For 55 years Herbert Spencer has been among the foremost arrangers in films. Along with ray Heindorf, Edward Powell, Conrad Salinger, and perhaps a dozen others he set the standards, especially in musical films, that helped make the American musical a genre that was unapproachable by the filmmakers of any other country. Spencer became a contract arranger at 20th Century-Fox in 1935 and remained there until both musical films and term contracts gradually passed into history.

The list of pictures on which he worked included Captain January (1936), Heidi (1937), Alexander's Ragtime Band (1938), Second Fiddle (1939), Tin Pan Alley (1940), Week-End in Havana (1941), Springtime in the Rockies (1942), The Gang's All Here (1943), Billy Rose's Diamond Horseshoe (1945), Centennial Summer (1946), Carnival in Costa Rica (1947), When My Baby Smiles at Me (1948), Dancing in the Dark (1949), My Blue Heaven (1950), Meet Me After the Show (1951), With a Song in My Heart (1952), Gentlemen Prefer Blondes (1953), There's No Business Like Show Business (1954), Carousel (1956), Say One for Me (1959), Let's Make Love (1960), The Pleasure of His Company (1961), The Pleasure Seekers (1965), Funny Girl (1968), and Hello Dolly! (1969).

He received two Academy Award nominations, for Scrooge (1970, Original Song Score Adaptation) and Jesus Christ Superstar (1973, Scoring Adaptation).

Like his colleagues, Spencer also orchestrated many dramatic scores, working with Cyril Mockridge (Seventh Heaven, 1973), Alfred Newman (Brigham Young, 1940), David Raksin (Forever Amber, 1947), Alex North (Cleopatra, 1963), Leith Stevens (Smoky, 1966), Jerry Goldsmith (Bandolero!, 1968), Johnny Mandel (MASH, 1970), and David Shire (2010, 1984). For the past several years Spencer has gained additional prominence as orchestrator for John Williams.

The following interview was conducted on October 31, 1988, by Carl Johnson, a young composer whose ambition is to work in theatrical and television films; he submitted this interview in fulfillment of his term paper requirement for Fred Steiner's course, "The History and Art of Film Music," at the University of Southern California. If a few discrepancies in dates and other matters are found, they may be attributed to the unrehearsed nature of an interview and to the subject's long and extraordinary career. –C.M.

HS: I was born in Santiago, Chile, April 7, 1906. When I was 12 or 13 I was sent to the United States to go to prep school, in New Jersey-a place near Princeton called Petty. I graduated from that and went to the University of Pennsylvania. My parents in Chile were overseas Americans. My father's father had started a business there sometime in the 1860s, and my father followed up on it. I think he had hopes that we could go into business, but I wasn't interested in going into business. I studies electrical engineering at the University of Pennsylvania.

CJ: Was that what your father was, an engineer?

HS: Well, a lot of machinery that was being imported needed engineering knowledge. There was a need for an engineer. In the third year the Dean sent for me and said, "What are you doing here, Spencer? Was it your father's idea? You had good grades in prep school. Why don't you go across the street where all your friends are?" My friends were the people in the music school, like David Raksin. But I couldn't get over there until I went back to college itself, and then make the move. So I stayed until I went back to college itself, and then make the move. So I stayed around five or six years, trying to make the move to the other side. In the meantime, I started getting interested in a school orchestra that we had started, playing dances and stuff like that. The trouble was that we didn't have any music to play. This was about 1926, maybe earlier. So I used to buy the sheet music, because I could always read music, ever since I was a kid.

CJ: When you were growing up in Chile, were you influenced much by the music there?

HS: No, it was very old-fashioned. Things like the tango. Chile didn't have a whole lot of dancing. A lot of ¾ pieces, nothing at all like the people from the equator, like the African influence in Brazil. But that was more exciting than the oom-pa-pa stuff.

CJ: What instrument did you play?

HS: In school I started off on clarinet, so I could go to the football games.

CJ: And be in the marching band?

HS: Sure. I learned all parts by heart. You know it's cold in that part of the world. And if I couldn't remember, I'd fake. Naturally I picked up the saxophone, which was nothing much. We had three saxes, two trumpets, a trombone, bass and drums, but we didn't have any music to play. So pretty soon I started cheating on my studies to get something going. We became a bit successful and got a little swellheaded, I guess. Tommy Dorsey played one of the school proms, and I met him, and he told me to look him up in New York whenever I got through school. In New York I started theory lessons with Pietro Floridia, whom I'd been referred to by Ferde Grofe.

CJ: Then you joined Vincent Lopez soon after that?

HS: Well, the hotel St. Regis had just been put up, and it was a society place in town. It was a nice clean job, and we got paid every week. You know, before Petrillo made the union really strong, you might get paid at the end of the week; it was vague.

CJ: Were you playing in the band as well as writing for it?

