

## Introduction

# *The Call*

It was the summer of 1981 when I arrived in Southern California to begin my career as a film composer. It was also the summer that *Raiders of The Lost Ark* was released. I remember sitting in the theatre hearing John Williams' score. I was mesmerized by it. As the end credits rolled everyone in my group wanted to leave, but I wanted to stay long enough to see who had orchestrated this score. Finally the name came up! It was Herb Spenser.

Fresh from Boston, I didn't know anyone in town, much less out of town! But I was determined that I was going to meet Herb Spenser. I wanted to orchestrate just like that. Notice I said orchestrate. I was always pretty confident in my ability to compose, but coming out of college, I'd only had the obligatory one semester of orchestration that colleges offer in the senior year. It's not enough. Then or now.

Consequently, I found myself way behind the power curve in my ability to get out there and compete with other composers. I needed to learn more than I knew. I wanted to know what the top Hollywood guys knew. I could hear these combinations in my head when I went to write, but I lacked the experience to know exactly what it was I was hearing. So I would spend hours going through score after score trying to identify what my inner ear was hearing.

Talk about time consuming!

So, I concluded the best way to start was at the top. I had no illusions about getting an interview with John Williams, but I did think I had a decent chance of getting one with Herb Spenser.

Not knowing him, or where he even lived, I was somewhat stumped on how to proceed. Fortunately, after a little prayer, it occurred to me that Herb Spenser would be a member of the Musicians Union. Since I was living in Ventura, California at the time, I placed a call to the local union. I left a message on their machine.

To my delight, a few days later, the local Ventura office called me back with Herb Spenser's phone number. They had checked and gotten permission for me to call and speak with him.

Being a busy professional, Herb Spenser gave me five minutes. Let me tell you something about five minutes. With a dodo, five minutes can be the biggest waste of time in your whole life. But with a professional who knows how to advise and teach, it can change the course of your entire life.

And it did.

In five minutes, Herb Spenser told me exactly what I needed to know. "If you're going to be successful," he explained, "you have to know about a thousand devices because that's the language of orchestration."

And so began the journey to organize and compile this device list on my own and to learn the craft that would empower my music to sing and soar.

Here's the thing about working with any top professional. They'll put you in the right direction, but don't expect to be spoon fed. It's up to you to do the digging.

And dig I did.

Ultimately, I came up with the device list. To explain, "device" was Herb's way of saying combinations and doublings. As a jazz arranger, I knew plenty of those. There was no mystery there.

The beginnings of this list is right here. It's the "secret sauce" list. I know that to be true, because after I finished volume 1, I was over at Warner Brothers with Jerry Goldsmith (*Planet of The Apes*, *Star Trek*, *Outland*, *The Blue Max*, and about 297 other film scores) sitting in the back of the control room with his orchestrator, who blurted out so loudly that everyone turned and looked at me, "Holy Sh\*t! You've got everything in here we steal from!"

Indeed I did.

And now, so do you.

What you're holding is multi-volume. Now, to explain what you've got, I have to explain it from an academic viewpoint so it will make sense.

Whenever you see a book labeled *Orchestration*, generally, it's not about orchestration. It's about instrumentation. All of the college texts are designed to be covered in a single

semester with a workbook. In that one semester you learn about the individual instruments and how to write for them. That's instrumentation.

When you look at the music examples in all the books, you mostly see single lines of musical examples, not the entire score. So if you're studying say the flute, you'll be given a technique and a single line example to illustrate the technique. Typically, because of copyright issues, that's all you get.

That's where *Professional Orchestration* is different. A huge majority of the musical examples in this book are full page/full score examples. So now you can see, and with the optional audio package, can *hear* the examples in context of the score.

That's a huge help! But with this present volume, there's one other huge benefit you get from my approach (which follows what both Berlioz and Rimsky-Korsakov did in their books).

When you're looking at these examples, organized by the low, medium, high and very high registers for most of the instruments, you're learning the first set of orchestral devices and combinations that covers how to write an orchestral accompaniment to a solo instrument. You'll also discover that there are certain ranges (called "sweet spots" by orchestrators) that composers consistently write for in dramatic writing, regardless of whether it's for film/TV or the concert hall.

Just in Volume 1, *Solo Instruments and Instrumentation Notes*, you have nearly 200 devices mapped out for you, provided you do the score analysis.

The next learning advantage you have comes with the computer and programs that come with orchestral sample libraries. As part of your analysis, you can key the examples into your notation or sequencing program to compare to recordings and live performances when these pieces are performed locally.

If you're working with orchestral sample libraries beyond what comes with the various notation programs, you're also:

- ◆ testing your samples to see which ones work and which don't
- ◆ building your sequencing skills
- ◆ building your recording and mixing skills

All from one full page/full score example.

And because you have "playback" with the orchestral sample libraries, you can also re-orchestrate the example to see why the composer made the choice he did.

Now, a warning.

With all this electronic power, don't think for a second that you don't need to go hear live concerts and talk with musicians, because you do. If you do everything electronically,

including restricting your listening to CDs and MP3s, you can make tragic mistakes in your scores that if performed live, will set you back.

Sample libraries are great tools, but they are only musical snapshots of a technique performed in a moment of time.

Having said that, I now want to explain about The 8 Keys to Learning Professional Orchestration since each volume is dedicated to one of the eight keys. This means that each volume is problem/solution driven. Here they are:

Volume 1: The First Key - *Solo Instruments and Instrumentation Notes*

Volume 2A: The Second Key - *Orchestrating the Melody Within the Strings*

Volume 2B: The Second Key - *Orchestrating the Melody Within the Woodwinds and Brass*

Volume 3: The Third Key - *Orchestrating the Melody by Combining Orchestral Sections*

Volume 4: The Fourth Key - *Orchestrating Harmony Within Each Orchestral Section*

Volume 5 : The Fifth Key - *Orchestrating Harmony by Combining Orchestral Sections*

Volume 6: The Sixth Key - *Solving Practical Scoring Issues*

Volume 7: The Seventh Key - *Scoring For Voice and Orchestra*

Volume 8: The Eighth Key - *Scoring For Voices*

One thing else to point out. The Eight Keys are how you approach score study for the examples in this book, and any other study score you might have.

With a highlighter, you mark the score:

1. where the solo instrument is performing (usually the melody or counter-theme)
2. where the melody is being performed in the strings and with what technique(s)
3. where the melody is being performed in the woodwinds and with what technique(s)
4. where the melody is being performed in the brass and with what technique(s)
5. where the melody is being performed with combined sections and with what technique(s)
6. where the melody is being harmonized in three or more parts per section (ensemble writing)
7. where the melody is being harmonized in three or more parts when sections are combined
8. how the tutti's, *ppp*, *fff*, etc., are written
9. how the orchestra is written behind the solo voice and whether or not the composer doubled the voice with an instrument to help the singer.

These are very simple observations. By applying them to any score, you'll quickly begin to discover how it was written.

I've included examples that have been recorded. I've worked to keep the examples within a restricted group of works so that you would learn a few, well, thus giving you a library of resources that fit into a couple of bookshelves.

As you can see, a lot came from that phone call with Herb Spenser in the Summer of 1981. So please, use this knowledge, and be blessed.

*Peter Lawrence Alexander  
Petersburg, Virginia  
October, 2008*