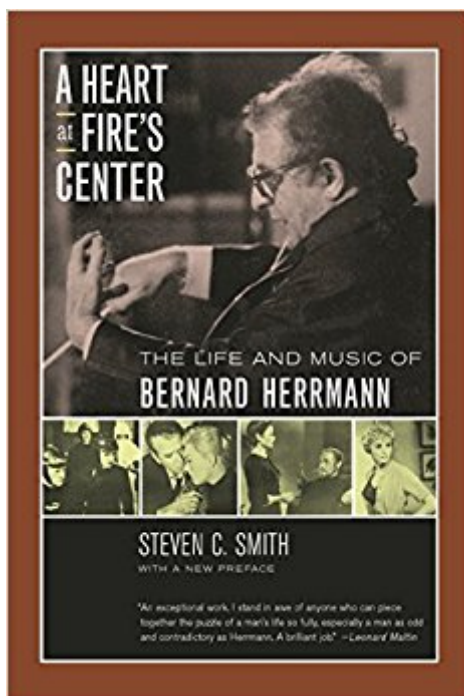


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# A Heart At Fire's Center: The Life And Music Of Bernard Herrmann



## Synopsis

No composer contributed more to film than Bernard Herrmann, who in over 40 scores enriched the work of such directors as Orson Welles, Alfred Hitchcock, François Truffaut, and Martin Scorsese. In this first major biography of the composer, Steven C. Smith explores the interrelationships between Herrmann's music and his turbulent personal life, using much previously unpublished information to illustrate Herrmann's often outrageous behavior, his working methods, and why his music has had such lasting impact. From his first film (*Citizen Kane*) to his last (*Taxi Driver*), Herrmann was a master of evoking psychological nuance and dramatic tension through music, often using unheard-of instrumental combinations to suit the dramatic needs of a film. His scores are among the most distinguished ever written, ranging from the fantastic (*Fahrenheit 451*, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*) to the romantic (*Obsession*, *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*) to the terrifying (*Psycho*). Film was not the only medium in which Herrmann made a powerful mark. His radio broadcasts included Orson Welles's *Mercury Theatre on the Air* and *The War of the Worlds*. His concert music was commissioned and performed by the New York Philharmonic, and he was chief conductor of the CBS Symphony. Almost as celebrated as these achievements are the enduring legends of Herrmann's combativeness and volatility. Smith separates myth from fact and draws upon heretofore unpublished material to illuminate Herrmann's life and influence. Herrmann remains as complex as any character in the films he scored—a creative genius, an indefatigable musicologist, an explosive bully, a generous and compassionate man who desperately sought friendship and love. Films scored by Bernard Herrmann: *Citizen Kane*, *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*, *Vertigo*, *Psycho*, *Fahrenheit 451*, *Taxi Driver*, *The Magnificent Ambersons*, *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, *North By Northwest*, *The Birds*, *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*, *Cape Fear*, *Marnie*, *Torn Curtain*, among others

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## Customer Reviews

"Smith catches what many of us felt in those days, that Welles and Herrmann and colleagues seemed en route to the moon, bright spirits of a worried yet fervid decade. Smith then goes on to take us into every nook of Herrmann's career and many crannies of his private life."--Stanley Kauffmann, "The New Republic

"An exceptional work. I stand in awe of anyone who can piece together the puzzle of a man's life so fully, especially a man as odd and contradictory as Herrmann. A brilliant job."&#151;Leonard Maltin"Bernard Herrmann was a master of psychology. His incredibly innovative music &#145;inhabitedâ™ the film it was in, creating moods that stayed with the audience long after the film was over. Steven Smith captures the very heart of what Herrmann represented. I highly recommend this book to anyone who truly wants a glimpse into the world of this musical giant who changed the very nature of film composing."&#151;Esa-Pekka Salonen, music director, Los Angeles Philharmonic"Fascinating. The scholarship is impeccable, the judgments sound, and the whole thing as compulsively readable as eating popcorn."&#151;Nicholas Meyer, director and writer

For a long time I've had the pleasure of enjoying many of the films which Bernard Herrmann elevated with his signature musical style. The complete story of his life was no less interesting. He shared many characteristics of artists who I feel a similar affinity with, like Scriabin and Hitchcock, while remaining a unique personality. This biography, the only one I'm familiar with was well-written and thorough, allowing a multifaceted perspective on his life and work. It also provided some insights which I'm keen to use for my Music History paper this semester. For one, I feel like he best summed up music's role in sound film, as one aspect of a collaborative art. After the main body of the book, there is a complete transcript of remarks on film music that he made at a university film class. One is also provided with a complete filmography and recording discography for further watching and listening. If you in any way enjoy movies and/or music, this book is for you. Highly recommended.

