer." That's been something that people say I should play up more. I should market myself because I'm a woman composer. I have yet to this day, to my face, been discriminated against because of that.

I think that 10 years ago, 15 years ago, there was much more a big deal made out of "Oh, so-and-so is a woman composer." So I do have to thank my predecessors for paving the way.

I think women sometimes get an edge because there are a lot of woman producers and directors out there. But it's still in this phase where some women directors and producers that have climbed up to a pretty high level don't want to be told they should use a woman composer. There's a little of this backlash. Once somebody recommended that I contact this particular woman composer, not Shirley Walker, and she was quite offended that this person said I should call her based on the fact that we're both women composers. She said something like, "What, why does he think I can do something for you just because I'm a woman?"

BUT THAT'S JUST A BACKLASH.

I don't even think about it that much. I think the bigger issue is your family life and how much time you dedicate to making your career happen versus living your life. I mean, at five o'clock, there's not a bell that rings and your career goes on hold. For me, family comes first.

DO YOU THINK THAT PROBLEMS EXIST IN A DIFFERENT DIMENSION FOR YOU AS A WOMAN THAN IT WOULD FOR MEN WITH FAMILIES?

It did more when my kids were babies. My children go to school now. It's a little different from when the kids were infants. I mean, who wants to take a breast pump to Warner Bros. for a session? And tell people you need to pump your milk during a ten-minute break. But I know session players who do it. It's part of life. There are things to consider. Marriage, having a healthy marriage has helped me a great deal. But it takes time. It takes maybe losing a gig here and there, or altering a plan to make it work. For example, during this last Christmas break I was orchestrating a television movie for David Benoit and the deadline kept getting moved. At first it was going to be right before Christmas, and everything would have been wrapped up nice and tidy so I could have my break. Well, it

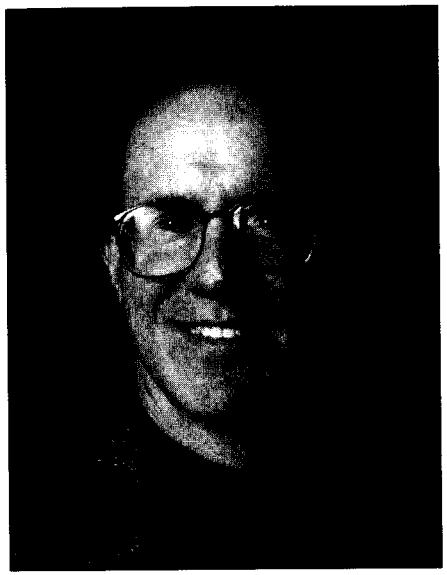
didn't happen that way. I took my Omnifax with me up to Portland to my parent's house. It was snowing the next day, and it was very surreal to be working where I grew up, and having this fax machine and a PowerBook with MIDI files. The kids are playing out in the snow, and Mom's in headphones trying to orchestrate some music and then fax it back to L.A. so it can get copied.

ARE YOU HAPPY WITH WHERE YOU ARE AT AS A COMPOSER?

A personal goal for me is to allow my voice to be heard, and to never stop learning and growing. I've had many great opportunities, and very few regrets. It is easy to sometimes disappear in the Hollywood film-music machine and to forget how wonderful it is to write music—just for the love of writing music.

As a composer it's important to let yourself write what comes to you, and write what inspires you. And not belittle that because people are telling you, "It has to be this way, it has to be that way. You should be doing this, or how can you do that?" You don't have to be what everybody tells you that you have to be. You choose much of your path, I believe.

This business is very exciting, and the people that discourage new composers or any composers that want to come out and give it a try, I think they're wrong. If you want to do it, you can do it. You just have to work really, really hard and be patient. And find little things along the way that will boost your spirits. There are plenty of little things out there, not just the big movies.



William Ross

William Ross is a composer whose work spans feature films, television, and the recording industry. He has composed music for films including *Tin Cup*, *My Fellow Americans*, *The Evening Star*, *The Little Rascals*, and the IMAX film *T-Rex*. His orchestration credits include *Forrest Gump*, *Contact*, *Mouse Hunt*, *The Bodyguard*, *Waiting to Exhale*, and *Father of the Bride*. He continues to work with a remarkable list of artists including Barbra Streisand, Celine Dion, Kenny G., David Foster, and Babyface.

HOW DID YOU DECIDE TO BECOME A FULL-TIME MUSICIAN AND ULTIMATELY A FILM COMPOSER?

I grew up studying piano, and I was fascinated by it, but I never had any notion that you could do that for a living. My parents were very blue-collar, and from the wrong side of the tracks. The notion of making a living at anything other than work—hard work—was ridiculous. My Mom wanted me to go to college, and my Dad wanted me to go into the Merchant Marines and be the captain of a ship. I decided to go to UCSB where I was pre-med—I always had a fascination with sciences. But there was so much that went on with my life at college—socially, intellectually, personally—trying to figure out, "Oh, wait a minute, now I'm away from home, what is life about, how do I orient myself in this world and make confident decisions for myself in the present and future?" I just kind of broke down. I got to the point where I couldn't go to the labs anymore. The smell of ether just nauseated me. Chemistry class ... just the thought of it ...

