

TRIBUTE TO J.S. ZAMECNIK (1872-1953)

By Rod Everhart, WJU #1351

John Stepan Zamecnik's compositions included a circus march titled "World Events" (1935), which we have played in our Windjammers Unlimited sessions. He was also the arranger of Mel Kaufman's "Stop It!" (1920), another popular circus tune.

"World Events" was familiar to many people, not necessarily through its use in the circus, however, but rather from it being adapted by **Movietone News** for the main and end title theme of the **Movietone Newsreels**. In addition, Jackie Gleason's **American Scene Magazine** television series in the 1950s used this version to open a skit that parodied current events.

Overall, Zamecnik composed 48 known titles under his real name -- 21 marches, 5 overtures, and 22 other pieces (waltz, novelette, serenade, intermezzo, one-step, descriptive, etc.)

His obituary's claim of his having composed 1,900 songs seems a bit of an exaggeration, but no doubt it includes silent film cues used in that era and then again with many lower-budget sound films and newsreels throughout the 1930s, plus songs composed using his many pseudonyms.

Zamecnik (ZAM-ishnick) was born May 14, 1872 in Cleveland, OH to Josef T. Zámečník (1832-1915) and Kateřina Hrubecká (1838-1908), both of the Czech Republic. His father was a musician who encouraged his son likewise.

J.S. showed a natural aptitude for music and at age eleven he began studying harmony, counterpoint, and fugue. At age fourteen he was admitted to the Prague Conservatory where he focused on piano and violin, and was a composition student of Dr. Antonín Dvořák. Once back in the U.S., he played first violin with the Pittsburgh Symphony 1901-1904 under Victor Herbert.

In 1904, Zamecnik moved back to Cleveland, joining the Cleveland Hippodrome Theatre as its music director, conductor, and composer. For horse racing & diving acts at the Hippodrome, he composed "Coaching Days." He also composed music for several other spectacles plus six operettas, including "The Girl I Left" (1911) that was produced at the LaSalle Opera House in Chicago, IL.

By 1913, Zamecnik was creating "photoplay" music to accompany silent motion pictures, and he may have been the first person to do that. Sam Fox Music Company was



J.S. Zamecnik

Photo courtesy Robert S. Birchard collection.

his publisher. Then in 1914, he began a long-term association with Sam Fox, who published his compositions for school bands and orchestras and professional theater.

J.S. quickly became Sam Fox's primary composer and music director for the company. Fox published the Zamecnik-composed **Sam Fox Moving Picture Music** volumes, consisting of incidental music and leitmotifs such as "Mysterious Burglar Music", intended for when a burglar is on screen.

Surprisingly, J.S. used as many as 21 different pseudonyms, including Lionel Baxter, R.L. (Robert) Creighton, Arturo de Castro, "Josh and Ted", J. (Jane) Hathaway, Kathryn Hawthorne, Roberta Hudson, Ioane Kawelo, Dorothy Lee, J. Edgar Lowell, Jules Reynard, Gene Scott, F. (Frederick) Van Norman, Hal Vinton and Grant

Wellesley. The numerous pseudonyms were likely used to give the impression that Sam Fox Music Company was large and had many composers contributing to its success.

Zamecnik wrote the musical scores for such films as "Old Ironsides" (1926), "The Rough Riders" (1927), "Abie's Irish Rose" (1928), "The Wedding March" (1928), and "Wings" (1927).

In 1927, Zamecnik was interviewed by Gordon Whyte of **Metronome**, and he described his methods for scoring the film **WINGS**:

"I go into the projection room in the morning and synchronize the picture. That is to say, I hold a watch on the various episodes and make notes of the action. By the time this is through, I have a fair idea of the nature of the music which must be written to fit the situations. Then comes the job of writing it. This I do in the afternoons and go back the next day and see how it fits. In other words, I test it under actual projection conditions. Fortunately, I react quickly to the mood of a situation and generally the necessary music comes easily. Also, I naturally write in a dramatic style, and this makes the task easier than it might otherwise be.