HS: Oh yes. I used to work in the afternoons before the jobs. And I loved it because you could hear right away the effects the instruments made with each other. I guess that's a good way to find out the things that work, and don't work. You find out other ways of doing things. You find out, for instance, that big gaps in the orchestration make for clarity, and things sing on top if it. Before that, I used to write every note on the way down. I found that really clogged everything. I studied with Floridia, who taught Ferde Grofe (the Grand Canyon Suite and other things that were very popular in those days). Then Joseph Schillinger came into town from Russia. He had a mathematical method of teaching theory and composition. I studied with him about three years. Everyone was going to him at the time. Gershwim was studying there, Glenn Miller, about five to six arrangers in town. Benny Goodman is the one who sent me there.

CJ: And he had a "mathematical" system of composition?

HS: Yeah. A seventh could, for instance, be resolved three ways: down, down to the fourth, and even the octave below. You were narrowed, was the thing about it. But you know when you get used to music; you hear where this stuff was going to go anyhow. It showed you the mathematical equations for music. If it didn't jibe mathematically, there is usually something wrong with what you are saying.
Incidentally, that was during the depression. At any rate, I got tired of playing, naturally. I just concentrated on studying and started doing odd jobs out of the library at CBS in New York, where Lennie Hayton, Freddi Rich, and Mark Warnow were the conductors. They had a singing program in those days for young girls who were going to make it. You get a girl to write stuff for, and you furnish her all through the week with the new stuff that's coming out, like chorus, and small orchestra. You get used to doing things fast. Then they also pay you every week, which is much better than not.

CJ: Then you got to work through a lot of material.

HS: Yeah.

CJ: This was around 1929?

HS: It was later, I think. The years go by. Then I started doing arranging for radio show. Thos were the big programs in those days. Most of them were cigarette programs–Camel, Lucky Strike. Then I met Eddie Powell in New York. He was from the South, a good arranger, and he had gone into "show business," another part of the world that I didn't know anything about. And I stated occasionally helping him. He finally got me into Harms, Inc. They published all the music for the Gershwins and Kern. They had three or four shows every year on Broadway that they underwrote part of, and they had a stable of arrangers: Russell Bennett, Conrad Salinger, Eddie Powell-all the good boys. So by that time I was getting pretty proud of myself, you know, knowing all these big cats. They all helped me. They were all very nice people to me.
So I signed with them, and the minute I signed with them they sent me to California. And it just so happened that we had a pre-emption of a radio program one week because of something the President had to do, so we had a week off. During that week off, Eddie Powell would work with me. I'd go over with Newman-he'd say, "Look, I need to have this piece of music written, to be recorded this week." He didn't know I was doing anything, so I said, "Gee, Eddie, I want to rest." But I made arrangements, and never heard more about it. At the end of my program, around May, I decided to go back home [Chile] to visit the folks there. I hadn't seen them in a while. While I was there, I got a cablegram, and Alfred Newman offered me a job at 20th Century-Fox. From that silly little thing I'd done! That was about 1934 of 1935.

CJ: Was Newman working at 20th Century at that time?

HS: See, 20th Century was a small firm that Zanuck headed. It was a very small company with a very big name. But, he [Newman] was about to leave for Fox, so he offered me the job at Fox. So when I got back, I joined him at Fox. We signed the usual seven-year contract. It sounded big, but every year they could either pick it up or not, you know. Those things are things of the past; you were really slaves. But I loved it because I could learn a lot about pictures.
When the war came, the place became filled with German refugees. Some of them were great musicians-Schoenber, Toch. I found out they were ready to take some pupils. So I studied another couple of years with Ernst Toch. In 1953 all the contracts with the studios were cancelled. You know arrangers, composers.

CJ: Between 1934 and 1953, you worked at Fox as a staff arranger, then?

HS: No, the musicals had tapered off. I was doing musicals, mostly. When I was not doing musicals, I would score movies with the composers. There were about five composers there. You would always learn something new from studying with a composer from the outside. How to use the orchestra, how to use it dramatically, how to use it beautifully, or for comedy; so, it was kind of fascinating. Then of course, the real thing that they wanted me to do were the Monroe pictures, and the Grable pictures, and that kind of stuff, for the choreographers. The choreographers were a nasty lot, most of them. They were giving themselves very big airs because they didn't know if the stuff they were doing was any good or not. Of course, I wasn't going to tell them, because it wasn't my job. I was told very carefully by Alfred Newman that I was being hired as an arranger and not as a critic.

CJ: When you were studying with Ernst Toch, were you studying composition, or orchestration, or both?

HS: The whole business. But very little orchestration. He was interested in his own theory of tone relations. A lot of modern harmony was being used then in Europe-the extended diatonic system. He was very funny though. It would take me a couple of weeks to do his assignments. Then he would go to the piano and say, "You were looking for this, weren't you?" You could just kill him! Because in order to get there you had to prepare it over here, and there was no way you could do it where you were, because you were locked in. He said he had perfect pitch. He'd go over and just play something on the piano, where you were,

because you were locked in. He said he had perfect pitch. He'd go over and just play something on the piano, where I had been just noodling for hours. These guys were the greatest in the world. Occasionally they'd give you a little pat on the back to make you feel good, but not always. I liked that very much.
Well, the good times in the business stopped for a while, in the mid-fifties. Then I went freelance in my partnership with Earle Hagen.

