

SCORE BOOK PUBLISHERS

FINALLY FIT TO PRINT

BY NOAH BALAMUCKI

They lie in salt mines and corporate offices around the world, stacked in boxes marked “Cue Sheets” and on massive fading manuscripts in attics and garages. Since the dawn of film music, full score books in the vein of classical works published by labels like Dover Publications have been as elusive as photos of Bigfoot, and those wishing to study the written notes have had to seek out concert arrangements or bootlegged manuscripts that are often as grainy.

Many score fans, myself included, considered this arrangement immutable, imposed by a cruel and impersonal gauntlet of logistical hurdles and public disinterest. While the other kids happily checked out Beethoven symphonies at the music library and lined their bookshelves with Dover classics bookended by stacks of Boosey study scores, we sadly contented ourselves with soundtrack piano books and Intrada liner notes. But in the last 10 years, a small group of scoring industry veterans and enthusiasts has challenged the non-existent model of score publishing by printing over 20 classic film scores in their entirety. As concert programs dedicated to music for film, games, and television become increasingly popular, their publishing companies—Omni Music, Chris Siddall Music, and Neumatation Music—are another sign of scoring’s growing prominence beyond the screen. At the same time, they are helping to preserve the history of the art while making the music accessible to the public in an unprecedented way.



The story of the score book publishers begins with Omni Music Publishing and its founder, Tim Rodier. A piano player from a young age, Rodier began transcribing music in high school, but it was during his time as a student at Berklee that his interest in transcription took off. “My jazz teacher was the one that really got me into it,” Rodier said over Zoom. “Transcribing Oscar [Peterson] solos and Bill Evans, Chick [Corea], Herbie [Hancock], and Miles [Davis]—you name it; if it was on a record, I was transcribing it.” Rodier began to tackle orchestral scores next. A big John Williams fan, he transcribed the entirety of the composer’s Oscar-winning score for *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*. “I was hungry and starved for this info just like every other student out there,” Rodier said. “That’s the impetus behind me transcribing *E.T.*, because I wanted to know what the notes were, what the harmony was, what the orchestration was, a lotta keys to the kingdom that were just hiding.”

It was the *E.T.* transcription that ultimately landed him a job in the music department at Universal Studios in the early 2000s. “I said to the guy at Universal, who became my boss, I said that, ‘I transcribed *E.T.* Now will you let me come in and compare my take downs of John’s score?’ And he was intrigued by that, and that’s how I got my job at Universal, and one thing led to another, and I ended up doing Omni Music Publishing.”

Rodier’s experience in the publishing department at Universal, where his jobs included preparing cue sheets, coordinating with the legal department, copying parts, and orchestrating, taught him how studio bureaucracies work, and introduced him to parts of the scattered network of people who could provide the score manuscripts needed for transcription and the licenses needed to sell them. “It goes back to 2006,” Rodier said. “I thought, ‘Well, if I have access to all these scores and I know the publishing side of the department, I know the lawyers, I know who to talk to...’” He also had some prior publishing experience, having transcribed an Oscar Peterson piano album that he published through Hal Leonard. So Rodier approached Universal about putting out a score book for Alan Silvestri’s *Back to*

A page from OMNI MUSIC PUBLISHING’S top-selling full score book for DANNY ELFMAN’S *BATMAN*; Courtesy of Omni



L-R: CHRIS SIDDALL (Photo by Anna Siddall) and BRANDON DRAKE (Photo by Justin Yee)

the Future—a favorite of his—and was told that if he could demonstrate wider interest for such a project he could proceed. “But I tried that...and nothing really came of it,” he said. He continued to work at Universal, building up a list of credits and rubbing shoulders with major composers like Danny Elfman and John Powell at recording sessions.

Five years after trying to do *Back to the Future*, Rodier decided to give the publishing game another shot. It was 2011, and he decided to follow up his Peterson book with another jazz album. This time, Rodier decided to self-publish, creating Omni for that purpose. And so a company that has become synonymous with film music began, not with Silvestri, but with, as Rodier put it, “a kind of obscure album by an even more obscure pianist named Dave McKenna.”

