

# This Day in History... June 29, 1911

## Birth of Bernard Herrmann

Composer Bernard Herrmann was born Maximillian Herman on June 29, 1911, in New York City, New York. He famously worked with Orson Welles, Alfred Hitchcock, and Martin Scorsese, and is often considered one of the most influential and pioneering composers in cinema history.

Herrmann's father encouraged his interest in music from a young age, taking him to the opera and sending him for violin lessons. When he was 13, Herrmann won a prize for music composition and at that time decided to pursue music as a career. He attended New York University and the Juilliard School and formed his own orchestra, the New Chamber Orchestra of New York, when he was just 20 years old.



*Herrmann stamp from the 1999 Hollywood Composers issue*



*As chief conductor of the CBS Symphony Orchestra, Herrmann championed the music of Charles Ives, who was relatively unknown at the time.*

Herrmann began working as a staff conductor at the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) in 1934. He was made music director of the Columbia Workshop within two years. In that role he arranged music for experimental radio dramas. Nine years later he became chief conductor of the CBS Symphony Orchestra. In this position, he broadcast concert music across the US, introducing Americans to more new music than any conductor before him. Herrmann received several awards and grants for the programs he arranged and for his promotion of unknown composers. He also wrote several concert pieces over the years including a symphony, a *Wuthering Heights* opera, a cantata for *Moby Dick*, and a piece dedicated to the fallen soldiers of World War II.

Herrmann met Orson Welles during his time at CBS and wrote or arranged several of his radio shows, including his famed 1938 *The War of the Worlds* broadcast. In 1941, he wrote the score for his first film, Welles's *Citizen Kane*. He received an Academy Award nomination for best score for that film. He competed against himself for that award, and ended up winning his only Academy Award for *The Devil and Daniel Webster*.



*Herrmann scored Welles's Citizen Kane.*

In the 1950s and 60s, Herrmann scored seven films for Alfred Hitchcock, including *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956), *Vertigo* (1958), and *North by Northwest* (1959). The violin "screams" he created for the shower scene in *Psycho* (1960) are still recognizable today. The music Herrmann created for



*Herrmann scored seven Hitchcock films as well as several episodes of The Alfred Hitchcock Hour.*

film is known as being unorthodox. He used short, identifiable themes in place of longer melodies. He also insisted on complete creative control of the score. Hitchcock often invited him to the set to determine the length of his music and would shorten or extend scenes to match Herrmann's music. Their collaboration came to an end when they disagreed on how to score *Torn Curtain*.

Herrmann scored several other films in the 1950s and 60s, including *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad* (1958), *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (1959), *The 3 Worlds of Gulliver* (1960), *Mysterious Island* (1961), and *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963). Herrmann also scored several episodes of *The Twilight Zone* and *Have Gun – Will Travel*. In 1975, he scored his final film, Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*. He died on December 24, 1975. Herrmann scored more than 40 films during his career. In the years since his death, his music has been re-used or re-worked for several modern films and other projects. He also inspired a generation of composers.

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