I wrote the score of "Wings" in four weeks, which was less time than I would have liked to do the job in. Originally, I was scheduled to have eight weeks, and it was my intention to compose an entirely original score for the picture. However, the opening date was put forward four weeks, and

I had to do the best I could in half the time I calculated on having. I immediately saw that I would not be able to write a complete original score, so I chose those episodes which most imperatively called for original music and used other compositions for those parts of the film which they fitted. Then I came to New York to put the finishing touches on the music.

It was necessary to do some cutting of the picture and, of course, the orchestra had to be rehearsed. I would see the cuts that were made and fit the music to the altered action. This took a good deal of time and much work, but I am happy to see that the score has been accepted as a suitable accompaniment to this very great picture."



WINGS was the very first Academy Award winner for Best Picture. It won a second Oscar for Engineering Effects.

On January 24, 2012, Paramount Home Entertainment released the silent film **WINGS** on home video (DVD and Blu-ray), with Zamecnik's original score. This "meticulously restored" version was part of the studio's centennial anniversary

celebration. This 1927 World War I drama explores the devastating effects of war as viewed by two men who go off to battle and the woman they both leave behind. The movie features groundbreaking aerial dogfights and epic battle sequences. **WINGS** is a compelling story of love and sacrifice that dramatizes the impacts of war. This historic piece of cinema stars Clara Bow, Charles "Buddy" Rogers and Richard Arlen, and also features Gary Cooper in one of his first feature film roles.

John Stepan Zamecnik married Mary Barbara Hodous (1883-1971) and they had two sons, Edwin Hodous (1905-1999) and Walter Joseph (1907-1992). J.S. retired not long after the arrival of "talkies" and his sons reported he did not care for sound movies, where audiences heard "low-fidelity recordings played behind dialog and sound effects" versus live orchestral music. Zamecnik's scores are held in the University of Southern California's Cinematic Arts Library. John S. Zamecnik died June 13, 1953, in Los Angeles, CA.

**John S. Zamecnik, 81,
Composed 1,900 Songs**
By the Associated Press

LOS ANGELES, June 16.—Funeral services for John S. Zamecnik, 81, prolific composer for the last 45 years, was to be held today at nearby Inglewood.

Mr. Zamecnik, a native and resident of Cleveland for 52 years, died at Hollywood Presbyterian Hospital Saturday of a cerebral hemorrhage.

Composer of more than 1,900 published selections, most of which were for school bands, orchestras and choruses, Mr. Zamecnik was best known for his composition, "Neapolitan Night."

Evening Star (Washington, DC) June 16, 1953

A sample of tune titles

CREIGHTON:

Apache Braves Novelty
At Sundown Reverie
Chinese Man Intermezzo
On the Way March
Round the Bonfire March
Uncle Hiram Novelty.

HAWTHORNE:

Woods in Spring Idyl

VAN NORMAN:

Alpine Echoes Waltz
Buny Parade March
Jolly Bunch March
Singing in the Moonlight
Summer Days Waltz
Trumpet Call March

REYNARD:

Dancing Bear Novelty
In a Swing Waltz
May Dance Novelette
Raindrops Novelette

ZAMECNIK:

All American March	Amorita
Amazon March	Fond Memories
College Yell March	The Girl I Love
Flying Ace March	Golden Moments
Fox Trail March	Hope Eternal
Grand Festival March	Indian Dawn
Liberty Day March	Jealous Moon
Men of Sparta concert March	Keep Smiling
Our Boys March	Kisses Waltz
World Events March	Scented Roses
World Peace March	Slumberland Waltzes

Solo Bb Cornet
(Trumpet)

World Events

MARCH

J.S.ZAMECNIK
Arr.by Floyd J. St. Clair

The musical score is written for a Solo Bb Cornet (Trumpet). It begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (Bb), and a 2/4 time signature. The music is marked with a forte (f) dynamic. The score includes various musical notations such as eighth notes, sixteenth notes, and beams. A section marked 'TRIO' begins with a piano (p) dynamic. A 'Solo Cor. Ohh. (One Cor. only)' section is marked with a fortissimo (ff) dynamic. The score concludes with a 'Fine' ending.

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