

# A SALUTE TO HENRY MANCINI

“Moon River,” “Charade,” “Days of Wine and Roses,” “The Pink Panther Theme.” These memorable songs and countless others were written by the great film composer, Henry Mancini, whose centennial birthday was celebrated last year. Over his long and prolific career, Mancini received four Academy Awards and twenty Grammy Awards.



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Henry Mancini, nicknamed “Hank,” was born on April 16, 1924, to an Italian emigré father and amateur musician. Quinto Mancini, his son recalls, was an unfeeling man yet a father who ensured that his son received a music education. Mancini began to study piano at the age of 12. He served in the Army Air Forces in the Second World War and was assigned to the 28<sup>th</sup> Air Force Band before serving overseas.

After discharge, Mancini studied composition and orchestration and was later hired as a staff composer for Universal-International, contributing music to movies like *The Glenn Miller Story* and *The Benny Goodman Story*.

In 1947, Mancini married Ginny O’Connor, a member of singer Mel Tormé’s group, The Mel-Tones. (I wrote about Tormé for the November/December 2022 issue of *Magazine A Praça*.) Their marriage lasted 46 years and they had a son, Christopher, and twin daughters, Felice and Monica; Monica is a professional singer.

In the 1950s, Mancini did a lot of TV work, most notably the series music for *Mr. Lucky* and *Peter Gunn*. The theme for *Peter Gunn* is representative of much of the jazz-inflected music Mancini would later create



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for movies like *The Pink Panther* series. The *Peter Gunn* shows were written and produced by Blake Edwards, who would later enjoy a long partnership with the composer including the classic movies, *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* and *The Pink Panther*.

Mancini also shared a fruitful collaboration with director Stanley Donen (*Charade*, *Arabesque*, *Two for the Road*). His pop songs, 15 of which earned a place on the Billboard Hot 100™, were recorded by the most well-known singers of the time and especially associated with Andy Williams and Johnny Mathis. Mancini recorded more than 85 record albums of which two RCA collaborations with trumpet player Doc Severinsen, *Brass on Ivory*, and its sequel, *Brass, Ivory and Strings*, stand out.

Henry Mancini died of pancreatic cancer on June 14, 1994; Ginny Mancini passed away in 2021 at the age of 97. Before he died, Mancini created a scholarship for composition students at UCLA. His long creative career was recognized last June with a concert at the Hollywood Bowl and filmed for a PBS *Great Performances* special (which aired on November 29<sup>th</sup> and is available for viewing on PBS Passport). While Henry Mancini did not live to share in the celebrations, his wonderful music lives on thanks to the miracle of movies and recorded sound.



Henry Mancini. Photo provided by Mancini estate.



Mancini with Alfred Hitchcock, Cine-Tele Sound Studios, London, 1972