I was playing blues piano at fraternities and having fun with it. But I got to the point where I was so unable to determine what step I should take next, that I almost had a nervous breakdown. I came to the conclusion that I have to do today what I really enjoy doing. It sounds like a weird approach, but that's how I got out of it. I didn't look much further beyond "today." Then the next day was great, and I just built on that, one day at a time.

I spoke to a counselor at the school, and knew that there wasn't much future in being a blues piano player. Eventually I switched my major to Anthropology, which is what I got my degree in. So, I'm licensed to dig up your bones!

How did you educate yourself and go from blues piano player to orchestrator?

Just because of the way my mind works, I'm kind of an analytical guy; my way of studying was to get scores and look at them and break them apart. And there was an interesting thing I found. One of the things composers in European conservatories had to do in the past was to be able to write certain key pieces by memory. Like a piece from the *Art of the Fugue* or *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. Many composers mention this thing: that the act of writing it down somehow transformed them. Prokofiev, Ravel, and Mendelssohn all mention it in their writings. Something happens when you are actually forced to sit and write it down; the information comes in and is ordered in a way that you mentally have access to it. When you just buy the book and stick it on your shelf, you don't get the same familiarity with it.

I strongly believe that there is a lot of benefit in trying to understand what has come before, what makes something a masterpiece, what makes something valuable to so many people over a long period of time. I would study anything I could get my hands on. Ravel, Beethoven.

I would also take a piece and make myself write something in that style. Ravel talks about taking a great piece as a model being a legitimate way to improve your abilities and skills. Find great pieces, use them as models, and they will pull you up to their level.

How did you get your first orchestration jobs?

Allyn Ferguson got me my first job arranging and conducting for Raquel Welch, and I started getting credits writing charts. I did whatever I could to study film scores in my spare time. My first job orchestrating was for *Dynasty*, a job which came through a friend. Then I hooked up with Dennis McCarthy and started working on *MacGyver*. What a school that was! Dennis was terrific. He would let you take the ball and run with it and compose the cues, and he'd give you full writing credit. So then I had composition and orchestration credit.

I started to get a reputation as a guy who could get the job done and not create problems. The name of the game is to be a problem solver, not a problem creator. That is what a film composer is looking for. The composer wants to be able to say, "I've got so much on my mind, if I can just hand this to this guy and know it's going to work," that's what they're all looking for. There's this giant level of trust. If you get on that list of people that are easy to get along with, does the job, is not a jerk, and can deliver, then your name gets around.

What is the process for you as an orchestrator?

After I get the call, usually the first step is that a meeting is set up. The challenge is to understand the composer's working style, and to figure out how I'm going to fit into that. The composer may know exactly what they want and hand me a sketch where I'm just going to just transfer the notes onto a different sheet of paper and send it to the copyist. Or they may really need a lot of help because they don't have an orchestral background and that's what they've been asked to do. The first thing is to identify what the job really is. That is a big part of it.

Once you identify what the job is, you have to figure out if this job is for you. Are you comfortable doing it? Your pay thing has to work out. Usually when you first start out, you're so glad to be in the meeting and get the credit that the pay is kind of meaningless. My recommendation is to get that taken care of ahead of time. It took me a long time to learn this, but there is nothing wrong with talking about the money.

LET'S TALK ABOUT YOUR COMPOSING PROCESS. DO YOU WRITE TO PAPER, OR ARE YOU SEQUENCING?

That depends on the nature of the score. I relate best to paper. My set-up at home has a lot of different areas to it. My central core is the piano, a piece of paper, and a pencil. I like a period of time when I can sit and germinate ideas, and think about it in an unhurried fashion. Ideally, a week is paradise. Sometimes you get more, most of the time you get less, depending on the schedules.

Those ideas filter through in various ways. I could use a piano, or synthesizers. Auricle is also a great tool, whether it's click or free timing. It's a great way to get the streamers to film. I also have this Erato system, which is a computerized notation system.

WHAT ABOUT THE "MOVE TO L.A." ISSUE FOR YOUNG COMPOSERS?

That's a tough one, and one that I address with a lot of empathy. Most people are driven to this business out of love for music and film; they're not out to get rich, at least when they start. It's a hard thing to come out here, with the uncertainties of the business, to uproot yourself, to challenge yourself. To me, anyone who does that is a success no matter what happens. I say that with utmost sincerity. I've had people call me after years of being out here, they had kicked around the business, they did the best they could, and they were out of money. Or just fed up. And it broke my heart to hear them say they were leaving, they were calling to say goodbye.

I think we are in a business where you are a person first, and somewhere down the line you are a composer. But the top of the list for me is what kind of person you are, how you treat people, do you get along with people. That's got to be in place. So I approach it from the human point of view. That being said, the reality is that most of the people in the business are here in Los Angeles. So it's really an unanswerable question.

Alan Silvestri

Alan Silvestri has provided a distinct melodic voice for many of Hollywood's most well-known films. Starting out as a guitar player, his first regular scoring gig was for the network television series, *CHiPs.* He received Oscar and Golden Globe nominations for his score to *Forrest Gump* and has scored over 60 films, including *Contact, Romancing the Stone, Who Framed Roger Rabbit?, The Bodyguard, Father of the Bride I* and *II, Practical Magic, The Parent Trap*, and the *Back to the Future* series.

