

Concert celebrates Seattle-based film composer Hummie Mann's music

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Composer Hummie Mann has created music for films including Mel Brooks' "Robin Hood: Men in Tights" and "Thomas and the Magic Railroad," as well as created a graduate program for film composition. (Courtesy of Hummie Mann)

By [Gemma Alexander](#)

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Composer [Hummie Mann](#) has created award-winning music for film and television, working with well-known directors on big-budget films. He's also been a music teacher since he was 13, and created [Seattle Film Institute](#)'s graduate program in music composition. How appropriate, then, that his two loves converge, as the first full concert of his work will be performed by a local mentoring orchestra.

On May 16 in Shoreline, [Seattle Collaborative Orchestra](#) will perform an eclectic selection of Mann's compositions. The concert will feature some of Mann's best-known work — including music from Mel Brooks' "[Robin Hood: Men in Tights](#)" — as well as several suites that have never been performed in concert before.

Several years in the making, the concert was first conceived when Seattle Collaborative Orchestra Music Director Anna Edwards met with Mann, a Queen Anne resident, to talk about creating a program of film music. The idea evolved into an entire program of his music. Some of the pieces, like the Emmy-winning music from the Showtime miniseries "Picture Windows," have been performed in concert before. But others, like a suite from the Mel Brooks movie "[Dracula: Dead and Loving It](#)," he arranged specifically for this concert.

Originally from Montreal, Mann has worked as a film composer since the 1980s. His big breakthrough came from Peter Yates' "[Year of the Comet](#)."

"I got hired to replace another composer who was much more famous, then the soundtrack album was wildly successful. It kind of put my name on the map for people who are film score fans."

But more than accolades or celebrity, he remembers receiving a message from a man who credited the "Year of the Comet" soundtrack with helping him through

chemotherapy.

“You go into every project hoping that you’re going to make some sort of impact with your music,” he said.

Outside of film circles, he is best known for his work with Mel Brooks, and he admits, “I’m definitely a junkie for a large orchestra.” But his credits offer a case study in versatility, including jazz, folk and bluegrass scores, among other genres. Mann has also written music for theatrical productions, including two for Seattle Children’s Theatre. Another work for children, his score for the 2000 film “[Thomas and the Magic Railroad](#),” is among his most popular compositions.

“‘Thomas’ fans are serious fans. There is a clip of ‘Thomas and the Magic Railroad’ up on YouTube. It’s had over 23 million views. That’s like Beyoncé territory,” he said. Seattle Collaborative Orchestra will premiere Mann’s newly adapted suite of this music in its May 16 concert.

SCO combines professional musicians with skilled amateurs and talented students to perform a mix of traditional orchestral music and compositions by historically underrepresented composers. Founded in 2012, recent seasons have included works from overlooked 20th-century composer [Ruth Gipps](#) and a world premiere by then-graduate student [Joe Jaxson](#).

“Hummie is a local treasure, an awesome musician and a terrific educator,” said Edwards, SCO’s music director. “It is especially thrilling when we have the opportunity to have the composers join us for rehearsals, offer feedback and allow us to ask specific questions about their music.”

SCO community bass player Christina Wright echoes the sentiment, “This is the soundtrack of my life, and I get to play it! I get goose bumps regularly, in spite of myself.”

Mann has worked with [a mentoring orchestra](#) in Seattle before. As a teacher and a local resident, he values mentorship, spending most of his own teaching time in one-on-one mentoring sessions with students at the graduate program he established.

“When I first moved up to Seattle, I was either at home writing music or down in L.A. interacting with people. I was bemoaning the fact that I was located in Seattle but not

really living in Seattle. And somebody said, ‘Why don’t you teach a class in film scoring?’ ” Mann said.

He started teaching a scoring class at Bellevue Community College (now Bellevue College).

“The thing kind of snowballed in a very, very good way,” he said. That snowball grew into the [Pacific Northwest Film Scoring Program](#), the country’s first accredited yearlong master’s program in film composition. The program, which accepts up to 14 students each year, operates as the music department of the Seattle Film Institute, a private film school. Students develop a portfolio of professionally recorded scores for student-made films submitted from around the world. The curriculum is based on composition techniques that Mann has codified and accumulated over the years, and which he hopes to have published as a book in the next year or two. Along the way, he earned a Ph.D. from the University of Salford in Manchester, England.

He also still composes. Most recently, he composed the score for the documentary “[The Automat](#),” with director Lisa Hurwitz, who was based in Seattle at the time. He is currently working on a Teatro ZinZanni-type [dinner theater project](#) that will be performed in Los Angeles in October. His daughter is the producer.

“When she called me, I was very honored because I don’t think many kids would hire their parents,” he said.

Looking forward, Mann is excited about Seattle’s [new film commission](#). He hopes it will help promote the local independent film scene.

“I’d certainly love to be involved in more Seattle-based projects,” he said.

“The Film Scores of Hummie Mann”

7:30 p.m. May 16; Shorewood High School Auditorium, 17300 Fremont Ave. N., Shoreline; \$20, free for those under 18; seattlecollaborativeorchestra.org