CJ: How did the partnership begin?

HS: Well, we were both together at 20th Century for a time. I was offered a series from a producer who was going into television who was from the studio. He didn't know me very well, so he offered me the job but I wasn't a conductor, and Earle was. So I said, "Why don't we do it together?" He said, "Fine, we'll split it right down the middle." So we formed a little firm, MSI; we did a lot of business for a lot of years. We did records together.

CJ: You said you initially teamed up with Earle Hagen because he was a conductor?

HS: And a very good arranger. Well, we weren't composers in the sense that we did big scores or anything like that; we'd do some cues. The trouble with what I was doing was that you were forever in your niche, because that's what you were hired for.

CJ: How would you describe yours?

HS: Well, I was supposed to take all these songwriters who used to come into the studios, hired to do a musical picture, take down the stuff. There were "hummers" and then there were guys who would come in with piano parts. Then we had to make something out of that stuff. Without asking for any help.

CJ: Did many of them have any idea about harmony and music?

HS: Well, some of them did. Dome of them were very good. One of the first pictures I did was with Irving Berlin–Alexander's Ragtime Band. He brought a piano along with him that had a shifting keyboard, because he could only play on the black keys. He had his piano parts made in New York; he used somebody that knew what the hell he was doing. He'd play something for me on the piano and say, "Do you hear the line?" and all I heard was him humming. But I got alone fine with him. Nice man. Tremendously talented. I guess he heard that stuff, but couldn't play it. His melodies, you know, wander around harmonically like mad. So, while maybe he could not play it, he could certainly compose it in his ear. He couldn't write anything unless he had the words for it.

CJ: Really? Did the words always come first for him?

HS: I think that it must have been so for the son "They Say That Falling in Love is Wonderful." He must have had that idea as words. That's why the music is so beautifully wedded to the words. If he had the words, he could find the melody to go with them. Amazing, absolutely amazing. Dear man.

CJ: You mentioned the Gershwins; did you ever work with them on any projects?

HS: Only with Eddie [Powell]. Eddie had worked with them on things like Let 'Em Eat Cake and a couple other shows. I'd give him a hand if he got in a hurry. And we all became friendly with him, because he was open to us. They were a different class of people. They were all here at one time… Richard Rogers… They were all here. God, it was tremendous. I haven't seen anything like it since. It tapered off after the war. Then they never came back. Never. Nothing like it.

CJ: This was around the time of the war?

HS: Yeah, even before, in the late thirties. I was here by 'thirty-five.

CJ: Most of the Germans came in the late thirties?

HS: Well, the rich ones came first. Boy, in the Beverly Hills Hotel, for a while you wouldn't hear anything but German. It kind of got on people's nerves, because some of the rich Jews were very overbearing. Then came the Schoenbergs, and those people, who were really somebody and didn't have to tell anybody. Which was real good. Thomas Mann, and people. Of course, he was a real swellhead. And Oscar Levant was the one who knew them all. The court jester of the town. Very funny man. No the kind of guy you want to mix words with, though. Very quick. We were friends of his. We stayed on the right side of him.
And there was nothing else to do in those days, since everybody worked at a big studio, it was like a baronetcy, or a dukedom, or something. All the fellows in the music departments knew each other as friends. Now nobody knows anyone from anyplace at all. We were all comrades. There wasn't any fear then.

CJ: What do you suppose the difference was between now and then?

HS: There was more security then.

CJ: Not as much competition for the few jobs?

HS: Not then, because the universities were still teaching guys to be rehearsal piano players, or some damn thing. There were not turning out prepared people to do this stuff. They were all going to write their own great symphonies, and were not into the popular stuff. Except the very few in new York, like Russell Bennetts, who could write you a fairly good symphony, and do the work that was required on the popular stage quickly. You know, you'd start a show at Birmingham or something, and by the time you'd brought it to New York or London, you'd rewritten it three or four times. You know, you'd never go to bed. Don't ever go into that business. It was madness. Absolute madness. They'd take a number out, want you to write a new one. And it was always for tonight, never for later.

CJ: I guess that's one thing nice about movies; once it's been released, they can't change it.

HS: Well, if they do, it's going to cost them a lot of money. In the old days, at MGM, if it didn't fit, they'd do it over again. Look, when you the orchestra under salary, you could work on Sunday. We'd do anything over again that wasn't right, because we were getting paid anyhow. We'd do it until we go it right. We didn't hurry through the recording at tall. Sometimes we'd do fifty takes. Sometimes a singer (these were actresses, never a singer) would never sing anything all the way through. You would have to take this not from take number 30, and cut it together. Then when you played it back they would say, "See, I got it right that time, didn't I?"

