

Henry Mancini (1924 - 1994) Composer

A Noteworthy Composer. Born in Cleveland, Ohio but brought up in Aliquippa, Pennsylvania, one of the most successful and honored composers in film-music history, Henry Mancini, wrote scores for many films. His work changed the style of background music through the interjection of jazz into traditional orchestral arrangements. Although he published over 500 works, most people remember Mancini for his theme tune to *The Pink Panther*.

Learned Music from His Father. Mancini's father taught him to play the piccolo at the age of eight; he was too small then for the flute. Mancini's father was suffering from the mumps, so both father and son were bored. Mancini's father asked him to fetch the piccolo from the closet and ordered him to blow, but no sound came out. Mancini learned to play both the piccolo and eventually the flute due to his father's determination and harsh discipline, which Mancini recalled in his autobiography, *Did They Mention the Music?* "He would take the wooden perch out of the bird cage, and if I played a wrong note when I was practicing he would whack me with it."

Taught Himself Piano. Mancini taught himself to play the piano by imitating a neighbor's player-piano rolls when he was 10 or 11 years old. "I would put roll after roll of the hits of the day into the piano and be fascinated by the music coming out," Mancini wrote. By accident, he discovered that he could play the piano without the rolls. With this innate talent, Mancini's local high school band leader asked Mancini to join the high school band when he was in seventh grade. At the age of 13, Mancini was first flutist in the Pennsylvania All-State High School Band.

Influenced by Max Adkins. At this time, Mancini had already decided that he wanted to write music for the movies, despite his father's dream that he study hard, attend college, get a degree, and become a teacher. Mancini's father finally acknowledged his son's dream and sent him to study with Max Adkins, who was then leader of the pit band at the Stanley Theater in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Mancini eagerly rode the bus from Aliquippa to the Stanley Theater. "I used to look forward to those days, because I would be with him and see the show free—twice," Mancini explained. For his lesson, Adkins gave Mancini parts of a stock arrangement for individual instruments, which he had to construct into a score. Mancini said these lessons were invaluable. "This way I learned what could be taken out of an ensemble while retaining its skeleton," he remarked. Although Mancini credited many composers for his success, Mancini said Adkins was the most important. "Max Adkins was to be the most important influence of my life," he wrote.

Attended Juilliard. After he had graduated from high school at the age of 17, Mancini enrolled at Pittsburgh's Carnegie Institute of Technology and applied to the Juilliard School of Music, which accepted him in spite of his poor study habits. For his audition, Mancini prepared a Beethoven sonata that warranted a lukewarm review. He was told, "That's very nice; can you play something else?" Although he lied, Mancini told the dean that he had written a fantasy on **Cole Porter's** "Night and Day." After five minutes of this improvisation, the panel of teachers and the dean said, "Oh, that's marvelous."

Drafted by the Air Force. Mancini entered Juilliard on a piano scholarship during the fall term before his 18th birthday. Although composition and orchestration were Mancini's first loves, his scholarship restricted him to major in piano. After a year of studies at Juilliard, however, the Air Force drafted Mancini.

Played in the Air Force Band. Mancini was drafted into the Army Air Corps, which took him to Atlantic City, New Jersey for boot camp. The Army recognized Mancini's talents, however, and appointed him to the Twenty-Eighth Air Force Band rather than gunnery school. While serving in this capacity, Mancini hung around with members of **Glenn Miller's** Army Air Corps Band, which Mancini admired. "Despite being in awe of them I came to know them pretty well," he wrote. Immediately after his discharge on 30 March 1946,

Mancini sought out a job from his old Master Sergeant, Norman Leyden, who was, by that time, chief arranger of the Glenn Miller-Tex Beneke Band.

Wrote Radio Scores. After he joined and rearranged the Glenn Miller-Tex Beneke Band, Mancini wrote radio scores for *A Tale of Two Cities* and *F.B.I. in Peace and War*. In 1952 Joe Gershenson of Universal Pictures offered Mancini a two-week assignment to work on an Abott and Costello film, *Lost in Alaska*, which he took seriously, although the plot was quite the opposite. "That film was my baptism of fire. The very first film writing I did was for a sequence in which Lou Costello is bitten on the ass by a crab—high-class stuff," he wrote. Mancini stayed with Universal for six years, working nine to five and writing music for movies.

Teamed with Blake Edwards. When Mancini left Universal he wrote scores for *The Glenn Miller Story* and *The Benny Goodman Story*, which impressed Blake Edwards, with whom Mancini collaborated on television shows including *Peter Gunn*, which was a huge success. "RCA had pressed only eight hundred copies of the album and had printed only eight hundred covers . . . They were running around like madmen at RCA, trying to keep up with the demand," Mancini recalled.