Emboldened by his first release, it wasn’t long before Rodier tried to publish another film score. By now he had worked in music prep and as an orchestrator on over 30 films, and was on friendly terms with several composers, including Danny Elfman. “From the time I got to Universal I did every film that Danny did until 2015,” Rodier said. So he engraved the full score to Elfman’s *Edward Scissorhands*, and during a recording session he presented the composer with a wrapped

copy. Recounting the story to me, Tim practically glowed: “I said, ‘Danny, I made this for you; I want to give it to you as a gift.’ He unwrapped it. He looked at it, looked at me, looked back at it, and said, ‘Where did you get this?’ And I told him, ‘I made it Danny, put it into the computer, engraved it into a book.’ And he said, ‘You did this?’ He couldn’t believe it. He gave me a hug and he loved it.”

With Elfman’s blessing, Rodier went to Hal Leonard and got the license to publish *Edward Scissorhands*, which became Omni’s first film score release. Due to the fickle winds of copyright permissions, the score quickly became unavailable for sale. But Rodier was undeterred, and between 2012 and July 2022 he had released 17 other scores on the Omni website.

I discovered Omni in 2019, sitting in a Starbucks in Rapid City, South Dakota, on the way to the airport. I had spent the last week exploring scenic Custer State Park with my best friend, and while driving along winding valley roads and windy mountain passes we listened to many of the Western scores that partly inspired me to pursue a career in scoring: *The Big Country*; *The Wild Bunch*; *Silverado*. Now I was in Starbucks, staring at my computer, staring at Bruce Broughton’s complete score for *Silverado*, available for \$85 plus shipping and handling on

the Omni website. My friend and I had shared a dorm room for two years, and he had become accustomed to my outbursts whenever a CD like *Jaws 2* was released by Intrada Records, so it was only the other customers who were startled when I filled the entire café with shouts of glee.

I mentioned this story to Broughton when I interviewed him for this article, instantly failing my resolution to act cool in the face of celebrity. He joined me on Zoom from his office, which was obscured by a background filter depicting a blue lake beneath snowcapped mountains and a cloud-peppered sky. He had taken the picture himself on a trip to Patagonia, on a narrow strip between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans in the lowest region of Chile. I found the scenery reminiscent of the Western landscapes of *Silverado*, or at least reminiscent enough to use the comparison to pivot our conversation to Broughton’s score.

Broughton learned of Omni after seeing the label’s book for Don Davis’ *The Matrix*, and he reached out to Rodier to volunteer his own catalogue. Broughton’s praise for Omni in our interview was so ebullient that I wondered how Rodier, who had told me of his ongoing struggle to market the brand, had not yet hired the composer as a company spokesperson. “I’m doing this [interview] because I really like Omni and



L-R: CHRIS SIDDALL MUSIC'S current and upcoming catalogue of score books, in order of publication; Courtesy of Chris Siddall

I like what they’re doing,” Broughton said. “I’ve got a bunch of their scores myself... I’m reading scores all the time; I’m teaching orchestration; I’m always learning and wanting to get better. And some of these scores are really, really good.”

The desire to study these scores for their orchestrations was a sentiment shared by all the composers I interviewed for this story. Craig Safan, well known for the music from *The Last Starfighter* and the long-running sitcom *Cheers*, said, “We have CDs of our stuff, but I learned how to orchestrate by buying every mini score known to man.” I heard similar comments from Penka Kouneva, a busy composer and orchestrator with credits on major Hollywood films and AAA games. “I am a gigantic score nerd, thirsty to study more and more music all the time,” she said. She credits her speed and confidence as an orchestrator in part to her score studies, which in turn have gotten her a steady flow of gigs and helped her move up the totem pole of projects.

