

# MONSTERS, SPIES, AND SPACE

BY SCOTT DUNN

Our previous two concerts, *Henry Mancini at 100* and *The Hollywood Modernists*, presented the film music of a generation of young, highly trained East Coast composers who introduced the languages of modernism and jazz into film scoring of the 1950s and '60s. In this concert, we carry on into the 1970s, where film music pushed the trends of the '60s even farther. Groundbreaking modernism combined with explorations forward into afro-latin funk, jazz, and disco idioms, and then intermingled with nostalgic looks back to ragtime, Italian folk traditions, European dances, and a return to the grand romantic orchestral traditions of Hollywood's Golden Age.

Most of this program's composers, though classically trained, all had significant careers in jazz. Johnny Mandel, Marvin Hamlisch, David Shire, Richard Rodney Bennett, Lalo Schifrin, Michel Legrand and John Williams all had significant careers as jazz performers. Had they never written a note of film music, they'd still have had significant careers and been major musical figures. Fortunately for us, they all chose to work in film as well.

We begin at the cusp of the '70s with Argentinian-born Lalo Schifrin's (1932-2025) bristling but cool music from his celebrated score for *BULLITT* (1968). As a tribute to Schifrin's lasting legacy, we are proud to present the composer's own personal favorite arrangement of this seminal work. Schifrin, and our next composer, Parisian-born Michel Legrand (1932-2019), were both pupils of Nadia Boulanger, and both enjoyed long and varied collaborations with other jazz giants. Presented tonight is Legrand's arrangement of the exquisite theme from his Oscar and Grammy-winning score from *SUMMER OF '42* (1971), sinuously weaving between parallel minor and major keys.

Musical prodigy Marvin Hamlisch (1944-2012) adapted Scott Joplin's 19th century ragtime – the very roots of jazz – to create his nostalgic and Oscar-winning score for *THE STING* (1973). 1973 proved to be a fortuitous year for the composer; he would go on to win all three music Academy Awards that year: one for *THE STING*, and two for *THE WAY WE WERE*. Hamlisch is also one of only two PEGOTs – having received, over the course of his widely varied career, at least one Emmy, Grammy, Oscar, Tony, and the Pulitzer Prize. (Richard Rodgers is the other.)

The Academy Award nominated, simultaneously modernist-and-retro score for *CHINATOWN* (1974) remains one of Jerry Goldsmith's (1929-2004) finest hours. Hired by producer Robert Evans to write and record a replacement score in only ten days, Goldsmith responded by creating an evocative soundworld with an ensemble of four harps, four pianos, solo trumpet, percussion and strings, artfully conjuring up the idea of water which lurks at the story's heart. Born in Los Angeles, Goldsmith studied at USC with Miklós Rózsa and, like Henry Mancini, André Previn and John Williams, also with the legendary Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco.

Winning the Oscar over *CHINATOWN*'s score was the Milan-born Nino Rota's (1911-1979) iconic music for *THE GODFATHER, PART II* (1974). A prodigy, like Hamlisch, Rota studied in the finest Italian tradition in Milan and Rome. Then, on Arturo Toscanini's recommendation, he studied for two years at Curtis in Philadelphia (1930-1932). He returned to Italy in 1932 and remained there, where he thrived as one of the 20th century's most prolific composers for film and the concert hall. Music from the first two *GODFATHER* films will be heard tonight, adapted from Rota's own *GODFATHER SUITE*.

The first half of the concert ends with the celebrated waltz from *MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS* (1974) by British-born Sir Richard Rodney Bennett (1936-2012), who crafted a score steeped in the period with effervescent waltzes, carefree fox-trots, and a harsh dissonance tearing away at the elegant facade. This glorious score evokes the mighty and magnificent "train of death" (so christened by Bernard Herrmann), and the glamour of Europe between the Great Wars.

Music by Buffalo-born David Shire (born 1937) opens the program's second half. The son of a society bandleader, Shire's style is marked by a rich eclecticism and dramatic specificity which graces all of his work for film, television, and the musical theatre. Hired by his then brother-in-law, Francis Ford Coppola, Shire wrote and performed a highly influential, solo piano score for *THE CONVERSATION* (1974), about which he writes: "The theme consists of a jazz melody over a Chopin nocturne-like accompaniment, a musical analog of Harry Caul's split personality – anal retentive, with a secret hobby as a jazz saxophonist wannabe." That same year also brought the landmark

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dodecaphonic-funk score for **THE TAKING OF PELHAM ONE TWO THREE**, about which Shire says: "The Main Theme sets the scene: 1970s New York City – vibrant, multi-ethnic, order in a perpetual battle with seemingly impending chaos. A consonant pulsating bass ostinato underlies an atonal 12-tone serial theme and its various permutations and combinations."

New York born jazzier Johnny Mandel's (1925-2020) music shimmers with a distinctive lyrical touch and rich harmonies. Mandel began his film career in 1958 by writing one of the very first all-jazz film scores for Robert Wise's **I WANT TO LIVE!** (1958). Tonight's piece from Mandel is best known from a recording by Bill Evans made under the title "Seascape," but it began its musical life as the Main Title of a 1974 thriller starring Twiggy called *W*. It is heard tonight in its original film arrangement.

A suite from Bernard Herrmann's Academy Award nominated final film score, **TAXI DRIVER** (1976), presents a startling urban nightmare. Modernist and jazzy, the score also possesses an elegiac quality – following the final day of recording sessions for the film, Herrmann died overnight. In marked contrast to the neurotic obsession of Herrmann's valedictory score, Marvin Hamlisch's lush, insinuating instrumental arrangement of "Nobody Does it Better," follows. Written for the 1977 James Bond thriller **THE SPY WHO LOVED ME**, Hamlisch garnered another two Oscar nominations for his work on the film, once more placing his ability to create an instantly absorbable melody on full display.

Born in Budapest, Miklós Rózsa (1907-1995), was a colleague of Bartók's, a three-time Academy Award winner (**SPELLBOUND, A DOUBLE LIFE, BEN-HUR**), and a prolific concert composer whose instantly recognizable musical voice was a favorite of many directors. Rózsa's lauded film career began in 1937 and continued into the early 1980s. Tonight, we present the concert premiere of "Journey's End and Finale" from Nicholas Meyer's brilliant **TIME AFTER TIME** (1979). The piece begins with a brief quotation of "L'Aïo dè Rotso" from Joseph Canteloube's Chants d'Auvergne, heard throughout the film emanating from Jack the Ripper's pocket watch. That is followed by development of the film's major motivic and thematic material, particularly an increasingly soaring love theme.

No program of music from the 1970s would be complete without John Williams. Born in Queens, NY in 1932 to a musical family, he studied at Juilliard and UCLA, aspiring to a career as a concert pianist. He studied with the legendary Rosina Lhévinne (along with Van Cliburn and John Browning), becoming one of the most distinguished and prolific jazz pianists and studio players of the '50s and '60s, and later, the most awarded film music composer of all time. Best known for his twenty-nine feature film collaborations with Steven Spielberg (with a thirtieth, *Disclosure*, due out this summer), we present the relentless "Shark Theme" from his second film with the venerable director: **JAWS** (1975), and close our program with the glorious, exhilarating march from Richard Donner's **SUPERMAN** (1978), starring Christopher Reeve.

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