CJ: What were some of the best or worst actor/singers you've worked with?

HS: Some of the worst? I guess Don Ameche. We'd have to get a violin player to play very softly behind him, so he'd get somewhere near the pitch. Otherwise, he'd wander off. But, a truly nice man. I enjoyed very much working Carmen Miranda. She was fun. And the band that she had-they used to play by my bunghole all the time, and I'd listen until I finally learned that damned stuff of theirs. They had a completely different accent. Then, of course, there were other girls. I liked Marylyn Monroe a little bit.

CJ: What was she like to work with?

HS: Well, she seemed to be two girls. The one everyone was talking about on the outside, and then a very hardworking girl who would rehearse forever. And she would wear those gym clothes and stink up the place a little bit. With us she was just like one of the fellows, just trying to do a job. Then I found out later that she was the "reigning queen" of this or that. She was a very simple girl, really. I think people go a hold of her and made something else out of her. She was living between two worlds, and really didn't know where the hell she fit in.

I think this guys she marries, this playwright, turned her on to all this heady stuff in New York, and from then on, who the hell knows what happened to her. All I know is that she wasn't doing stuff as well, she wasn't showing up. What was the last song we did? "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend"… That was from Gentlemen Prefer Blondes.

CJ: So we've gotten up to the point where you are working with Earle Hagen…

HS: Yeah, we worked together for about ten years, from 1954 to 1963.

CJ: How did that partnership end?

HS: Well, he was really interested in doing that kind of stuff, and I really wasn't.
CJ: You mean television.

HS: He was good at it. He liked the medium. I think then, Streisand offered me a picture, Funny Girl. This just have been around 1967.

CJ: What was Barbra Streisand like to work with?

HS: Scary. Really. She scared everyone except Willie Wyler. The producer was scared of her. This is at Columbia. She scared people. I know I was terrified of her too. I almost died when I got through with the picture.

CJ: Anything in particular happen when you were recording for the picture?

HS: Well, she could be very loud sometimes.

CJ: When she was singing?

HS: No, when she was rehearsing. "What are you playing over there? Why are you playing that?" The guy said, "Because it's written here". She would turn to me and I would go change something that didn't make a damn bit of difference, and it would make her happy. That was a success, so I got some other pictures. Hello, Dolly! That had Streisand in it. This must have been 1968 or 1969. I got a picture to do abroad with Ian Fraser, Scrooge. They were going to do it in London, and asked me if I wanted to go abroad for a year, and I said "Sure." I hadn't been to London yet, and I thought it would be a good place to go. Naturally I got something else from Previn while we were there, and first thing you know we went to Spain to visit and aunt of my wife's. We went there for three weeks, and stayed for four years.

CJ: Is your wife from Spain?

HS: No, I married here. She is of English decent, Scottish, actually. And she had an aunt who had a plantation in Kenya. The Mau Mau came in, and they old lady couldn't cope with that so she went back to Scotland. She almost died when she was there ' cause she couldn't cope with the cold. So she moved to Spain, to get back to what she was used to. She bought a place near Malagua, and we stayed with her there for a wile. It was very pleasant.

CJ: When you were in Spain you weren't necessarily working….

HS: Well, I was working out of London all the time. Previn was working with the London Symphony, and I had known him since he was a boy at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. He had a show called Good Companions. He wanted me to do it, and I did. It ran for a year.

CJ: You were doing arrangements for this show?

HS: yeah, and also some pictures, which were not very successful. Then, while I was doing Scrooge in London, Johnny Williams was there too. He was doing Fiddler on the Roof.

CJ: Is that were you first met him?

HS: Oh no. I'd known him since he was younger than that-before Previn became Mr. Previn and before Williams became Mr. Williams. The ride from London to where I was in Spain was about and hour and a half by plane. See, Europe is very small. It's the same thing as living in Fresno, except that Fresno should be that nice. Spain is lovely, southern Spain particularly. I could see Africa on some days. So I had a ball there. Previn took the job, I don't know why, of cleaning up Jesus Christ Superstar. You know, cleaning up all the tracks and all. The music was all recorded fine, but needed things to tie it all together, so I arranged for that. I didn't want to take any credit for it so I said, "Just put me down as coordinator."
I did some other show while I was there, too. Oh yeah, Thomas and the King. Well, as I was telling you before, I had gotten pretty chummy with John, who had grown up and come to his own. He said, " Why don't you come home with me and do some pictures?" And I said, "Why?" because, don't forget, at this time I was living in Pain and feeling no pain. "I've got a picture about a fish." I said, "I've done those, and I hate them." "No this is about a shark." And I said, "What else?" "Well, I've got a picture called The Towering Inferno". "You mean something burning down? Jesus Christ, can't you get anything decent to do?"
So I decided to come on and try. So I did The Towering Inferno and I did Jaws and next thing you know, I had an apartment for a couple months, starting staying, and never returned to Spain. No planning… and here I am. I've done all these pictures with him since. I didn't know the picture Jaws as going to become anything. Who the hell would? Twenty years ago I did a picture about a whale. It died the death of a dog. I though this would be the same thing. See, you can never tell which way it will go. I've done some pictures, which I though were very good which never saw the light of day. Either they were never released, or when they were, later, nothing happened.