Some composers, like Elfman and Broughton, have also been involved in Omni’s score publishing process at one stage or another. After Rodier spent weeks trying to license John Powell’s music for *How to Train Your Dragon*, the composer went to the studios directly; within days, Rodier was given the green light. Powell’s enthusiasm for score books is evident in a quote that crowns the shop page on the Omni website, reading in part: “To be able to dip into the first few elegant bars of *Batman* or see how simple the voicing is in the main theme to *Back to the Future* gives me such joy; I hope that my score also will reveal interesting answers for fans of the film.”

Rodier—as well as Chris Siddall, who launched his own score book company in 2020—also cited the educational benefits of these books, particularly for students. But for some up-and-coming artists, such as a composer friend of mine in Culver City, there is frustration with the price tag. Rodier and Siddall offer a 10% educational discount, but with scores sold for up to \$85, not including tax and shipping, the cost can be prohibitive. “It’s not an insignificant amount of money for people,” Siddall admitted. “One thing I recommend to students is, ask your university or college library to get a hold of a copy.”

Rodier would also like to get his books into more universities, and he’s had some success. New York University’s Bobst Library has collected scores from both publishers—although, when I studied at NYU’s Screen Scoring program in 2019, I was initially unable to check any of them out. Several of my professors had already done so, including Mark Suozzo, my former orchestration teacher. Via email, Suozzo said, “These scores are a great service to anyone studying the art of film scoring. The scores illustrate the clarity of the orchestrations and the straightforward technical demands on the pros who recorded these scores.”

The first time I talked to Tim Rodier was in October 2021, after an online ASMAC lecture he gave on *Poltergeist*, which Omni had recently published. I expressed my willingness to work for Omni if ever the chance arose. Some months passed, and Tim called me up: How would I like to transfer James Horner’s score for *The Mask of Zorro* from the handwritten manuscript into Sibelius?

Note entry is the part of the job that Tim

most often delegates to a small network of experienced composers and orchestrators like Joel Kreimeyer-Kelly. I get why he avoids it; working on *Zorro* in this way has been a masterclass in composition and orchestration, but deciphering thousands of scribbled notes and cryptic shorthand is laborious. Even for experienced Sibelius and Finale users, the process can be time consuming. “It’s funny, I talk to Chris [Siddall] about this,” Rodier said. “He enjoys the note entry. And I hate the note entry. I find it so boring and tedious. The whole time I’m thinking, ‘God I just want to be done with this so I can tidy it up...so I can actually enjoy looking at the music.’”

Chris Siddall, owner of the eponymous music publishing company, does indeed enjoy note entry. After college he began transcribing scores and parts for his local orchestra under the baton of his Mr. Holland-esque secondary school teacher. In 2020, he took on some larger projects for the ensemble, and from there, he said, “It kind of snowballed. I knew that Tim was doing his thing, and I thought, ‘You know, I could do that.’” He started scoping out score publishing, and even got some advice from Rodier: “He was really helpful without, obviously, making it too easy for me,” Siddall laughed.

Like Rodier, Siddall originally published scores part time. By day, the mild-mannered Englishman worked in aerospace as a business intelligence analyst, and on weekends he hurtled through the pitch-black, scream-bereft vacuum of space as he engraved James Horner’s score for *Aliens*. Then the pandemic hit. “The aerospace industry went down the toilet,” Siddall said, “as did my job.” After some soul searching, he

decided to make Chris Siddall Music his full-time gig, which has given him the time to crank out three more full scores in the last two years, including Basil Poledouris’ very, very note-heavy *Conan the Barbarian*.

Siddall’s experience engraving *Aliens* is a case study in the logistical nightmares that can arise when preparing a film score for print; it certainly makes any of my troubles on *Zorro* seem mild by comparison. Siddall found a copy of Horner’s manuscript at the Library of Congress, where the curator informed him that the score’s condition left something to be desired. “Well, that was a bit of an understatement,” he said dryly. “It had actually degraded, and the pages had come apart. I had to get another copy from Fox, but they had a whole cue missing.” In the end, he managed to recreate most of the score from these copies, although he had to transcribe some missing bars. “And with *Aliens*,” he adds, “you’ve got the music as it was written, as it was recorded, and as it was presented on Varèse Sarabande [the album recording].” So Siddall had to choose which version of the score to present in his book. On *Zorro* and other projects, Tim tends to follow the album version, partly because customers are more likely to follow along to the recording than the film. For Siddall, the choice “depends, because I want to keep the music in its most musical form, the way it was written.” For *Aliens*, a score so choppy in its film presentation that it was the subject of a section of my NYU music editing professor’s thesis on extreme edits, Siddall ultimately opted to follow the Varèse album.