How did you get started writing for films?

I had gone to Berklee, got a gig touring, and through a long series of chance events ended up in L.A. My first film happened because of a case of mistaken identity.

I was working with a lyricist as an arranger on a number of songs. He got called to do this film, *The Doberman Gang*, because the producers misread the credits (he was an academy-award nominated lyricist) and mistook him for a film composer. The lyricist in turn called me and asked if I was interested. I said yes, even though I knew nothing about film scoring. This was all happening really fast, and my meeting with the producers was the very next day. So I went out and bought Earl Hagen's book, *Scoring for Film*, and read it cover to cover that night. When I went to this meeting and we watched the film, I found that I had strong opinions about what the music should be. They liked my ideas, and I got the gig. I was a film composer!

My first big break came a few years later, when I came home one day and there was a message from a Harry Lojewski at MGM. So I called this man, a very nice guy, and I said, "What's up Mr. Lojewski?" He said, "Well, there's this show here at the studio, it's been around for a season, it showed promise, but we couldn't say that it did well and the people at the studio here want to take a different approach to it. They've hired a new staff, and they've asked me to find a young guy who can do the score for this show."

Now, this was in the middle of the disco craze, and I had rather long hair, I was about 28, I probably weighed about 120 lbs., I looked perfect. I looked perfect! I'm not some old establishment guy, or any of that; I'm a young guy who's a rhythm-section player.

It turns out that the show he was talking about was CHiPs. They really wanted to see if they could do a disco thing. So I wrote a score for that first episode of their second season—the one where they put Eric Estrada in a John Travolta suit and send him to the disco. Lo and behold, this show takes off almost immediately. I get a call from them that they want me to do the next three episodes, and this was like the end of the world to my wife Sandra and I because this is the closest thing to a steady job in show business that I've ever heard of. So that's how that all came about.

Your connection with Robert Zemeckis seems to be very special. How did it come about?

Well, that's kind of interesting. I had done CHiPs for four years, and then it abruptly ended. I was out of work for almost a year, and was starting to go a little crazy. I did a couple of TV episodes for a show that the producers hated, and I started to wonder if I really was going to continue in this business.

In addition, I had a house, and a baby that literally had just arrived! Not only that, but when I got the news about them not caring for the music for the television show, my baby was in intensive care, and we were on the verge of losing her. I got the message while I was in the hospital, if that's not too dramatic for you.

So, after this year of nothing, I was thinking, "It can't get any worse than this." But I get a call one day about writing a piece of spec music for a new series at Warner Bros. I went to see the show, called *Blue Thunder*, and walked out of the theater realizing that I didn't even have a way to go about making a spec piece of music. I had a 2-track tape recorder. How could I even do this without spending a bunch of money? Money I didn't have. So the revelation was, if I'm going to try to make a go of this music thing, I need to find a way to show what I can do. At this point in the mid-'80s, things were just starting to happen in the electronic-music world.

My wife and I had a family meeting, and we decided that I should go out and buy the latest technology: a DX-7, which had only been out a few months and came with a Japanese manual, an 8-track tape recorder, and a Linn drum machine.

So now I've got these three pieces of gear, and one Friday afternoon the phone rings. It's Tom Carlin, who was the music editor on CHiPs. He says, "Al, would you be interested in doing something on spec?" I said, "Absolutely." He then says, "Okay, here's the deal. These guys have a movie. They've listened to a lot of tapes of people, and they still haven't found anything that they feel really works for them. If you'd be interested to try something, then let me introduce you to somebody. The director is a guy named Bob Zemeckis and the film is called *Romancing the Stone*."

So Zemeckis told me about this one scene where they are running through the jungle and it's raining and they're trying to get away from the Federales. I got off the phone, I walked into my new studio. What I had staring in front of me was an 8-track machine, a Linn Drum machine, a DX-7. I'm not a piano player. I had no board to mix with, no work-print to see the film, and I had to bring them a tape the next morning!

I spent all night on this; I actually mixed it by making the RCA cables longer if I wanted a certain track softer. I didn't have to get up the next morning, because it *was* morning, and all I had to do is walk out to the car. I got to the studio and the first thing that

happened was that Tom wanted to listen to the cassette, because he had recommended me, now he's on the line. Next thing I know, Bob Zemeckis marches in with his editor. The great coincidence in this story is that Bob and I were wearing the identical Calvin Klein sweater. It was kind of like an omen. It was the beginning of what I consider to be one of my great friendships.

DID THEY OFFER YOU THE GIG RIGHT THEN AND THERE?

No. Michael Douglas, who starred and produced the movie, called me that night. He asked me to send a demo reel. It's kind of interesting that when you're doing this job, you're selling your product, but you're also selling yourself. What counts the most is the impression that people have of you, the level of trust that they have in you, and everything else that goes with it.

The second I hung up the phone that night I realized that I had failed Marketing 101. Even though I felt incredibly empowered and confident that I could get work with my new gear to demo stuff, I was still going up against guys that had more impressive credit sheets and recording histories. I understood, at that point, that the phone call wasn't enough, what I needed to do was get into a room with Michael. That was my only hope.

