

(Liner notes writer uncredited)

When the history of popular music in the 20th Century is reviewed, Henry Mancini will almost certainly rank among the giants of American music.

Composer, arranger, conductor and indeed, performer, this talented and versatile musician has, so far, transformed the art of writing music for television, composed a string of outstanding and memorable film scores and collected a display cabinet overflowing with Oscars, Grammys, and sundry other awards and citations. And there is every indication he will add to his collection.

‘Hank’ Mancini was born in Cleveland, Ohio, on April 16, 1924. His parents, Quinto and Anna, moved with their infant son to the steel town of Aliquippa, Pennsylvania, shortly afterwards. Henry was introduced to music by his flute playing father. He, himself, took up the instrument when he was eight years old, adding the piano to his instrumental accomplishments four years later. He graduated from the Aliquippa High School in the autumn of 1942. In the High School yearbook for that year, a prophetic teacher wrote, “Henry Mancini, a true music lover, collects records, plays in the band, and has even composed several beautiful selections. He wishes to continue his study of music, and to have an orchestra of his own some day.”

Even before his graduation, Mancini had begun to learn the art of arranging under the guidance of Max Adkins, resident house orchestra conductor and arranger at the Stanley Theatre in neighboring Pittsburgh. After graduation, he enrolled in the famous Julliard School of Music in New York. The budding musician’s studies were short lived. He was drafted in 1943 and served overseas, first in the American Air Force and then in the infantry.

Discharged in 1945, he joined the Glenn Miller Orchestra, then under the direction of Tex Benecke, as pianist and arranger. He also continued his musical studies with a variety of contemporary composers including Ernst Krenek, Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco and Dr. Alfred Sendry. Hollywood beckoned in 1952; he joined the music department of Universal International Studios. During the next six years, Mancini worked on over 100 films, including the “Glenn Miller Story,” for which he received his first Academy Award nomination, “The Benny Goodman Story” and the Orson Welles classic “Touch of Evil.”

Producer-director Blake Edwards commissioned him to score the music for the TV series “Peter Gunn” in the late 1950s. Unleashing her fertile imagination, and adding a considerable flavoring of jazz, Mancini pioneered an entirely new and exciting concept of thematic writing for TV which persists even today.

His Gunn music earned him two Grammy Awards, as Album of The Year and Best Arrangement of The Year, from the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences in 1958. He repeated the success and collected two more Grammys with his music for “Mr. Lucky,” another Blake Edwards production, in 1960.

His most trophy-clustered film score is “Breakfast at Tiffany’s.” It won the 1962 Oscar for the Best Original Score, and “Moon River,” with lyrics by Johnny Mercer, won an Oscar in its own right as Best Song. Mancini’s music for this film also won Grammys in five different categories, two for the full score and three for “Moon River” which was voted Record of The Year, Song of The Year, and rated Best Arrangement Honors, too. Another Oscar followed a year later with “Days of Wine and Roses” written again in collaboration with Johnny Mercer, was adjudged Best Song.

Mancini’s music scope is all embracing. “There was a time” he

points out, “when the lines separating Pop, Jazz, Rock, Folk, Country, Latin and Rhythm and Blues were clearly defined. But these lines are crossed with increasing frequency as new influential performers and writers emerge on the scene. The truly professional writer has an obligation, not only to himself but to those who hire him, to keep an open mind and absorb new ideas.”

It is his ability to respond to new ideas that explains why this man, born in the 1920s, continues to provide a stimulating musical diet for the youngsters of the 1970s. His popularity on the campuses of American colleges and universities has never been greater. He is in tune with the times, in more ways than one. And one need look no further than his own words for the reason. “A change in basic concept often follows innovation. We are involved in such a change of concept that, in time, will influence the entire orchestra--live amplified sound. The electric organ and guitar were the forerunners, of course. The piano and even the harpsichord have been wired for sound. The entire saxophone and woodwind families are now involved. The string family is a prime candidate, and even the solo brasses are picking up the idea. To ignore this movement in the electric field would be a serious mistake. Our job deals with musical sound, regardless of its source.”

Mancini, the man, is a quiet charmer. Musicians everywhere like him for his manner and understanding. They admire him and give of their best for the skilled arrangements of his own compositions in particular. He is not a conductor given to histrionics. He moves easily around the stage. As likely as not, he will stand next to an instrumental soloist, with admiration for what he is hearing evident in his face cueing in brass or strings with a politely pointing finger, and often joining in on piccolo with the woodwind--if he is not performing on piano--during such numbers as his own “Baby Elephant Walk.”

This new compilation - Henry Mancini 40 Greatest - aptly demonstrates the various facets of Mancini's talent. It includes many of his own compositions, of course, like "Dear Heart," "How Soon," and the inevitable "Moon River." But, equally, it includes consummately crafted arrangements of works by such composers as Michel LeGrand, Jim Webb, Lennon and McCartney, Simon and Garfunkel and even Irving Berlin. Once you have heard it, you'll appreciate why this unassuming and essentially modest musician holds 20 Grammy Awards, three Oscars and numerous other musician honors. The impact and appeal of this man and his music is universal.