It wasn’t long after Siddall released *Aliens* that a third score publishing boutique entered the scene. Neumation

Music was co-founded by Brandon Drake and Dillon Selph, who launched the company with their 2020 release of Bernard Herrmann’s *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. Drake runs the company’s day-to-day operations from his home in the San Francisco Bay Area, while Selph works remotely from the East Coast on Neumation’s archival projects. As with Siddall, the pandemic played a role in getting Drake’s business off the ground. Drake found doors opening for him at studios as the country shut down, because, he said, “You now have lots of people at home, working remotely. I don’t think I would have been able to talk to anybody at Disney if it weren’t for the pandemic.”

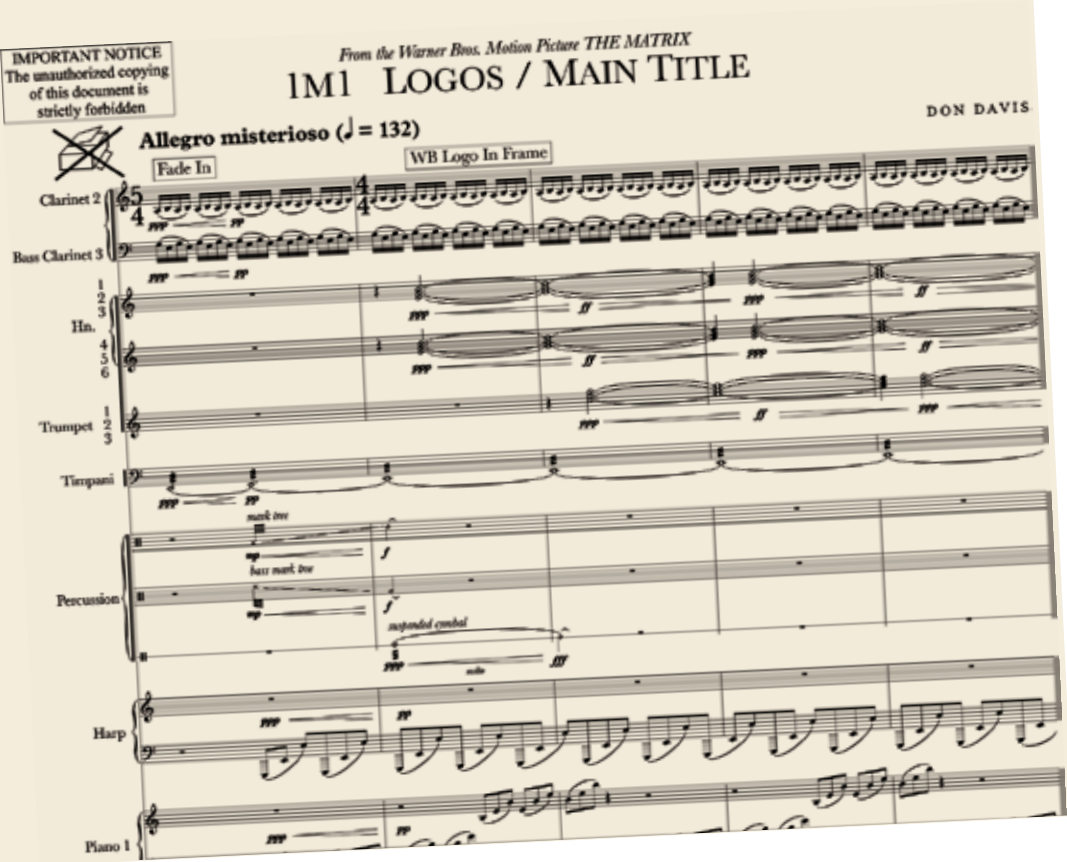
Working with major companies like Disney is one of the biggest hurdles to printing a score. Since the silent film era, studios have retained the rights to most music written for their films, including the scores and parts. However, the music in many cases has been neglected, misplaced, or lost. It took a friend of Broughton’s in the Sony music department three weeks to locate the composer’s original manuscripts for *Silverado*, and when Broughton proposed scanning the original score, keeping it, and giving Sony copies, his friend said, “No you can’t; those are company assets.” Broughton chuckled as he recounted the story. “I said, ‘Yeah, your assets are so important that you don’t even know where they are. You put them in boxes that are mislabeled.’”