I somehow got in touch with him, and told him I was going to be nearby Fox the next day and could drop the tape off, as opposed to sending it. He said, "Well, what time are you coming by Fox tomorrow." And I said, "Anytime you want!" Now, Michael is the kind of guy who appreciates somebody who's trying to extend himself for something that he really wants. He said "Okay Al, why don't you come to my office at 11 o'clock tomorrow." So that's what I did. I walked in and brought these tapes. Michael was incredibly gracious to me, and we had the meeting, but the most important thing was that I got to be in the room with him. Whether it was that afternoon or the following day, I don't remember, but the call came through, and I was hired by Michael Douglas to do *Romancing the Stone*.

Let's talk a bit about some of your more recent work. There is one scene in Forrest Gump *that is intriguing: When young Forrest is running from the bad kids who are throwing rocks at him, and his leg braces go flying off.*

That is a really interesting cue from several perspectives. The start of that cue was a decision. Many people, including myself, may have started that cue when we first saw the bad boys, they may have started that cue when the rock hit Forrest's head, they may have started that cue after Jenny said, "Run." I didn't want to just jump in there with music. It deserved more than that. So, the question really was, What's this cue ultimately going to be about?" Well, that cue is ultimately about the celebration of someone who thought they had an infirmity, and to their surprise, they discovered that they didn't. When you consider what to do with the music on that level, all bets are off on the obvious stuff.

The cue basically comes in out of nowhere. He's already started to run, but that's okay because this isn't a running cue; this is a cue about the awakening of a realization in Forrest that something he thought was an infirmity, in fact, doesn't exist. Of course, we as an audience are seeing what's going on, we're seeing that this kid can move, we're seeing the braces come off, and we're way ahead of the game. We are getting all this, and were are smart folks. So, the music isn't about the audience seeing that this kid's gonna be able to run without braces; the music is about this kid discovering that he's already been running, and he doesn't need the braces. That's really the emotional release of this whole thing.

That's why the big musical moment has to be on the shot where he looks up with a smile that would just knock people down from coast to coast; this kid has just realized that he does not have this infirmity. That's when we start to celebrate. Boom, we blow the top off of it right then and there. Everything to that point has been a build-up to his awakening to that realization. Physically, then we cut back to the adult Forrest on the bench, and he says, "From that day on, if I was going somewhere, I was running!"

There's a cue in Contact, *when she first hears the "sound," and she arrives in the lab. At that point, the music fades out to silence and it's very effective.*

That cue in the lab starts to wind down with the physical action. She arrives in the room after frantically driving back to the lab and running up the stairs. She's not running anymore, but the tension is still there. We're building to the moment where we first hear the signal in the lab. So, the music has been very active while she is driving and running, but gradually chills out when she returns to the room with her colleagues and all those computers.

So you're talking about contrast here.

Contrast, absolutely. That's one of the things that you have to understand about silence. Silence is like any other sense perception, whether it's sight, taste, touch, sound, or whatever it is. If those organs are being stimulated, they are less responsive to a more subtle stimulation. So this is a perfect example. If we are about to introduce a character, and in this case "the sound" is an authentic character, we don't want people's auditory sensibilities to shut down before the introduction.

What are the qualities of a great film composer?

A film composer needs to understand that this is not music for its own sake, but it is music for a collaborative art. For me, a great film composer is always someone who not only has musical talent, but also a talent for telling a story with music. This is what makes film scoring a unique musical expression. It's all about how the composer can assist the telling of the story as well as write great music.

Mark Snow

Mark Snow is an eclectic composer who has become most well known for his music to the *X-Files* television series. His music for *X-Files* has been nominated for two Emmy's, which bring his total number of nominations—for both orchestral and electronic scores—to eight. Since moving to L.A. in 1974, Mark has scored over 70 television movies, as well as hundreds of weekly episodes for shows such as *Millennium, Hart To Hart*, and *Crazy Like a Fox.*

LET'S TALK A BIT LITTLE BIT ABOUT WHAT GOT YOU INTERESTED IN FILM SCORING.

I went to Juilliard where the oboe was my major instrument and the composing was just something off to the side. But I was very much interested in modern music—this is in the '60s in New York. I never thought about film music as being a good place for really out-there music; I thought it was all songs and schmaltzy love themes and stuff. Then I heard Jerry Goldsmith's *Planet of the Apes* score, which was 12-tone or avant-garde, and way out there for its time. That was really exciting to me and I thought, "Oh man, this is great, I want to do this." I loved that music and that was really the beginning of my interest in it.

SO HOW DID YOU MAKE THE LEAP FROM BEING A STUDENT AT A CONSERVATORY TO ENDING UP WRITING FOR FILM AND TV?

Well, my roommate in high school and Juilliard was Michael Kamen, and we put together this rock 'n roll band called the New York Rock and Roll Ensemble that played classical music and rock 'n roll. Not a group like Procol Harem, where they combined both styles—we'd play just straight classical and straight rock 'n roll. It was a big deal at the time.

