

For SCL's SCORE

A First Class Stamp of Approval

**By
Michael Isaacson**

This past April, the larger music world and particularly film music was ennobled by the issuance of a first class U.S. stamp honoring composer/ arranger/ conductor Henry Mancini.

This wonderful occasion pays tribute to both a gentleman and a gentle man who quietly and elegantly advanced our art and presented it in a most scintillating, user-friendly way to the world.

I'm sure many of you join me in recalling the exhilaration of first opening Mancini's SOUNDS and SCORES in 1962 self published by Northridge Music and learning his unique approach to recording orchestration by listening to the accompanying bundled records (the whole package sold for only \$15) – what an innovation it was to study and simultaneously hear the film cues and learn what a bass flute sounded like; for this alone, Hank merited his American stamp.

Like most innovators he grew out of an enlightened, extended tradition. Mancini was influenced both by Victor Young and Tex Benecke. He often recounted how he used to run to a piano as soon as the band bus came to a venue, to confirm the sonorities that he had in his head while working on the ubiquitous arrangements for the band.

At the conclusion of an era when Alex North and Leonard Rosenman were creating more and more tension with denser textures, somehow Mancini figured out how to sustain tautness with soloistic transparency. He brought us into the musical sixties; for this too, Hank affixed his stamp on our musical sensibilities.

He was not only a film scorer but he was a songwriter who knew how to use a song in an underscore. His source and implied source cues furthered the action in a theatrical manner while independently selling records as well. They were not imposed by a music supervisor, but grew organically from the warp and woof of the film. I still recall the bitter sweetness of *Two for the Road* and the delicious understated romance of *Charade* whenever I summon up those melodies; for these alone, Mancini's art adheres and will be remembered.

In addition to his musical successes and film recognition, Hank (and Ginny) have always been great supporters of the arts. I remember chatting with him backstage at the Dorothy Chandler before I conducted a benefit concert honoring Walter Scharf. Hank was excited as I was to be presenting an award to our musical colleague. His steadfast support of composers, orchestras, the opera, and music schools throughout Los Angeles were yet another quiet part of the man's nobility.

For all these reasons and so much more, we congratulate the Mancini family on this distinguished honor. We thank them and fondly remember with great gratitude our first class teacher and friend Henry Mancini.

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Michael Isaacson is a versatile composer, conductor and orchestrator who, aside from his own extensive credits, has assisted Alex North, Elmer Bernstein, John Williams, Walter Scharf, Charles Fox and many others. He now gives private composition and conducting lessons. Dr. Isaacson may be reached at: Eggcreamer@sbcglobal.net