

# COMPOSER BIOGRAPHIES

---

## **Johann Strauss II (1825 – 1899)**

Johann Strauss II was born in Austria and discouraged from studying music by his father, a composer. He secretly began taking lessons and soon surpassed his father's fame. He became the Royal Director of Music for Court Balls in Emperor Franz Joseph's court, founded numerous orchestras, and composed many polkas, waltzes, and other dance music.

Strauss wrote his polka *Vergnügungszug* in 1859 after the opening of the Austrian Southern Railway. *An der schönen blauen Donau* (*On the Beautiful Blue Danube*) was written to improve the mood of Austrians after their country's defeat in the Seven Weeks' War, and it is referred to as Austria's second national anthem.

## **Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844 – 1908)**

A Russian-born composer and professor at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, Rimsky-Korsakov taught himself counterpoint, harmony, and musical form. His music is famous for its vivid orchestration and Russian nationalism. Rimsky-Korsakov is also well-known for his operas, including *The Tale of Tsar Sultan*, which features the popular "Flight of the Bumblebee."

## **Leroy Anderson (1908-1975)**

Born in Massachusetts, Anderson first took piano lessons from his mother, a church organist. Over the years, he collaborated with the Boston Pops Orchestra and served as the Director of the Harvard University Band. *The Waltzing Cat* (1950) was among the many works he premiered with the Boston Pops Orchestra and recorded for Decca Records.

## **Gioachino Rossini (1792 – 1868)**

Gioachino Rossini was born to a trumpet player and an opera singer in Italy. He was fascinated by music at a young age and went on to write more than 39 operas. Rossini specialized in *opera buffa* (comic opera) and is most famous for *The Barber of Seville* (1816) and *William Tell* (1829). The *William Tell Overture* is arguably one of the most famous orchestral overtures ever written.

## **Felix Mendelssohn (1809 – 1947)**

Born in Germany, Felix Mendelssohn began composing at age 11. During his life, he wrote many sonatas, concertos, symphonies, quartets, and Singspiels (spoken operas). He also founded the Leipzig Conservatory and was a well-known choirmaster and music festival organizer. His Concerto in E minor for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 64 is one of his largest orchestral works and took six years to write.

**Henry Mancini (1924 – 1994)**

Henry Mancini was born in Ohio and learned flute, piano, music theory, and arranging at a young age. He went on to compose music for over 100 films at Universal Studios in Hollywood. His film scores and freelance work earned him 29 awards, including Grammys, Oscars, and Golden Globes. The theme from *The Pink Panther* is one of his most recognizable songs.

**Nacio Herb Brown (1896 – 1964)**

Nacio Herb Brown, who was born in New Mexico, started writing music as a hobby. After a few of his songs became popular in the early 1920s, he switched to composing full-time and began creating movie scores for MGM. Brown became one of the most important film composers of his era and is most famous for his song *Singin' in the Rain*, featured in the movie of the same name.

**Take Me Out to the Ballgame (Traditional, 1908)**

Jack Norworth originally scribbled the words to this song on a napkin when he was inspired on a New York subway after seeing an advertisement for the New York Giants. *Take Me Out to the Ballgame* is now sung in the middle of the seventh inning at each baseball game around the country. At the concert, feel free to sing along and help us "Root! Root! Root!" for the Pittsburgh Pirates.

**Fred Rogers (1928 – 2003)**

Fred Rogers began his career at WQED Pittsburgh in 1955. Over the years, he wrote over 200 children's songs, many of which were used in his TV series, *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, filmed in Pittsburgh from 1966 to 2001. He received many awards for his work, including Emmys, Lifetime Achievement Awards from the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, and a Presidential Medal of Freedom.

**John Philip Sousa, "The March King" (1854 – 1932)**

Born in Washington, D.C., John Philip Sousa took voice, violin, flute, cornet, baritone, trombone, and alto horn lessons from his father. He joined the Marines at age 13, where he conducted "The President's Own" band for five different presidents. After leaving the Marines, he created The Sousa Band. He is well-known for his lively, brassy patriotic music and marches, including *Stars and Stripes Forever*.