I played drums and oboe in the band, and Michael played keyboard and oboe. We had five albums out. We stayed together for five years, never really had a hit record and weren't one of the big bands, but it was a fun five years. The important thing is that during that time, we all got to hear more about pop music and the music business, and I felt I had much more in me than just being a player. My wife's family was in the business; some of them still are. She suggested, "Why don't we go out to California, and they could introduce you to people, and you could do your thing out there?" So, I decided to take a chance. I had no job in California, nothing, maybe a thousand dollars. We took our two kids, piled into a car, and when we got to California her father helped us out a little bit. Six months after I got there, I got a job doing an episode of a TV series called *The Rookies.* That's where it started for me. I did another episode, and another one, and then I worked a lot for Aaron Spelling in the early days.

HOW DID YOU LEARN THE TECHNICAL STUFF?

Well, first of all, these were the days before anything electronic. No computers were ever happening then. This was click tracks, frames per minute, Moviolas—no videotape, and really detailed spotting notes. I was able to meet some other composers through some friends and they told me what was up with this stuff and how it's done. I remember my first scoring session. I made all the typical mistakes that newcomers do, where you write all these fragments. When you're starting off, you're so nervous about doing a good job that you think you have to catch all the action. So it sounds like a bad temp score where it's just these little fragments all over the place. That's what separates the men from the boys, when you can write a good piece of music that makes linear sense and also works with the picture.

So it took me a while to get that concept. I overwrote way too much and I was actually fired off a few jobs, which really made me

think, What the hell am I doing wrong? I realized there are many, many more approaches than my limited ones at the time, and I started listening like crazy to other film composers and TV composers. That really opened my mind to try new things. I think that was a very important part of my development.

IT SOUNDS ALMOST LIKE YOU NEEDED TO GET FIRED OFF THOSE JOBS AND TAKE A LOOK AROUND.

Absolutely, that's right, because I was getting comfortable and complacent and people were telling me, "You're the greatest." And then one day some producer comes in, he hears it and says, "This sucks, we're getting someone else, you're out!" So, it was a really great learning experience and a good wake-up call.

HOW DO YOU RELATE WITH DIRECTORS AND PRODUCERS WHO ARE NOT MUSICALLY KNOWLEDGEABLE?

In the mid '80s the home studio thing was just starting up, and I bought a Synclavier. When that happened, it was a magical, wonderful learning experience for me because then people could come over and hear the score and make their comments. I learned so much from these people who know nothing about music. It didn't matter that they weren't musicians; they were talking about the drama and the emotional elements of the story. They would say, "Take this out, oh no that's fine, but take out the piano, or try it without the bass," and I would say to myself, "That won't work." Then I'd look at it again and say, "Oh my God, he's right, that's great!" So these people who came in and told me; "I don't know anything about music, but ..."—it never ticked me off. I always thought I could learn something from these guys.

SO, YOU REALLY LEARNED TO LISTEN TO OTHER PEOPLE EVEN IF INITIALLY YOU HAD A DIFFERENT POINT OF VIEW?

Yes. My personality in general is very cooperative and collaborative. I wasn't one with some huge ego who would tell people they were wrong, and it had to be my way. It was important for me to

make the people feel comfortable, and that I would basically be doing what they wanted me to do. I might have gone a little overboard in that department when I was younger but it served me well at the time. The wonderful thing about what I'm doing now is that there is much more respect. They now ask me what I think, and often defer to that.

WHAT IS YOUR COMPOSING PROCESS?

With the *X-Files* and this *Millennium* show I do, I just sit here and basically improvise with the picture. These improvisations start to take shape, I start to add more instruments so it sounds less like an improvisation and more like a thought-out piece of music, but nothing is written down. I feel very comfortable with it, the results have been very good, it seems to get better all the time, and people dig it.

DO YOU START WITH A MUSICAL IDEA FOR EACH EPISODE THAT YOU FOLLOW THROUGH? DO YOU SCORE THE FIRST SCENE FIRST?

Most of the time, I actually score the last scene first because it seems to have the most music in it and the most stuff going on. It is usually a full piece with different themes and different rhythms and so on. Then I can pull that apart and go backwards and start at the beginning with smaller variations of that big piece. Usually, the last act of these things tends to be more active and more fleshed out dramatically, so then when you do that, it's easier to go backwards and pull things out

WHAT WAS THE CREATION OF THE X-FILES THEME LIKE?

With the *X-Files* theme, Chris Carter, who is very much of a control guy, wanted input on this. He sent over a ton of CDs, a very eclectic group of CDs—rock 'n roll, Philip Glass, classical, jazz, rock—and told me exactly what he liked in each one.

So I did a first version that was okay, but looking back on it, I'd say this is was too predictable, nothing special, kind of loud and fast. Chris gave his feedback, and I tweaked it. So this happened two or

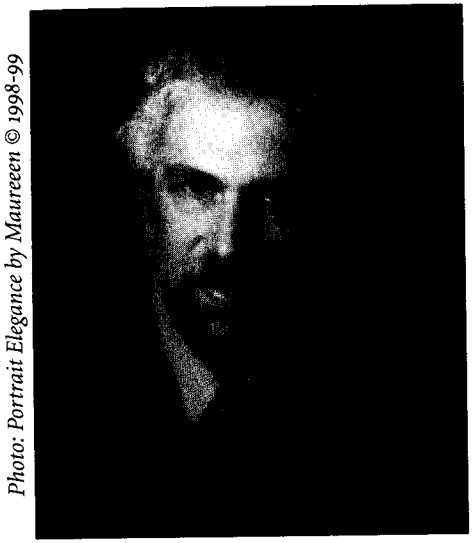
three more times. He was very nice, but not quite satisfied, and I wasn't too happy with it either, so I finally said, "Listen, let me just try something on my own. Why don't you go away for a few days and let me see what I can come up with." That's when it started to happen. I put my hand on the keyboard, I had that Echoplex sound. It was there by accident and it sounded like a good accompaniment thing. I knew he didn't like harmony, I knew he liked very minimal sounding things, so I just put this bed, that accompaniment rhythm underneath. I had a melody and was searching for something really weird or interesting, or anti-thematic, whatever you want to call it. I tried every kind of voice imaginable, I tried woodwinds, saxes, guitars, and came upon this whistle thing for the melody, and it seemed just perfect.