According to Jeannie Pool, a score archivist who for decades has worked with studios, composers’ estates, and universities to preserve manuscripts as a member of the Film Music Society and formerly as an archivist at Paramount,

“Studios were reluctant when it came to being music publishers.” She said that in the early days of film, studios built their own in-house music departments to avoid costly licensing fees, but that they had no real interest in, or knowledge of, the publishing process.

And from Omni’s perspective, this mentality lingers. “Studios are reluctant because it’s not in their best interests,” Rodier said. “Copying costs money; it costs time...and if it’s not going to make them a lot of money they’re just not going to care a lot about it.” And since many of the major studios have shuttered their music libraries—including Universal in 2015, a move that led to Rodier doing Omni full time—studio staff are often untrained to handle requests for music. Drake gave an example: “You call an archivist and say, ‘I need parts for blah blah blah.’ Archivist: ‘I thought we gave you that.’ Me: ‘No, that was the score.’ And they say, ‘What’s a part?’ And I say, ‘It has notes on it; it’ll say like, Oboe 1.’ Archivist: ‘Can you draw a picture? I don’t know what you’re talking about.’”

Sometimes, the trouble of finding studio-owned scores goes beyond messy archives and untrained employees. “Columbia Pictures, years ago—it may have been back when it was owned by TriStar—their librarian literally had the Leonard Maltin guide, and she went through it, and anything that didn’t have three or more stars she threw away in a dumpster,” Drake said. “Which is what she was told to do.” Broughton and the other publishers had similar stories, of trash dumps or thefts of studio materials. Broughton, trying to find his score for *The Boy Who Could Fly*, called



The first cue from the score book for **THE MATRIX**, published by Omni; Courtesy of Omni

“every studio I could think of, and finally someone told me they think Lorimar [a studio] threw everything away.” Pool, who helped Broughton locate one of his scores when she worked at Paramount, resisted multiple orders from Paramount higher-ups to destroy music. “I’ve had four music directors who’ve told me to throw stuff out,” she said, “and I’ve smiled and covered stuff up with tarps in some cases and waited for them to get fired.

“Executives felt if you couldn’t see the music you couldn’t steal it,” she said. “Stupidly, because they didn’t know that we as trained composers could listen to it and write it down.” She said it was this thinking that led to the destruction of the MGM archive, which is just one of the varying accounts my sources gave me regarding the fate of that particular collection. My knowledge of the events that led to much of the collection’s disappearance was thus filtered through the Rashomon Effect, but whatever tragedy really befell it—theft, destruction, aliens—the result is a trove of scores unlikely to see the light of day anytime soon.

On December 1, 1971, members of the Composers and Lyricists Guild of America (CLGA) went on strike, after the major film and television studios refused to discuss demands for ownership of the publishing rights to their work. Members of the CLGA, led by then-president

Elmer Bernstein, were frustrated not just with the perceived injustice of the current copyright arrangement—one that “presupposes all the various rights to belong to the producer,” in Bernstein’s words—but also with the studios’ failure to “exploit and make use of plaintiffs’ music and lyrics they own and control,” according to the suite. Or, as Broughton translated for me, echoing Pool, “The studios, which are the legal publishers and owners of all this music, basically do nothing with it.”

