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### Dave Kahn Dies

Composed *Leave It to Beaver*, *Hitchcock* TV music

by Jon Burlingame



Dave Kahn, composer of several classic TV themes including *Leave It to Beaver*, died July 3 at the Motion Picture Country Home and Hospital in Woodland Hills, Calif. He was 97.

Kahn was the last surviving creator of iconic themes and scores from the 1950s. He was also the last of TV's behind-the-scenes composers who frequently worked without screen credit, ghost-wrote for other composers, and was forced to split credit with non-writing partners involved in music publishing deals.

In addition to the playful theme for *Leave It to Beaver* (1957-63), Kahn composed the musical signatures for

*The Restless Gun* (1957-59), *Suspicion* (1957-58), *Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer* (the half-hour version with Darren McGavin, 1958-60), *21 Beacon Street* (1959-60) and *Overland Trail* (1960).

He also wrote the first of three themes to adorn the popular sitcom *Bachelor Father* (1957-62), much of the music for *Hopalong Cassidy* (1952-54) and, perhaps most significantly, an arrangement of Charles Gounod's "Funeral March of a Marionette" for the half-hour *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (1955-62).

Most of this work fell to Kahn because of his association with David M. Gordon, a Southern California music publisher who contracted with MCA-owned Revue Studios (later Universal) to provide music for its TV series. "When [Gordon] needed something done, he came to me to do it," Kahn recalled in 1993. "In those days they were using a lot of track music," he said, referring to pre-existing music not written specifically to any one picture. "So I wrote a lot of background

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▼ July,

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music for *Hitchcock* and all the shows [Gordon] had out there.

"And in those days, you had to do it out of the country," Kahn explained. "All of the stuff that I did for him was recorded in Munich, Germany. He used the musicians in the Munich Symphony. You sent the music over there and they recorded and sent it back."

All of Kahn's themes, for publishing purposes, were co-credited to "Melvyn Lenard," the first and middle names of Gordon's son, who didn't actually compose music but whose name enabled the Gordon family to collect half the royalties of any Kahn composition used. It was understood to be part of the deal in that early, less scrutinized, era of TV music.

In addition to the themes, Kahn was also called upon to write underscore music for several of the series, notably *Beaver* and *Hitchcock*, but on a "library" basis, not for specific scenes or episodes. "I did a lot of what you'd call 'wild' cues – a bunch of mystery cues for *Hitchcock*, music for fights or car chases. I did some bridges based on the themes. Music editors had to cut them in and make them fit."

In fact, Kahn knew nothing of Jerry Mathers or Tony Dow before composing that memorably bouncy tune with just a hint of mischief for *Leave It to Beaver*. "I wrote it without having seen the pilot," Kahn remembered. "I was just told it was a kids' show and a little of what it was all about. That's the only thing I ever wrote that everybody knows. That's my claim to fame," Kahn said with a smile.

The music that Gordon commissioned from Kahn wound up in literally dozens of popular shows from the late 1950s and early 1960s (most of them produced by Revue), including *Bringing Up Buddy*, *Buckskin*, *Cimarron City*, *Coronado 9*, *Death Valley Days*, *M Squad*, *The Millionaire*, *Northwest Passage*, *The Real McCoys*, *State Trooper*, *The Texan*, *The Thin Man*, *Wagon Train*, *Tales of Wells Fargo* and more.

Although *Leave It to Beaver* is the best-known of Kahn's TV themes, interestingly it was his folk-flavored theme for John Payne's Western *The Restless Gun* that was the most-recorded at the time, earning renditions by the Sons of the Pioneers, Lawrence Welk, Mitch Miller and others.

Just once was an entire album devoted to Kahn's music: the 1959 soundtrack for *Mike Hammer*, arranged and conducted by jazz veteran Skip Martin. "Dave Gordon called me up one day and said, 'I've got an album at RCA. Write me up 12 tunes real quick. So we did this album, and none of that music was ever in *Mike Hammer*.'" The album – now available on CD, paired with another Revue soundtrack, *M Squad* – is 33 minutes of classic private-eye jazz played by some of the West Coast's finest musicians.

Kahn spent nine years – from the early 1960s to the early 1970s – at Filmways, where he served as a music editor, coordinator and supervisor on such popular comedies as *The Beverly Hillbillies*, *Petticoat Junction*, *Mister Ed*, *The Addams Family* and *Green Acres*. He wrote background music for most of them and earned a tiny bit of fame by singing (along with its composer) the *Addams Family* theme ("they're creepy and they're kooky, mysterious and spooky...").

"Vic Mizzy and I made a tape singing the theme to demonstrate it to the producers. Well, they never did replace our voices – mostly Vic's – with real singers, so that's what went on the air," remarked Kahn.

"Dave was the best music editor around," Mizzy said on Saturday. "He was with me at Filmways when I did *The Addams Family* and *Green Acres*. He did five shows a week. I don't know how the hell he did it. He was a great guy with a good sense of humor."

Kahn was born October 14, 1910, in Duluth, Minn. A saxophone player in high school, he went on to perform in the 1930s with Clyde McCoy's band, including McCoy's signature song "Sugar Blues." After Army service during World War II, he joined Republic Pictures' music department as an arranger and orchestrator, which in turn led to an association with music supervisor Raoul Kraushaar.

Kahn said he ghost-wrote several feature-film scores for Kraushaar, including Fritz Lang's *The Blue Gardenia* (1953) and a library of music for TV's *Hopalong Cassidy* in the early 1950s. ASCAP records indicate that he also contributed music to such Kraushaar-credited films as *Copper Sky* (1957), *The Unknown Terror* (1957) and *The Cool and the Crazy* (1958).

After his stint at Filmways, Kahn continued working as a music editor on features including *Electra Glide in Blue* (1973) and *National Lampoon's Animal House* (1978). He received a 1984 Emmy nomination for his music editing on the TV series *Simon & Simon*.

He is survived by a brother.

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