

HENRY MANCINI (1924-1994) was the first American film composer to become a household name. On the strength of his music for *Peter Gunn*, his Oscar-winning songs “Moon River” and “Days of Wine and Roses,” his theme for *The Pink Panther* and many other scores of the 1960s and beyond, Mancini is now ranked among the giants of movie music.

And he wrote many of those classics right here in Northridge.

“We lived in Northridge for many years,” says Mancini’s widow Ginny. “We built a home there in the 1950s. It was very country – nothing but orange groves and walnut groves. We had such happy years there – the children played safely in the cul-de-sac in front of our home. It was a great time.”

One of those children, Monica Mancini, grew up to become an in-demand singer of popular standards, not least of which are those by her famous father. “I have nothing but fond memories of Northridge,” she says. “We grew up in a neighborhood where everybody knew each other. We rode our bikes to school. My dad wrote ‘Moon River’ in a little room off the garage in Northridge.”

He even named his first music publishing company Northridge Music.

Tonight, we bring the Mancini family back to Northridge with a concert – very much in the spirit of those Henry Mancini himself led – that includes his songs and film scores, and features daughter Monica and son-in-law Gregg Field, making it a genuine family affair.

Henry Mancini came along at precisely the right moment in film history. Classical-

ly trained but well-versed in jazz, having played piano with Tex Benecke’s post-World War II big band before toiling in “B” movie scores at Universal, he startled the music world with his compelling jazz score for *Peter Gunn* in 1958, earning the first Grammy ever awarded for Album of the Year. It earned him the first of 20 Grammys (from 72 nominations!), a mark of the respect accorded him by the recording community.

Gunn was the first major collaboration with producer-director Blake Edwards, with whom the composer would eventually do 33 film and television projects over nearly 40 years. In the aftermath of their success with *Gunn* (and another TV series, *Mr. Lucky*, also a Grammy winner), they launched a legendary film partnership with *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* (1961), which would earn Mancini the first two of his four Academy Awards – for the score as well as the song “Moon River” – along with another five Grammys including Song of the Year.

Throughout the 1960s, Mancini did an incredible array of films, creating fresh and innovative scores, songs that would become pop-music standards, reminding the film-music establishment that his unique blend of jazz, pop, and light-romantic moods were welcomed by filmgoers and record buyers alike.

He won another Oscar for the song “Days of Wine and Roses” (1962), written, like “Moon River,” with legendary lyricist Johnny Mercer; and three more Grammys for *The Pink Panther* (1964), whose saxophone theme became a Mancini signature and followed him throughout his career, including six film

sequels, all directed by Edwards and mostly starring Peter Sellers. Songs like “Charade,” “Dear Heart,” “The Sweetheart Tree” and “Two for the Road” became equally indelible in the ears and minds of anyone who went to the movies or listened to the radio.

But Mancini wasn’t just a tunesmith; he was a dramatically astute composer of orchestral scores. He wrote a clever boogie-woogie for baby elephants in *Hatari!* (1962); dark and scary sounds for *Experiment in Terror* (1962) and *Wait Until Dark* (1967); delightful marches for *The Great Race* (1965) and *The Great Waldo Pepper* (1975); intriguing ethnic colors for *Arabesque* (1966) and *The Molly Maguires* (1970); and country flavors for *Sometimes a Great Notion* (1971) and *Oklahoma Crude* (1973).

Helping Mancini attain that “household name” status was another unprecedented move by the composer: performing his works live in concert around the country. Film music had been performed in concert venues, but not regularly and rarely with the composer himself on the podium. Mancini took that to new heights in the ‘60s and continued doing so for the rest of his life.

The 1970s and ‘80s saw shifts in musical styles and approaches, yet Mancini remained relevant and in-demand. He wrote a memorable adaptation of Ravel’s “Bolero” for Blake Edwards’ hilarious Dudley Moore comedy *10*; launched a collaboration with actor-director Paul Newman that would encompass four films including *The Shadow Box* (1980) and *The Glass Menagerie* (1987); and penned an enchanting set of songs for Edwards’ *Victor/Victoria* (1982) that would

win Mancini and longtime lyricist Leslie Bricusse a well-deserved Academy Award for Best Original Song Score.

Television beckoned, too, with new themes for such popular series as *Newhart*, *Remington Steele* and *Hotel*; and an Emmy-nominated score for one of the most popular miniseries of all time, *The Thorn Birds* (1983).

Mancini died in June 1994. Over a 50-year career of making music, he recorded more than 90 albums, wrote 95 complete movie scores and 150 more for television. But Mancini’s lasting legacy is greater than all the statistics: He took the movie song to sublime new levels, adding at least a dozen entries to the Great American Songbook.

And at a time when American popular music was in transition, he demonstrated conclusively that a composer with a strong melodic sense and inherent theatrical instincts could elevate a film both musically and dramatically, making the soundtrack as important and enduring as the film itself.

The Mancini legacy is assured, not only via continued public performance of the music, as in tonight’s show, but in other ways such as the Frank Gehry-designed Youth Orchestra Los Angeles (YOLA) center in Inglewood, where the Mancini name will appear among the major donors – “so that my great-granddaughter can go there and be proud of her great-grandfather,” says Ginny Mancini. “*Peter Gunn* was the beginning of a wonderful new life for us. Everybody tells me that they grew up with Henry’s music.”

Yes, we did. And we’re all grateful.

–Jon Burlingame, 2018