The studios dragged out the process until mounting legal expenses forced the composers to settle without securing any significant concessions, and “by June 1982,” journalist Jon Burlingame summed up in an article first published in a 1992 edition of *The Score*, “the CLGA was dead.” Despite subsequent efforts to win creator rights, including by the SCL, the state of publishing rights today remains largely unchanged.

COMPOSER AND ESTATE RELUCTANCE

Studios and publishing rights aren’t the only hurdles Neumatation, Chris Siddall, and Omni face in their efforts to recover scores and secure licenses. According to Drake, composers and their estates, particularly of older generations, can be

similarly uncooperative. John Williams, though well known for publishing concert arrangements of his film work, is cautious of letting others print his music in full score. “I still don’t think Williams fully knows how culturally significant this stuff is, and how fully impactful it would be to have one of his books out,” Drake said. He has encountered similar resistance from other big-name composers.

But as with studios, the publishers have had some success swaying skeptical composers and their estates. Drake approached Craig Safan about doing his score for *Wolfen*, and Safan, who had “never thought there was a market for it,” happily agreed. And while Drake’s attempts to contact Michael Kamen’s estate in London about doing *License to Kill* went nowhere, Siddall was able to use his geographical advantage to establish a personal relationship with Kamen’s daughter Zoe, gaining access to her father’s Bond score in the process. The two also worked closely on Chris Siddall Music’s publication of Kamen’s score for *The Iron Giant*. “Some people don’t realize the importance of preserving it,” Drake sighed. “But,” he added, “sometimes it’s just a matter of having a conversation and saying, ‘Look. People care. If only one person in the next 100 years wants to look at your special collection, that’s one person you’re making happy. So don’t throw it in the trash.’”

But even if the publishers can obtain the rights and manuscripts to sell a score, they must still consider a project’s commercial viability. “The example I always use for this,” Drake said, “is *Herbie Goes Bananas*. I was talking to Disney, years ago. They asked, ‘What are some things you’d do and wouldn’t do?’ And I just happened to pull this movie out of my ass thinking I’d made it up, and they’d laughed about it and then someone told me, ‘That’s actually a real movie.’ A score that a film music nut would love, but nobody else cares.”

Much of the cost of publishing is upfront at the licensing stage, which pressures the publishers to pick scores they think are likely to sell. Usually, this means older scores with a proven fan base, like Elfman’s *Batman* and Horner’s *Glory*. But even then, high sales are not guaranteed. Siddall lists *The Iron Giant*, his second full score release, as an example. Despite the film’s strong cult following, and an ASMAC talk on the score featuring director Brad Bird and orchestrators Robert Elhai and Blake Neely following

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its release, it sold more slowly than *Aliens*. “Some passion projects can be tackled, but commercial expectations have to be tempered accordingly with an understanding that they will need more marketing, TLC, and effort,” Siddall said. But by and large, Omni, Chris Siddall, and Neumatation cater to their base: musicians like me who grew up on mainstream American cinema, and who worship James Horner and Jerry Goldsmith like my mother worships George Harrison and Paul McCartney.

One might expect the publishers to compete to publish specific scores from the filmographies of this relatively small group of composers. But, Siddall said, “We’re not going to be fighting over these things. I keep getting asked to do *Planet of the Apes*, for example, and I have no interest in spending three to four months working on that score. Whereas Rodier’s like, ‘I would give you my right arm to do that score.’” Siddall is a big fan of later-era Horner and Goldsmith, and his next release will be Horner’s *Legends of the Fall*, a score Drake—who prefers the frenetic works of Horner’s early years—has little interest in publishing.

Not that there haven’t been conflicts. Drake winced as he recounted transcribing the entirety of Goldsmith’s note-stuffed score for *Poltergeist*, only to have his countless hours of work dashed when Omni beat Neumatation to the press.

Unfortunately, the composers most published by these companies—again, reflecting the tastes of customers like me—are predominantly white and male. This reflects an exclusionary tradition within Hollywood filmmaking, which in turn is present in my reporting thus far. This uncomfortable fact is one of the reasons I contacted composer Catherine Joy for this story. Joy is founder and CEO of score

production company Joy Music House (JMH), a publisher that in recent years has produced score books of film music.

