

I Believe...

Jerry Goldsmith, David Raksin and Elmer Bernstein: Thank You

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I Believe...the loss of Jerry Goldsmith (1929-2004), David Raksin (1912-2004) and Elmer Bernstein (1922-2004), three giants of the film-music World, fills me with great sadness. At the same time, I would like to say to them “Thank You” for decades of superior music and for leaving behind such a great legacy to future generations. Even though we still have great film composers today (John Barry, Howard Shore, Rachel Portman, etc.) Goldsmith, Raksin and Bernstein were superstars.

Jerry Goldsmith was born in Los Angeles, California on February 19, 1929. At the age of six he started piano lessons and later took courses in theory and composition at UCLA. In 1950 he landed a job as a clerk typist in the music department and was given his first assignments as a composer. Goldsmith worked on the *Twilight Zone* series composing seven scores for the series during its entire run from 1959-1965. A piece of trivia: The famous theme to *The Twilight Zone* was composed by Marcus Constant. One of Goldsmith's greatest strengths as a composer was that he could write in almost any style and did so during his long career. By the time he died he had won the Oscar for the film score to *The Omen* in 1976, five Emmy's for *Star Trek: Voyager* (1995), *Masada* (1980), *Babe* (1975), *QBVII* (1974), and *Red Pony* (1973), five Grammy nominations (won none), and nine Golden Globe nominations (won none), and numerous awards and citations for excellence from various other organizations. He was immensely prolific having written approximately 191 film scores, 133 TV scores, 9 radio scores, 8 concert and ballet scores, and numerous miscellaneous scores for events and film trailers.

Some of his more famous film scores were (and please realize that I can't name them all): *Lilies of the Field*, *A Patch of Blue*, *Our Man Flint*, *Planet of the Apes*, *Patton*, *Chinatown*, *Alien*, *Poltergeist*, *Gremlins*, *Total Recall*, *Basic Instinct*, *The River Wild*, *L.S. Confidential*, *Air Force One*, *Mulan*, *The Mummy*, *The Last Castle*, *The Sum of All Fears*, and five of the *Star Trek* movies including the new theme for the acclaimed TV series *Star Trek the Next Generation*.

David Raksin was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on August 4, 1912. Raksin's first encounters with music started with his father who taught him the clarinet and, later, he attended Pennsylvania University where he was part of a band where he performed and arranged music. For a time he also studied with the great Arnold Schoenberg. He had a stroke of luck when he was tapped by Charlie Chaplin to write the score to his masterpiece *Modern Times* from melodies whistled and hum to him by Chaplin. This opened up his career as a film composer and for the next 50+ years he wrote countless scores for film and television. He landed a job at 20th Century Fox and worked under Alfred Newman, the premiere composer of his day at that studio. In 1944 he was asked by the legendary film director, Otto Preminger, to write a score for his current film project. That film was called *Laura*. It is the film that put Raksin on the map and so identified him for the rest of his life. In many ways, it became a sore spot for him since he wrote many more scores but *Laura* was the seminal work that is always mentioned with his name. The work was turned into a song with lyrics by Johnny Mercer and has since been recorded hundreds of times by other artists.

Over his lifetime, Raksin eventually composed music scores for over 450 movies and TV shows, but has also composed works for symphony orchestras, dance and

musical theater. He taught music at USC for 21 years and only stepped down a couple of years before he died.

David Raksin's more famous musical scores for film were: *Suez*, *Stanley and Livingston*, *Laura*, *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*, *Forever Amber*, *Pat and Mike*, *The Bad and the Beautiful*, *Separate Tables*, *Will Penny*, *The Day After*.

Elmer Bernstein was born in New York, New York on April 4, 1922. Ironically, Bernstein performed as an actor and a dancer, as a child, and accidentally stumbled into music at the age of 12. He received a scholarship to Juilliard and after having some of his childhood compositions were presented to the superb composer, Aaron Copland, he was encouraged to study composition. He entered New York University and earned his bachelor's degree in music education.

Bernstein became a concert pianist and performed from 1939 until 1950 on the concert stage when he was offered the chance to write a score for a little known William Holden film called *Boots Malone*. However, during the early 50's at the height of the McCarthy House Un-American Activity hearings, Bernstein was a Communist sympathizer and was "gray listed" (not enough evidence to charge him with being a Communist but highly suspicious) and couldn't find any work with reputable studios.

In 1954 he was tapped by choreographer Agnes de Mille to be her rehearsal pianist (quite a step down from being a concert pianist). Soon after, he was given a chance to work with the director, Otto Preminger, as composer for the 1955 film *The Man With the Golden Arm*. The jazz score he wrote brought him a great deal of attention and finally put him on the map as a new, young, voice in film scoring.

Thanks to his connection with Agnes de Mille her uncle, Cecil B. DeMille, hired Bernstein to compose the score to his biblical epic *The Ten Commandments*, which, in 1956, cost \$14 million dollars to produce. In today's terms the film cost would be in excess of \$100 million dollars. Needless to say the film was a huge success and Bernstein never had to look back at the days in the early 50's when all the work he could find was to write scores to films called *Robot Monster* and *Miss Robin Crusoe*.

He once explained how he approached a film score: "I have this thing that if I run the rough cut of the film often enough, over and over again, it will start to talk to me. It will tell me stuff. Eventually, the tone I need will come to me. Then you have something that fits, some sense of integration with the film instead of just slapping some wallpaper at the end."

Eventually, he wrote the scores to over 200 films and won one Oscar for his score to *Thoroughly Modern Millie*. A sampling of his most famous film scores are: *The Ten Commandments*, *The Sweet Smell of Success*, *The Magnificent Seven*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Birdman of Alcatraz*, *Hud*, *The Great Escape*, *Hawaii*, *True Grit*, *Airplane!*, *Stripes*, *An American Werewolf in London*, *Trading Places*, *My Left Foot*, *The Grifters*, *The Age of Innocence*, *Wild Wild West*, *Gangs of New York*, *Far From Heaven*.

I've only been able to give you a cursory biography of these great men and encourage you to get online for further information. Thank you Jerry, David and Elmer.

Please feel free to contact me with comments or subject suggestions at:
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