


WHO IS FRED STEINER?

Photo Courtesy
The Film Music Society



If you were a fan of the original Perry Mason TV series which ran from 1957 to 1966, I'll bet you can hum the bluesy theme that opens the show. That memorable tune is titled "Park Avenue Beat" and it was composed by Fred Steiner. Steiner, a legend in the film industry, also composed music for countless TV shows in the 1950s and 1960s including *Gunsmoke*, *Rawhide*, and *The Twilight Zone*. He went on to create many of the atmospheric cues—a musical segment that underscores a scene—which played an important and underappreciated role in the success of the original *StarTrek* series. (The *StarTrek* theme was composed by Alexander Courage).



 Bill Curtis

Fred Steiner was born on February 24, 1923 in New York City to Hungarian parents. His father, George Steiner, was an accomplished violinist, conductor and film composer. The younger Steiner's gifts were evident from an early age: he played piano at six, cello at thirteen, and earned a scholarship and degree from the Oberlin College of Music when he was twenty.

He began his career as a composer of music scores

for live radio broadcasts. In 1947, he left New York for Hollywood where he worked as arranger, conductor and composer for television shows like *General Electric Theater* (hosted by Ronald Reagan) and filmed TV series.

Steiner also composed music for feature films, although he is best remembered for his TV work. He shared an Academy Award nomination with Quincy Jones for *The Color Purple* in 1985. In 1974, Steiner became concerned about major studios like MGM destroying their music libraries to recover storage space. He met with other film composers and scholars who shared his concern to found the Film Music Society whose mission is to promote the preservation of film and television music in all forms. Steiner lived out his twilight years in Mexico where he died at home at the age of 88. He continues to be admired by fellow composers for creating music that captures the emotional heart of a scene, whether suspenseful, ominous or romantic.

The next time you watch a rerun of an episode of *Twilight Zone*, *StarTrek*, or your favorite black-and-white western, stay tuned for the music credits: chances are you will see Fred Steiner's name. If you listen attentively and gain an appreciation of how much a sensitive musical score contributes to making a scene work, I believe Fred Steiner would have been pleased.



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