CJ: Do you find that a person can do their best work on a picture that never gets seen?

HS: Well, you die. In other words, it becomes a secret between you and the cutter. But you can't buy groceries with that. It better be on something good. "Good" meaning successful. That enough people like it. Success means making a lot of people, or at least enough people say that that's pretty good. Otherwise your career is going to be very difficult.

CJ: Do you find that a lot of times your reputation rides on your most recent film, whether it be good or bad?

HS: Well, if you've been working on a lot of "dead horses" it gets to you. It really does. I've never done that many in a row, but everybody gets their share of them. For instance, there was tremendously expensive picture at 20th Century called Star. This picture cost 40 million dollars, but didn't make a penny. Young Zanuck lost his job at 20th Century. He thought he had it made, but the picture was never released. Well, it was released, but just taken off the screens basically. A real death in the afternoon. Didn't even make the evening show.

CJ: These other films you've worked on since then, were all these with John Williams?

HS: No, Breaking Away was with Pat Williams; The Way We Were was with Marvin Hamlisch, the rest were with John Williams.

CJ: What's the most recent film you've done?

HS: The Witches of Eastwick and Empire of the Sun. But I didn't work much this year, because John didn't write, and I don't feel like going with anybody new, frankly.

CJ: When did you first meet John Williams?

HS: I must have met him when he was a piano player doing sessions for me. He was at Universal. I think he made his pictures there. Then he came to 20th Century as an occasional composer here. We hit it off as friends, you know. I did some pictures with him at 20th Century, some God-awful pictures like A Guide for the Married Man, I mean absolute bombs. I noticed the quality of his writing. Very up-town. Here he gets these lousy pictures and he

writes this kind of stuff. But he was just trying to get his nails into something. But when he did finally get his act together, he had it all. It was wonderful to see. Since he never really had a real good picture to work on, you couldn't really tell what he could do. You have to have the footage so you can see the man understand the picture and sharing it.

CJ: What was the first picture that he was really able to do his best work on?

HS: Well, for me it was The Towering Inferno. Before that he had done some things at 20th Century, like The Poseidon Adventure, and I noticed him coming into his own.

CJ: How does he compare with the other composers you've worked with? Say, for example, the Alfred Newmans, and the George Gershwins?

HS: They're all different. But you see a good mind working here, and you know that it's necessary, that there's a need to do it. So it makes you feel very relaxed and warm. This guy knows what they hell he wants to do. See, you can write very good music, but it has to fit the picture you're looking at. You have to have a dramatic feel for what the heck's going on. That's like Alfred Newman. He very seldom made a mistake. We used to say that the best composers for movies did not have to be the best composers, but had to be the best for what was going on. It's very hard to get good composers, because they have all these ideas about symphonic things instead of concentration on what you have. The medium is very subtle, and when you get hold of it, you can feel it. Otherwise you sit there and you think, "It's too bad this guy's wasting his time doing this because he's got one eye shut or something, he's not getting the idea."

CJ: You think it's important to be aware of what the filmmaker's trying to say regardless of how he's saying it?

HS: I think so. The guy who makes a film is usually the last guy who knows what the hell a film is about. By this time the film is living a life of its own. He's still looking at the script he though he was going to do, and the way he shot it, and all that stuff, but this is something else. Very seldom do the two jibe. Some producers are still thinking today that a film is the same they read and thought, "My God, what a wonderful script." Because the guy who shot it is improvising as he goes along because he's done the shot before, and the thing takes off by itself. Not necessarily the way it is on paper. So the composer had better look at the film, and not read the script. Or listen to the guy who bought it, because he's still back at square one. He's got something else, now. You score what you got. Listen to him politely, but to hell with that, stick to what actually is on.

CJ: So with John Williams

HS: Well I noticed right away that he was grabbing the thing. I said, well he is a full-grown, real composer of films. He is much more than that, but he has learned what films are about, and he sees them well. He sees them with continuity. He doesn't see them as 30-second things, but he sees the whole damn thing, because the key structures are so well managed. And you don't plan these things. When you are with it, you wander on to these things, because the scene seems to demand it.

CJ: Is there usually a logical progression of key centers to a film?

HS: Well, it sounds logical when you see it. I've never gone back to compare films, but I suppose you could make a continuum of the whole thing and find out that the guys who do it most successfully do certain things. It makes a big difference, for example, what key you are playing in. We used to do a lot of talking at 20th Century. "How did you like so-and-so's score?" Well, I liked it, liked the music and all, but it sounded like it had been transposed. From the key that it should have been in to something else. Most of the pictures that Paramount seemed to be doing in those days reminded me of something a piano player would do. Put down how a piano player would do it, in the wrong key, where the strings don't sing

there, they're playing on the middle strings with the wrong fingers-all the flats. Whereas John is very conscious of where things lay on the strong, tremendously conscious, both of us are.