DO YOU GET A LOT OF SATISFACTION OUT OF THIS KIND OF SHOW?

I do actually, because the shows are so great. *X-Files* has done so well, it's like doing a mini-movie, and no one tells me not to do anything, so I keep trying. I get a new sandbox, I try new stuff. I'll buy a CD of samples of crazy things, I try it. I got one the other day of nothing but gongs. All kinds of gongs, processed gongs, electronic gongs ...

DO YOU HAVE ADVICE FOR YOUNG COMPOSERS JUST STARTING OUT?

The most important thing is a love for it, a fascination, a desire, a love and feel for music. It takes someone who is passionate about film music, who can go to a movie and hear how some music works with the picture and just think, Oh God, that is so cool, I wanna do it. That's the first thing. The second thing—if you have any relatives who know anyone—that's the next part. And if you don't have that, you just go to where the work is, and unfortunately, it's in ugly Hollywood. You knock on every door and you're merciless, you keep persevering like crazy and pray, and one out of ten guys who come to town make it. I don't know, maybe 1 out of 100. Maybe 1 out of 4. I don't know what the exact ratio is but it's not that promising, which is the reality. So just having the desire or being super-talented is not necessarily going to do it. It's having that, plus some good luck and some good breaks.



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Richard Stone

Winner of five Emmy awards for his television music, Richard Stone is best known for his themes and background scores for Warner Bros. cartoons *Animaniacs, Pinky and the Brain,* and the *Sylvester and Tweety Mysteries.* After receiving a degree in music from the University of Indiana, he migrated to Los Angeles and worked as orchestrator and music editor for many film and television projects, including *Witness, Agnes of God, Ferris Bueller's Day Off,* and *Pretty in Pink.*

HOW DID YOU GET STARTED IN SCORING FOR ANIMATION?

I started out as a music editor, and learned on the way. I did some ghost writing and orchestrating at the same time as I was editing, and I gradually got my feet wet. Then around 1990, *Tiny Toons* was starting up. Bruce Broughton gave me a chance to score one of those, and I've been working exclusively at Warner Brothers ever since.

I became a supervising composer at Warner Bros., and *Tiny Toons* was eventually succeeded by *Animaniacs, Pinky and the Brain, Freakazoid,* and *The Sylvester and Tweety Mysteries.* Now we're doing a show called *Histeria.*

LET'S TALK ABOUT YOUR PROCESS FROM WHEN YOU FIRST RECEIVE THE SHOW RIGHT UP TO THE RECORDING SESSION.

It's like anything else. We still sit with the producer and have a spotting session. In our case, the music is wall-to-wall; it's not a case of where the music starts and stops, as it would be in a feature

film or a live action television show. In our shows the music never stops. The question is always about musical style and what specific things we're going to hit, how loudly, and with what instrumentation. We might talk about which public domain tunes we will use.

The style we use is an extension of Carl Stalling's animation style that he started in the '30s and '40s. I've done a lot of research and study of his work. They have a lot of his scores at the USC archive where they keep old things from Warner Bros. So what we do is an outgrowth of his style that tries to stay in sync with as many things on screen as we can: characters walking across the screen with pizzicato celli and a bassoon, if a boulder falls on somebody it will have a piano glissando on it, the xylophone eye-blink, and all the rest of those clichés. We also try to do musical puns with folk songs—PD tunes that we can use. We quote from the classical literature all the time.

What is the schedule like on these shows?

We have about two weeks to write 20 minutes of music. I say "we" because I can't do this all myself; I supervise a team of composers. If everybody is healthy, each person can manage between two to four minutes per day. We all either work at home or in rented offices.

We get timing notes from the music editor via e-mail. Most of us use the *Cue* software for timing notes. We also use *Performer*. I will take timing notes written in *Cue*, and create a tempo map, which is a specific tempo and a bar layout with meter changes, if necessary. I then export that as a MIDI file and bring it back up in *Performer*. Then I watch it in sync to the video with an audible click-track so I can hear the dialogue and the click while I watch the scene. As I watch it, the music starts to appear in my head and I'll write it out on a six- to eight-line sketch that is very specific as to instrumentation. I write out every note, every voicing; it is an elaborate sketch. Then I'll fax that sketch to the orchestrator who will write out each individual part on a full score. He sends that to the copyist, and then we have the recording session.

How is this process different from the way Carl Stalling would have worked fifty years ago?