Talented Writer of Musical Scores. Mancini continued to write complete musical scores for the duration of his career, which included 88 complete musical scores for motion pictures, 6 television films, and 15 television themes. Mancini also wrote his autobiography, *Did They Mention the Music?*, and *Sounds and Scores: A Practical Guide to Professional Orchestration*, which is a collection of his scores that sold close to 100,000 copies before its 5th edition. "It is enormously gratifying to me that there now is a generation of young arrangers, some of them very well known, who started with that book," Mancini wrote.

An Awkward First Meeting. When Mancini was writing arrangements and playing the piano for the Glenn Miller-Tex Beneke Band he met his future wife, Virginia O'Connor, whom he snubbed. "When I first met Ginny, I looked down my nose at her as a Hollywood type," Mancini professed. Ginny O'Connor was the lead in the Mello-Larks band, which Mancini began coaching at the Million Dollar Theater. Because the feeling was not mutual, Mancini was oblivious of Ginny's attraction to him. "I think Ginny saw something in me as a musician that I didn't see in myself," he wrote. Although Mancini was naive, the band members were not and they supported Ginny's endeavor. "The guys in the band all knew what was happening," Mancini explained. "If I got on the bus late, I'd find all the seats taken except for the one beside her. They'd left it open for me."

Married Ginny O'Connor. After having shared a disastrous first date and a dinner shortly thereafter, Mancini and Ginny made a connection, although Mancini was in the dark about its implications. "Little did I know that I was about to make a deep and lifelong commitment," he wrote. Although he did buy Ginny a ring, Mancini never formally proposed, which he attributed to his having trouble expressing his feelings for people, much like his father. Mancini's engagement surprised his mother and father. Ginny's mother, on the other hand, disapproved because she did not want her daughter to marry a musician, which was ironic considering she shared Mancini's profession. "She said that as a musician's wife Ginny would starve," Mancini wrote. "She wanted her to marry someone in a solid profession," he added. After their wedding on 13 September 1947 and a week-long Las Vegas honeymoon, the Mancinis moved to a new, two-bedroom apartment in Burbank, a suburb of Los Angeles, California, for \$90 a month.

Started a Family. Mancini and Ginny decided that they wanted four children, and they wanted to have them close together, but they later changed their minds. Ginny gave birth to Mancini's first child, Christopher, on 2 July 1950, which delighted Mancini. "I was ecstatic at having a son. I now had insurance that the name would be around for a while," he wrote. Almost two years later on 4 May 1952, Ginny gave birth to twin girls, Monica Jo and Felice Ann. This put an end to Ginny's plans to bear four children. "She had three babies in diapers: Chris toddling and getting into everything, and two in their cribs . . . We decided that three were quite enough," Mancini wrote.

Joined the ASCAP. To create long-term security for his family, Mancini decided to join the American Society

of Composers and Publishers (ASCAP), which is a group of composers and lyricists that collects royalties and distributes the income to its members according to the frequency their music is used. To join the ASCAP, Mancini was required to publish a song, which he achieved by setting up his own company to publish and print his song: "The Soft-Shoe Boogie." Although Mancini said the song was dumb, it established a lifelong relationship between ASCAP and Mancini. While explaining his excitement over his first payment, he recalled, ". . . it was my entree to ASCAP. I didn't get the first check for a long time. It was for \$14.73. I kept it and still have it, framed."

Became an ASCAP Board Member. Later in his career, Mancini attributed ASCAP for most of his earnings and he repaid them by serving as a member of the board from 1964 to 1968. As he explained in his book, "ASCAP is the financial pillar of my life. It's going to be around for Ginny, the kids, and the grandchildren. In that way, I feel very lucky. I am high in the financial hierarchy of the ASCAP, and I am proud to see my name surrounded by legendary names. At such moments, I can feel sure I've accomplished something." At a cocktail party hosted by his wife on 19 June 1995, the ASCAP recognized Mancini's accomplishments when the organization's president, Marilyn Bergman, announced the establishment of the Henry Mancini Award, which the ASCAP would present at its annual dinner to individuals who had made outstanding contributions to film music.

Established Several Scholarships. To take advantage of the charitable contribution clauses in the tax law, Mancini set up scholarships for Juilliard, the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), the University of Southern California, and the American Federation of Musicians Congress of Strings. Remembering that he was forced to major in piano although he preferred composition, Mancini funded a composition scholarship at Juilliard. At UCLA, Mancini established two scholarships. The first was a film scholarship that gave a student \$2,500 a year and the second was for a student composer to record a score for a student film. Mancini also set up a scholarship for the American Federation of Musicians Congress of Strings, "which nurtures young string players from all over the country," he explained in his book. In addition to these scholarships, Mancini funded an endowment at the University of Southern California to buy the necessities for a music department, which it lacked. This included band instruments, music stands, and lighting.