CJ: Although neither of you are string player yourselves.

HS: No, but you've got to be conscious where a thing lays, where the guys really draw a bow and get something going for you. Otherwise you get just an "hmm" sound, an organ sound. He's very conscious of that.

CJ: How do you both achieve that kind of awareness?

HS: Well, we both know the classical repertoire. The stuff that we learned sounds wonderful, usually lays in the right key. You put it up half a tone or down, you kill it. You'd be surprised. Most of the violinists have been trained so that they know where things lay well for them. Something that really cooks. Most of the stuff that he writes is in A, you know, sharp keys.

CJ: Strings generally do not work as well in flat key?

HS: they do… you can use them on purpose in a flat key for an effect. But when the sun comes out, it better come out in another key. Because the half-positions in the flat keys-that's not where the fingers lay. The flat keys are not as open. D-sharp and E-flat are in slightly different position with slightly different fingering. Of course everyone knows that generally, but specifically you notice a difference in the sound. It's a little more muted, as little more tentative. Of course, there are no end of examples of when this can be tremendously successful, but usually we try to keep the hell away from that kind of thing. The clarinet will have to play in all sharps, but they have to do that anyhow, so they might as well get used to it.

CJ: In the composer-orchestrator relationship, are there differences between how many details a composer will put on a sketch, and how much is left to the orchestrator?

HS: John generally makes a very good sketch. If you look at it carefully, all the information is there, but sometimes there are suggestions back and forth. "Why don't we do…" He might buy that and say, "Yes, let's do it that way."

CJ: So you do get to have input into a project.

HS: Oh yea. He'll always play his stuff for me. Bounce it off of me. "What do you think?" Sometimes I'll say, "I like the other thing you played better." "Why?" You always shave to say why, because he won't ask for their two bits from just anybody. You can't just shrug your shoulders. We have a good relationship. And I know the right questions to ask him. How does he fill about a piece, how much sound is a particular section supposed to have? Not that you wouldn't know how much sound they have naturally, so that there are no other places to go to, or less to go to. Is it a solo pictures, for instance, where solo instruments play a lot? I think Alfred Newman was a solo man. He was always featuring somebody. They'd get married to the picture.

CJ: Thinking of your career in general, what would you say have been some of the highlights, and what have been some of the low points?

HS: Well, I must say my last years with John Williams have been the most enjoyable of all, truly. In the first place, we get out of here, go over to England for three or four months - live like kings. We write music there, record it there. Wonderful musicians. You can tell immediately that they aren't the lads that we've got.

CJ: What would you say are the main differences between the musicians there and the ones here?

HS: Well, the best here are almost comparable to what you can get any day there from a good contractor. A good contractor there can get you a Las Vegas-type band with wonderful brass.

If you hit a chord, all the guys are there. In other words, they're all like a first trumpet. I mean there's none of that falling off. They can read anything right off, which is unusual in Europe, because not all orchestras can do that. I had a big surprise in, of all places, where I thought music had been born, in Rome. Jesus, I couldn't believe it. What a bunch of beasts.

CJ: What other countries have you recorded in?

HS: Well, I recorded some in Paris. Forget it. The French go across the Channel. There are five big symphony orchestras in London. None of them get paid all the time. The guys belong to it, and they get paid as they make money. For example, the London Symphony has a series of concerts, but they also have all sorts of jobs where they can get paid. A good contractor can get you the best orchestra in the world, drawing from these five. Because one of them is relatively dead. You hit an A chord, and it's absolutely glorious, alive, beautiful. They should be Italians, or something. No, Scottish. The Scots are wonderful musicians. So I have nothing but respect for these guys. And they pay attention. The only thing you mustn't do is bore them-missing cues, and so forth. They can't stand a guy who can't conduct. Because the guy's trying to catch the cue in odd bars, you know? He got this one, he missed the other one, and pretty soon you have to go back and do it all over again. Pretty soon they get all stoney-eyed, and you won't get anything out of these guys, because they won't put up with it. They'll play their hearts out for a guy who is as good as they are. At least they'll play for John, because Johnny's a good conductor, see, as well as being a great writer. What a difference that makes/

CJ: How did he learn to become a good conductor?

HS: Well, he made up his mind that he was going to learn how to do it.

CJ: Do a lot of composers not do that?

HS: Well, don't forget that Andrew Previn was a very good friend of his. And, he started thinking about being as clean and precise as possible. Going on when there are wrong notes, and remembering that in bar 35 there was some wrong note in the back. And remember, don't stop. That will bore them. The orchestra wants to hear the piece all the way through. The next time they run it, maybe they'll fix everything themselves, but if you start interrupting, you never hear them play the whole piece through. Their minds wander. So John has learned to do it that way. He remembers exactly what was necessary over there… "Bar so-and-so, what do you have?" … Corrects that and starts again. Now the second time around it should go through almost perfect. Now, bring the picture on, and see how we're doing, so he gets the recording guy moving. In this way you can record a lot of music, with everybody cooperating, and everybody absolutely on. But when the guys start getting glassy-eyed, you better give them five, or they'll go to sleep.