Bernard "Benny" Hermann--one of, if not \*the\* greatest composer ever to write music for films--was

an enfant terrible. He lived on long enough to become un vieil homme, as well. This revealing book celebrates the genius of the man as a musician and collaborator, but pulls no punches when it comes to depicting his many misadventures and mishaps as a man. Hermann burned almost every bridge he crossed, offended the very people who might have helped him, and so insulted his orchestra players that whenever he made a conducting mistake, as he often did, they followed him to ultimate disaster, causing Benny to lose the many symphony engagements he so coveted. Tail between his legs, he went to London to live and work. The next generation of filmmakers rediscovered him, and, in old age, he ended working for "the kids," as he labeled them. Even then he could not restrain his serpent tongue. When Spielberg heard he had returned to Hollywood, the then young director came to his scoring stage, and literally knelt before him--there were no chairs--to pay him homage. Benny said, "If you think I'm so great how come you keep using Johnny Williams?" An impossible man, but also a very great musician whose scores are now almost all available to us on CDs, proving once again and for all that a very infantile man can also be a supremely mature artist

An insightful look into the life of a legend of the silver screen. Bernard Herrmann was a genius who is primarily remembered for his outstanding film scores for Orson Welles' "Citizen Kane", Robert Wise's "The Day the Earth Stood Still", several Alfred Hitchcock classics including his haunting "Vertigo", a handful of Harryhausen films including the fanciful "7th Voyage of Sinbad", Francois Truffaut's poetic "Fahrenheit 451" and "Brian de Palma's mysterious "Obsession". Smith does an outstanding job of presenting Herrmann's life and times and music. Herrmann's acerbic, oft-times mercuric temperament would suffer no fools. His gift for remarkable orchestration, as one reviewer put it, would make reading a phone book sound great. Herrmann's as composer and conductor spanned radio presentations, concert halls, opera, classical music and the cinema. Quite simply, Smith's biography of Herrmann a must-read for anyone interested in film scores, behind-the-scenes film-making, brilliant music and the genius that was Bernard Herrmann. A keeper.

The story of Bernard Herrmann does not begin and end with Hitchcock. It actually begins with Charles Ives and ends with Martin Scorsese. Along the way Orson Welles, Francios Trouffet, Brian DePalma, Sinbad, Gulliver, Rod Serling, and the "It's Alive" baby turn up. A biography of Bernard Herrmann tells the history of the use of music in radio, television, and film. It also tells the story of a brilliant, infuriating, and ultimately tragic figure. If you have an interest in film composing - real composing, not gathering 10 pop songs on a CD and calling it a soundtrack - you owe it to yourself

to read this biography. And better yet would be to listen to some of his music while reading - the book vividly describes the music but hearing is believing.

I am still reading this book, having read through, roughly, half the book. However, I think I can share some thoughts about this remarkable book. Bernard Herrmann is one of the great film composers of the 20th Century. One of the things about Herrmann that I was less familiar with, was his career outside of film, such his concert works, his passionate desire to be a conductor, his championship of new music, and his lengthy career in radio (both as a composer and conductor). Herrmann was a very talented musician who expected high standards from himself and others. He was also notorious for his hot-tempered, abrasive demeanor. This book explores all of these aspects from Herrmann's life and one can begin to understand (little by little) the enigmatic nature of this gifted composer. The author includes letters to and from Herrmann to connect seam the composer's life into an entertaining and highly informative narrative. The book is not technical on the musical end, so I think it would be very enjoyable for non-musicians to enjoy (and not just the would-be film composers such as myself). Each time I pick up the book, I eagerly anticipate what lies in its pages. I do have one warning, though: learning about Bernard Herrmann is an obsessive past-time. As I progress though the book, I find myself renting the films he scored and spending way too much money on his albums!

So excited to finally buy this! I've wanted it since it was published 25 yrs ago. Perfect condition (bought used), fast delivery. Gonna be a great read. Been a fan since I was a kid. Bernard Herrmann is one of, if not, THE best film composer. Plus so much more.

While I have not finished the book yet, it more than met my expectations of a good read. Didn't know of all the early Herrmann associations with Aaron Copland and Jerome Moross and others that predated all the film music from all three. The book itself had some markings in pencil but nothing to harm the text.

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