Aside from the technology and the fact that he had an office on the lot at Warner Bros. where he went every day, the musical process is not different at all. He sat at a piano. Most people don't know this, but he never saw the cartoon he was scoring. He scored from exposure sheets. These sheets laid out the action on paper. The director would decide, for instance, how fast a character was walking, and would have this very elaborate sheet saying, for example, "Daffy is walking across the street taking a step every eight frames." This information would be copied onto the exposure sheet giving Stalling a description of all the action and the frame measurements of all the action. That is what he wrote to.

In addition, all the tempos that he used were in even frames because they ran from an optical click loop, and if you look at his scores most of them will say 10-0, 8-0, 12-0, whatever.

When you have as many as 30 or 40 hits in a 30-second cue, how do you handle that, both musically and in terms of the click?

I often use a variable click. The art of writing for animation is in keeping the music musical, and still hitting the things that need to be hit without being choppy. I've found that sometimes in an effort to hit everything, people come out with something that is meaningless mush. Then it's not entertaining anymore. It becomes like musical sound-effects and that's what you don't want to do.

What you want to do is create a cue to be a piece of music with a beginning, a middle, and an end where every note means something. This will depend on the way things are animated. For instance, if a character gets hit on the head with twelve anvils one after another, they will usually be evenly spaced apart—each anvil hit will be 8, 10, 12 frames apart. You can take the rhythm of that and make it into a piece of music. That's a trick that you can use to make the music really live.

So, you are actually composing forward and backward from one pivotal moment?

Yes, that is one possibility. But you can also design your cues so that the start of your new cue is on the first anvil hit, for instance. This will make it even more in sync.

What is it like to be the supervising composer overseeing a whole team of people?

I have the advantage of being able to cast each segment according to each composer's strength. For instance, some composers handle adventure better than comedy. The disadvantage is that I have to take the responsibility for every cue, whether it works for the producer or not. But I have had the privilege of working with the best group of composers in the universe!

At the peak, when we had three or four different series going, we had five or six composers working steadily, as well as orchestrators. It's actually very similar to the old "studio system," where someone like Max Steiner would have an office at Warner Bros. right near the scoring stage, and next to him would be other composers and orchestrators. What we do today is the closest thing to that, including our wonderful orchestra, who, although they are not under contract as in the old days, are basically the same people week after week.

How does the music on some of the other cartoon shows today differ from what you do?

Well, for example, on *Superman* or *Batman*, they don't approach those shows as a comedic cartoon. That's why it works so well, it's very serious business. They choose what they are going to hit very carefully, much the way you would in scoring a feature. Similarly, the people that do the big Disney features, even the comedies, are not hitting eye-blinks. They are painting with a much broader brush.

What advice do you have for the beginning film composer?

My advice is familiar: compose, compose, compose! Have your music recorded whatever way possible. Score student films, plays, local commercial spots, anything. It also helps to befriend a working composer and try to arrange a situation where you're assisting him or her in some way. You can also learn a lot simply by hanging out at recording sessions.

Photo: Dana Ross Photo

Shirley Walker

Shirley Walker began her film music career as orchestrator, conductor, and synthesist on such films as *Apocalypse Now*, *Batman*, *Days of Thunder*, *A League of Their Own*, *Backdraft*, *The Black Stallion*, and *True Lies*. She has gone on to compose original music for films such as *Escape From L.A.*, *Turbulence*, and *Batman: Mask of the Phantasm*. Walker has written the scores to many television movies and series, including *Batman*, *Superman*, *China Beach*, and *Space: Above and Beyond*.

YOU BEGAN AS A CONCERT AND JAZZ PIANIST AND YOU HAVE A CLASSICAL MUSIC BACKGROUND. HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED IN FILM COMPOSING?

My very first film experience was industrial scores. And it was fascinating to me. The whole concept of putting music to image was something I just lusted for. I certainly didn't know what I was doing. I didn't have any craft back then. I just had my raw ability as a person who could imagine and create. Because of my training, I knew how to work with other instruments. So I didn't have any problems of getting a recording session done.

DID THAT FIRST PROJECT GO SMOOTHLY?

It was just unbelievable that somebody was going to pay me money to record the music for the film. There was one problem, though. I didn't know it could help to play the music for him in advance of the session, and he didn't know to ask me anything about what it was going to sound like. And at first, the director just hated it. He didn't want to tell me at that time because we were friends and he had been coming regularly to my jazz-trio gig in Haight Ashbury. Then he listened to a cassette of the score for about a week, and he fell passionately in love with it—he just couldn't stop listening to it. He told me all of this way after the fact—how when he heard the way the music sounded he just couldn't imagine it working for the film. Then he finally saw it all put together, and just thought that it was wonderful.

WHAT WAS YOUR MUSICAL TRAINING?

My high-school band teacher had me writing for our jazz band. He also had me transcribing stuff. Count Basie arrangements. Oscar Peterson and Art Tatum solos. What wonderful training. Then I went to San Francisco State College for two years and studied classical composition and performance, but I was too shy for college! Of course, things have progressed since then, or I certainly couldn't be doing what I am doing now.

WHAT HAPPENED AFTER THAT FIRST INDUSTRIAL FILM?