CJ: Do you remember a particular cue or piece of music that has surprised him when he's gotten up on the stand?

HS: Oh no, he looks the scores over. He can tell exactly how something will sound by looking at it. If I say, "Well, I did this or that, "he'll say "Good." Or "No Good." No good means he disagrees, always for rational reasons. None of this "I have to have it my way." Usually I change something because over here I had this effect, and I can't get to it without destroying this. But there are practical things about orchestration. You get to a place where you say, "This sound has to be exactly what we had over here, and this is being compromised by something we had over here. We should fix this, not this." To fix it on the stage is for the birds. It would take too long and be too costly. In fact, you're better off fixing it during a break or something.

CJ: If you would, please, could you talk a little about the making of the score to Star War? Did either of you have any idea it would become so successful?

HS: No. Not the least. Never a clue. We kind of liked it, but we through it was more of a cartoon. We though the kids would like it, but we never thought people would line up around the block to see it… Everyday forever… Oh no.

CJ: Was that gratifying to you to see something you'd worked on become so wildly popular?

HS: It was very gratifying. As a matter of fact, I think I went to see it at the theater.

CJ: Do you usually go see your pictures at the theater?

HS: Well, usually we get a chance to see it before, but this time we had been in England before the film was assembled. John had seen it, of course, during the previews, but I hadn't. I saw it over here on the corner. "Son of a _____," I said. "That sounds wonderful." But I appreciated the music, the way it was laid out. It takes off from the opening fanfare. I still remember recording it outside of Compton. Big hall. Big orchestra. It was a certain excitement. Lucas was very excited about it. Leitmotives are used all the way through the score. It's the only way you can get through something like that. We had six horns, all the woodwinds we wanted.

CJ: Do you often get an opportunity to write for whatever you want, like that?

HS: Well, with Lucas and Spielberg you always get what you need.

CJ: What about the other films in the Star Wars series? After the success of the first one, did the tow of you feel that there was any pressure to do as well with the other two?

HS: No, we know from the beginning it would be a trilogy. I like The Empire Strikes Back very much.

CJ: What about E.T.?

HS: That was a joy. Totally unexpected. But then all the picture that these young people had done, Lucas and Spielberg, were fresh. They weren't all used up. I guess John felt that same exhilaration, because with bad pictures he drops too. As with Empire of the Sun. The picture didn't go anyplace, and the movie didn't go anyplace.

CJ: What about The Witches of Eastwick?

HS: I thought that was great. You see, the picture was exciting. It was a naughty, cute picture. Johnny found the mood to do it. A composer has to have something pushing him. You work with the film. It makes all the difference in the world. It really does.

CJ: One of my favorite scenes from The Witches of Eastwick was the tennis scene. Do you remember working on that one?

HS: Yes. It took some bit of doing.

CJ: When you were learning about orchestration, who did you study?

HS: Well, personally, I was with Pietro Floridia, who was an Italian composer in exile from Mussolini. He got me to buy the piano versions of certain pieces. He would tell me to take the piano versions, orchestrate them, and then compare that to the original to find out how this stuff was done. It was slow, tedious work, but I guess it's the only way to find out how this stuff is done. Some of the Mozart stuff, for example. The B-flat Symphony. He'd give me the piano part, with no strings, and say, "You set the strings." But above all go to concerts as much as you can. Listen to ask much music as you can, then buy the scores and remember what you've heard. This is the way it is done. Little by little you'll start catching on; slowly, then faster after that. Then you start hearing devices all the time. You start hearing settings and subdivisions of those things. Then finally, you're pretty sure you'll hear what you want to

hear when you go to the stage and rehearse. In the beginning, I was so startled by what I heard. "Did I do that?" But you've got to be sure from the downbeat, because to have surprises on the recording stage is no good. Very bad. After a while when you do it day after day. See, the best training ground was when you and the orchestra were under contract. Every day you could hear something you'd written the music for. You could say, here's the way it's written, and here's the way it sounds. It finally penetrates the brain. Slowly, but it does.
In the old days, people used to learn everything by conducting the pit orchestra in local opera and stage plays. You'd find out how something was done because the guy playing it was right in front of you. Rimsky used to say that there were only two kinds of music, the kind that sounded good right away, and the kind that needed rehearsal. If it needs too much rehearsal, then it's too expensive and nobody wants to listen to it.

CJ: Who would you say are the best orchestrators to study?

HS: Well, among the modern composers, I think you can learn more form the Russians than anybody else. Because they scored everything in Paris anyway. Of course, the greatest person in the world at orchestrating his own music was Stravinsky. The Russians seem to incorporate almost anything the French discovered almost immediately. And they use it well.