Gave Generously to SHARE Inc. Mancini made more than monetary contributions and invested time with SHARE Inc., whose members were mainly show-business wives that devoted themselves to helping the mentally retarded. "The organization has grown quite large and has done a great deal not only for retarded children but in recent years for other causes as well," Mancini explained. SHARE members hosted an annual western show titled the Bloomtown Party. Mancini contributed his writing and conducted the show on various occasions, which he fondly recalled in his book. "It has always been done in a wonderful spirit, with good will and laughter. It was great fun for a great cause."

Died of Cancer. Mancini died in his Los Angeles home on 14 June 1994 at the age of 70 of liver and pancreatic cancer, which were diagnosed four months prior to his death. Despite his terminal illness, Mancini had continued to work on a Broadway version of *Victor/Victoria*, scheduled to open the following fall, which was originally a film starring Julie Andrews and Robert Preston. The film composer and songwriter is best remembered for interjecting jazz into film music and more importantly, making it widely acceptable.

Academy Awards. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences nominated Mancini for 18 Oscars between 1954 and 1984. He won four Oscars: Best Musical Score for a Dramatic or Comedy Picture: *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961); Best Song: "Moon River" from *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961), Best Song: "Days of Wine and Roses" from *Days of Wine and Roses* (1962); and Best Original Song Score: *Victor/Victoria* (1982).

Grammy Awards. The National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences nominated Mancini for 70 Grammy Awards—more than any other musician—between 1958 and 1970. He won 20 of these: Best Arrangement: *The Music from "Peter Gunn"* (1958); Album of the Year: *The Music from "Peter Gunn"* (1958); Best Jazz Performance (Large Group): *The Blues and the Beat* (1960); Best Performance by an Orchestra Other Than for

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Dancing: "Mr. Lucky" from *Music from "Mr. Lucky"* (1960); Best Arrangement: "Mr. Lucky" from *Music from "Mr. Lucky"* (1960); Best Sound Track Album or Recording of a Score from a Motion Picture or Television Show: *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961); Best Arrangement: "Moon River" from *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961); Best Performance by an Orchestra Other Than for Dancing: *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961); Song of the Year: "Moon River" from *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961); Record of the Year: "Moon River" from *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961); Best Instrumental Arrangement: "Baby Elephant Walk" from *Hatari!* (1963); Best Background Arrangement: "Days of Wine and Roses" from *Our Man in Hollywood* (1963); Song of the Year: "Days of Wine and Roses" from *Our Man in Hollywood* (1963); Record of the Year: *Days of Wine and Roses* (1963); Best Instrumental Arrangement: *The Pink Panther* (1964); Best Instrumental Performance (Non-Jazz): *The Pink Panther* (1964); Best Instrumental Composition (Other Than Jazz): *The Pink Panther* (1964); Best Instrumental Arrangement: "Love Theme from Romeo & Juliet" from *A Warm Shade of Ivory* (1969); Best Instrumental Arrangement: "Theme from Z" from *Theme from Z and Other Film Music* (1970); and Best Contemporary Instrumental Performance: *Theme from Z and Other Film Music* (1970).

Honors and Awards. In addition to his Grammy and Academy Awards, many other notable organizations recognized Mancini's talent with awards. The Hollywood Foreign Press Association awarded Mancini with a Golden Globe Award for Best Original Song for a Motion Picture: "Whistling Away the Dark" from *Darling Lili* (1971). Although he never graduated from Juilliard due to the draft, Duquane University, Mount Saint Mary's College, Washington and Jefferson College, and California Institute of the Arts recognized Mancini's achievement with Honorary Doctorates in 1976, 1980, 1981, and 1983, respectively. Also in 1983, the American Guild of Authors and Composers presented Mancini with the Aggie Award. The National Italian American Foundation honored Mancini in 1987 with a Lifetime Achievement Award. In 1988, Mancini earned the Golden Soundtrack Award: ASCAP Life Achievement Award for outstanding contribution to film music. The American Academy of Achievement honoring America's outstanding leaders, presented Mancini with the Golden Plate Award in 1988. Finally, in 1989, the American Society of Music Arrangers presented Mancini with the Golden Score Award for outstanding achievement in the fields of arranging and composing.

Further Reading:

Mancini, Henry and Gene Lees. *Did They Mention the Music?* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, Inc., 1989).