I did some other projects like that, some jingles, and continued playing. My big break was doing some synthesizer stuff and orchestrating for the Francis Ford Coppola projects *Apocalypse Now* and *The Black Stallion*. Then there was a chain of events where one person led to another. On the Coppola projects I met Dan Carlin, Jr., who was conducting the orchestra for some of the stuff I had written. He introduced me to an agent, and I ended up on a TV series. I was very, very fortunate.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT SYNTHESIZERS TODAY?

If you want to work in the business today, you have to have some technology. There's no way around it unless you're way at the top of things and you just hire it.

I enjoy it now because I finally have gotten good enough with the sequencers and the recording technology to where I can create

electronic music that has the same kind of emotional whole that I know how to get with a live orchestra. But I hated it until I got it to this point. At first, I was anti-technology. I resented the notion that I had acquired all these skills as a creative music being, and then here's this whole other thing that comes along that I don't know anything about. People who had those toys were making inroads on the turf that I was establishing myself on. So I had years and years of resenting technology. Now I'm more comfortable.

Do you always do mock-ups?

That's such a fascinating area because every film production group that you work with has had different experiences with the mock-ups. For some people, I sit at the piano, I play and sing, and that's enough for them. Other people want to look at every single note. I play a fully-orchestrated sequence for them, and they go, "What's that thing that sounds like an organ, we're not going to have an organ here, are we?" Of course, it's just a synth string pad, and then you've got to talk them through the music.

Here is a good story: I was doing *Turbulence* with producer David Valdez. When we finally got to the scoring stage, on the first day he turned to me and said, "You know, whoever's been inventing those synthesizers should just be shot." And then he explained how scary it was for him to come out to my studio, listen to the mock-ups of the cues, and feel it was kind of okay, but he was not really sure. Then when he heard it with the orchestra, he was so relieved because it sounded as good as he had hoped it would.

When I've worked with someone a lot, they learn to trust me. They know what my dramatic instincts are and we have a vocabulary with each other. Once someone has a good experience with a composer, it's so much easier. It all comes back to the comfort and trust level in your relationship.

What was it like working with John Carpenter, a director who is also a musician?

He's very knowledgeable about music in many styles, not just the one that he himself can play. When we did *Escape from L.A.*, he originally did the guitar and the synthesis. After the pressure of shooting and editing the film, it's a way for him of almost decompressing. He likes to get in and musically work with the film. So a lot of the cues were done at his home studio on his synthesizers, and then we redid them with the studio synth guys.

On *Memoirs of an Invisible Man*, it was going to be a total orchestral score. He is not totally comfortable or interested in working in that medium, so that was 100% mine.

What is your preference in terms of coming on the project? Do you like to be involved at the script level?

I look forward to the time when I go in while they're shooting, and then write stuff based on the script. Working on some ideas with some themes as we go along. Some of the people that I've worked with really like that idea.

My favorite way to write for a film is when I get to watch something, and then without the picture, just sitting down and working with whatever emotion I take away from that experience. That becomes my raw material. In the Batman feature length cartoon, *Mask of the Phantasm*, I got to see some test footage from the animation houses—sequences that were not yet assembled into the final film. I just wrote thematic material for scenes I knew were going to take place.

Do you sketch and orchestrate yourself?

I don't transfer my orchestrations to the conductor's score. But when I'm writing, I'm putting everything in—all the dynamics, the phrasing, percussion—everything, it's all there. So I don't physically orchestrate myself, but my sketches are very complete.

WHAT IS IT LIKE SUPERVISING THE BATMAN *AND* SUPERMAN *CARTOONS?*

It has been an interesting process on the *Batman* show. From the beginning, I was establishing the musical style of the series. I wrote the first several shows myself just to get the whole thing up and going. I also wrote the themes for the major characters. So for the first number of years of *Batman*, any main theme was mine.

Ultimately all of the composers that are in the rotation now worked their way up from orchestrating on the shows I was writing. Then they got to write a few cues, then maybe a half of the show, and then finally I would give them a whole show of their own. So it's a great way to reward the people who really paid their dues. This season, we started doing *Batman* electronically, but I'm still involved with basically the same team. I like to go to the spotting, and I look at their show once they've got everything on its way. We go through every cue and make sure that there's not a misread somewhere, or something that I think could be handled in a different way. But the composers working for me now are excellent, and it is satisfying to see how they've all come along in their careers.

WHAT IS YOUR ADVICE FOR YOUNG COMPOSERS JUST STARTING OUT?

There's career success, and there's personal, human success. They aren't mutually exclusive, but parallel trains of thought that can both be happening in someone's life. If you focus on career success, you're going to keep your total concentration on, "How do I get myself hired?" You're going to find some way to associate with young film makers that you relate to artistically. You will always be out meeting people, going to film festivals, film schools; you get involved in everything they are doing, whether it's performance art, or theater, or films. You're not concerned so much about your skills; you look at each job as it comes up, and figure out how to do it.

For personal success, you may have some interest in developing your craft, and learning how to compose for film. Then you're going have an educational stream that comes into your life, and you're going to start your research. You're going to look at scores, listen to soundtracks, and note who's doing them. You're going to read everything that you can, and you're going to go to libraries or places where they have film scores. Then you'll be able to put together what you're seeing on a page with what you're hearing. You will develop an enormous respect for the traditions that have gotten the art to where it is today.