CJ: If you had to name your favorite film of all time, what would you say that would be?

HS: Gigi. The musical.

CJ: Do you foresee the musical films coming back into popularity any time soon?

HS: Not until the talent that writes them gets better. All the current stuff is just old-style operetta. Nothing very big, simple tunes, very expressive, classically trained singers, etc. Even Les Miserables was a miserable show. Not one tune or piece of melody in the whole thing. But there wasn't anything in Jesus Christ Superstar. And what was the one about the roller skaters? Starlight Express? I saw the first act and walked out.

CJ: What would you say is your favorite piece of music?

HS: Well, I couldn't say that I have a favorite. I like the symphonies of Beethoven and Mozart. I don't like singers, though. Especially high German sopranos.

CJ: What was it like working on Empire of the Sun with all the coals in that movie?

HS: I didn't work directly with that. Just the background stuff. It was supposed to sound "churchy." I'm not great on that stuff. I find it worthy, but not exciting. I must say I like the French composers very much. Especially when they're played well. Of course, Stravinsky occupies the top rung with me.

CJ: Did you ever get to meet him?

HS: No. Almost everyone I know did, but I never got to. I want to, but he stayed within his own circle of friends. His ballets. And, of course, Le Sacre is one of the great works of art. Of course now, all the symphonies he learned to play it properly. They play it like a "head" arrangement. They can almost play it without looking at the music. When I was with Eddie Powell in New York we went to hear the ballet that came after the war. We went to hear Petrouchka and I almost rolled over. I'd never head anything like that before. It was absolutely riveting.

CJ: Are there any composers alive today that you think match that?

HS: No. See, he was a hybrid from Russia that went back a thousand years. And, or course, one of the cleverest men who ever lived. Particularly in calligraphy. Have you ever seen any of his sketches? They were like works of art. One time they were going to put for sale some

of his sketches form Le Sacre and I saw them in a window in London, and I think they cost thirty pounds or something like that. I didn't have the money with me, so I went back to the hotel, and tried to come back, but couldn't, of course, and had to stay with somebody. I went back a couple days later, and it had been withdrawn. They'd changed their mind. "Oh no, it was a mistake."

CJ: Of all the music that you've written, and orchestrated, what has been your favorite?

HS: I suppose E.T. Well, in a theater I feel so wonderful about it.

CJ: Did you see that in a theater with a real audience?

HS: Yeah, I guess as a whole, I could tell that everything had been done right. Particularly by Johnny. He's such a good man. One of the nicest guys I've ever met. Thoughtful, simpatico, funny.

CJ: Do you and he keep in close contact?

HS: Yeah. We go to work a lot of times at an enclave that Spielberg built inside Universal, called Amblin. It's just for the music. A projection room. A big office for him with a grand piano, an office for me right next to it. A kitchen. When you work for him, he sends in lunch. My God, I don't see royalty treated any better than that. I used to work at home a lot, but when I work with John I'm usually in the same room. He'd be working at a piano, and I'd be sitting down, and I could shut him off if I wanted to. But then when it came time to work on the cue he had been working on, I had already heard it. See, he always plays it for me exactly in tempo. He's a good enough piano player that he doesn't stumble through it. The tempo and the intention of the sound. Everything is right there. That way everything keeps moving.

CJ: What are you views on synthesizers and electronics?

HS: Well, I guess that the films I do with John are some of the few that are done with a real orchestra. Synthesizers are effective if you write them precisely. I think they are their own genius. I think the future will be more or less like the Hammond organ in the old movie theaters. The orchestra would play and then the organ would substitute, but we always wanted to hear the orchestra. They don't have the expression of the orchestra, but here and there they do a good job imitating the orchestra. I don't think they should imitate the orchestra. I think some talented boys will develop something that uses tones differently. The problem is that it always sounds as though somebody had their fingers all over, fiddling with the notes. Good music is not that way. I think it's in its infancy.

CJ: Where o you see film music going?

HS: Somebody will have to provide music for it, always. Films are part and parcel of our society. There will always be good filmmakers and bad ones. And they'll always want music. There will be more opportunities for people who are very well trained to do this, and there will be a terrific burden for doing everything marvelously very fast, which is a lot to ask. I've noticed that in the United States there is always plenty of talent. In companies like Disney, for example, [Walt] Disney hired people, not form conservatories, but he used to go around and find out who was playing piano or organ for his pictures that he thought was funny. That's the way he got them. It was pure talent that he wanted. The good guys will make it. The clever ones will make it first, but the good guys will always find a spot. But you have to learn to wait sometimes, because it is very difficult.

CJ: If you had any advice to somebody just starting, what would it be?

HS: See everybody's stuff. Find out for yourself, "Why is this good? Why is this popular?" find the reasons people like things.

CJ: What are some upcoming projects for you?

HS: Well, John called me up the other day and said that Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade was coming up. "Do as much as you want to do." I don't have the strength to do the whole picture like that. So I figure "Sure, it will get me out of the house."