However, representation in scoring is not the focus of this article, and though I believe JMH’s work publishing modern scores at a time when the field is diversifying will ultimately lead to more inclusion in the score book business, I mostly wanted to ask Joy the same questions about score books that I put to Rodier and the other publishers. Joy’s answers showed me a use for score books I had not considered, which is not just to preserve the music, not just to study it, but to market what it is we do as composers, and to get other people in the creative process excited by it. “As a film composer, I’ve considered myself an educator to filmmakers about the scoring process,” she said in a phone interview. “We’re in this constant battle to have studios and filmmakers value our music. And the best way to have them value it is to have them understand how much work is involved... and presenting this as another way for the studio to merchandise the film.”

Joy’s mission reminded me of Neumatation and Chris Siddall’s efforts to convince studios and estates of the historical and monetary worth of their own properties. But while the main goal of Rodier, Siddall, and Drake is to get old music into the hands of musicians, Joy’s primary purpose is to get studios and filmmakers more invested in the scores that are being made now. Both approaches preserve and promote the art of film music, as well as in their own ways: Omni and the other boutiques give fans and students new ways to study and enjoy the masterworks of the past, and Joy Music elevates the relationships between filmmakers and composers.

THE FUTURE

More talk of JMH will hopefully come in a future article; for now we return to Omni, Chris Siddall, and Neumatation, and their future plans. The three publishers would all like to increase their output, but apart from that, their strategies vary. Rodier is content to continue largely as he is now: “As a business owner you want to see the company blossom as big as possible without losing focus of what the product is, and so I always want to be at the helm.” Omni’s upcoming releases include *The Burbs*, Goldsmith’s everything-and-the-kitchen-sink approach to the suburban

satire of Joe Dante; Horner’s *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*; and *Dracula* by Wojciech Kilar. Tim says he’ll continue publishing “as long as the studios are willing and as long as the public still wants it.” When asked if he thinks public interest is growing, he said, “I think so. There’s a growing interest as film music grows more and more popular. More orchestras are performing it; they’re playing it live to picture. Maybe someone will want to publish game scores. The sky’s the limit.”

Indeed, Siddall recently featured the iconic theme from sci-fi shooter *Halo: Combat Evolved* in a recent edition of his YouTube livestream series, “The Chain.” It is one of many single cues and suites he sells digitally. He also continues to discuss his work in ASMAC virtual events, most recently in July when he joined composer Zoë Poledouris-Roché in discussing her father’s score for *Conan the Barbarian*. As for Siddall’s upcoming print releases, they include the aforementioned *Legends of the Fall* by Horner, and Goldsmith’s *Alien*.

Neumatation’s upcoming score book releases include *Twilight Zone: The Movie*, *For Your Eyes Only*, and *Tiny Toon Adventures*. Drake wants to broaden Neumatation’s scope beyond publishing; he’s eyeing a multi-media approach similar to the Criterion Collection, with book-adjacent essays by academics, special Blu-ray releases, and cue mock-ups for scores without commercial recordings. Drake also wants to produce concerts of the scores he publishes. “I’d like to do a concert of some of that music live, that has never been played live and will probably never be played live again. It’s events like that that really keep the stuff alive. Putting out a book kind of does it, but ultimately it needs to be performed.”

Jerry Goldsmith reportedly once said, “If our music survives...then it will be because it is good.” He may have been right. But when I see Jerry’s craftsmanship painstakingly laid out in a score book, I’m reminded that art does not survive on its own power. Like any good idea, good music relies on the sweat and tenacity of its champions. Film music has a lot of them these days, from preservationists like Pool to the orchestras that play scores live to picture. Rodier and the other publishers, armed with a passion for film music and a patience for engraving, are furthering the cause of scoring in their own way. And as the audience for film music continues to grow, perhaps it’s not overly optimistic to imagine a future where the music not only survives, but thrives.