



## Ottman, John (b. 1964)

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American film composer John Ottman has gained international acclaim for his innovative and emotionally resonant musical scores for such diverse films as *Superman Returns*, *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*, *Apt Pupil*, and *The Usual Suspects*. In addition to scoring over thirty full-length motion pictures, Ottman has created musical compositions for numerous short films, television programs, and commercials.

Although he prefers to devote himself to music, Ottman has worked as both editor and composer on several occasions; he is reputed to be the only individual who simultaneously fulfills both these roles in the production of major American motion pictures. Prominent among the films that he has both edited and scored are seven created in collaboration with his close friend, director Bryan Singer, who is also openly gay.

On several occasions, Ottman has cautioned against interpreting all of his contributions to mainstream films in terms of his gay identity. However, in a 2000 interview with Dennis Hensley, he explained that he thought his experiences as a gay man strongly influenced his music.

Specifically, he maintained that the "longing tone" conveyed by many of his scores is an expression of his "empathy for people who go through the coming-out process." In this interview, he further stated: "I was really fortunate to be in a very liberal family, but even in that environment I felt there was something wrong with me."

Ottman's comments imply a relationship between gay identity and a certain degree of alienation from others. Thus, it seems reasonable to correlate his determination to overturn conventions and to affirm difference in his musical compositions with his perspectives as a gay man. As he explained in a 2006 interview with Rudy Koppl, he delights in defying expectations: "I love scoring against the grain when I possibly can."

Thus, for *Usual Suspects*, Ottman devised a lush, classical score that offsets the brutal action, even though the producers tried to force him to produce lively "hip" music that would better conform to the expectations of most moviegoers.

Most current American film scores emphasize the specific actions taking place on screen. In contrast, Ottman develops themes that evoke the inner lives and backgrounds of characters and that musically establish the narrative. As he explained in a 2006 interview with Christian DesJardins, he regards music as "the soul of a movie," and he tries to create scores "from which you can somehow take away the gist of a story being told without having seen the film." To accomplish this goal, Ottman not only reads the entire script but also does extensive background research before beginning any film composition.

In emphasizing the narrative functions of scores, Ottman recalls the achievements of composers of earlier generations, such as his idol Jerry Goldsmith. However, his work should not be regarded simply as a revival of older methods. Ottman's "longing tone" infuses his scores with an emotional complexity often lacking in

more traditional narrative film scores.

### **Background and Youth**

Ottman was born on July 6, 1964 in San Jose, California, where he grew up. He attended Gunderson High School in South San Jose, graduating in 1982. Then from 1982 to 1984, he attended DeAnza College in nearby Cupertino.

In his interview with DesJardins, Ottman described himself as an "odd kid" because of his early interest in film scores, which he avidly collected. Also fascinated by classical music, he persuaded his parents to take him to numerous concerts of the San Jose Symphony Orchestra. He prepared himself for these events by listening repeatedly to recordings of the featured music, so that he could pick out variations in the performances.

Despite this early strong interest, Ottman had only minimal training in music. In fact, his only formal instruction in music consisted of clarinet lessons that he began while in fourth grade; he continued to play that instrument through his high school years.

As a young boy, Ottman was also an avid science fiction fan, and he remains one to this day. Already while he was in elementary school, he began shooting science fiction films with a Super 8 mm. camera. In his parents' garage, he devised all sorts of sets with the help of friends, family members, and teachers, who also served as actors. By the time he was in high school, these productions had become quite elaborate. To provide musical background for his films, he spliced together excerpts from his extensive collection of recordings of film scores.

Between 1981 and 1983, Ottman created with his friend Bud Robertson a particularly ambitious film-- *Ultimatum*, a 61-minute thriller about an alien race that tries to colonize the earth. Premiering at Gunderson High School in June 1983, the film was enthusiastically reviewed in the *San Jose Mercury News*.

In 1982, while studying film at DeAnza, Ottman independently undertook *Metamorphose*, a 45-minute suspense thriller about a woman pursued by a mysterious stranger, who turns out to be an alien. Foreshadowing his mature interest in psychological characterizations, he did not utilize elaborate sets in this relatively modest production but rather emphasized the range of emotions experienced by the woman. Ottman was responsible for all aspects of the production, direction, and editing of *Metamorphose*. It was praised by local media for its effective camera work and acting when it was shown in 1984 at San Jose State University.

### **Experiences at USC**

In order to develop his professional skills, Ottman transferred in 1985 to the prestigious University of Southern California School of Cinematic Arts. Specializing in film editing and directing, he graduated in 1988. While at USC, he gained recognition for his insightful direction of actors and for his exceptional skill in editing films so as to enhance performances. For this reason, fellow students often solicited his help in developing their productions.

While at USC, Ottman established significant friendships with other gay men, which endure until today. While helping a fellow student with the production of his thesis film, *Summer Rain* (1987), Ottman got to know Bryan Singer, who also was a production assistant on the project. Almost immediately, Ottman felt a very strong affinity with Singer, and they have been closely associated personally and professionally ever since. Largely due to Ottman's intervention, *Summer Rain* won the student Academy Award in 1987, but its producer decided to switch to a law career after receiving his film degree.

Impressed by Ottman's editing, which gave coherence to a fragmented project, Singer resolved to employ him on his own films. Thus, in 1988, Ottman served as editor and co-director for Singer's *Lion's Den*, a short film about a reunion of college friends, featuring Ethan Hawke (one of Singer's childhood friends). Shown at the Director's Guild, *Lion's Den* attracted favorable notice; one of the individuals present at the screening later helped to arrange funding for *Public Access* (1993), the first full-length professional film on which Singer and Ottman collaborated.

Also while engaged in film studies, Ottman got to know Damon Inrabartolo, then enrolled at the USC Thornton School of Music. Ottman consistently describes Inrabartolo as his "very best friend," and he emphasizes that he enjoys Inrabartolo's flamboyantly out personality, which contrasts with his own more reticent manner.

Inrabartolo frequently assists Ottman in the realization and production of his film scores. Perhaps because he was not traditionally trained in musical composition, Ottman prefers to create his scores with synthesizers and computer programs, employing MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface). Despite his use of this technology, Ottman largely disdains electronic music, and he relies on Inrabartolo to provide accurate transcriptions for each of the orchestral parts in his compositions.

In addition, Inrabartolo has served as conductor on many of Ottman's most important film projects, ranging from *Usual Suspects* (1995) to *Superman Returns* (2006). Ottman has also supported Inrabartolo's own musical endeavors, and he was executive producer for the initial Los Angeles production of Inrabartolo's gay musical, *Bare* (2000).

Since his years at USC, Ottman has been grounded professionally and personally by his friendships with Singer and Inrabartolo. For many years, he maintained that he was too preoccupied with work to become involved in a more intimate partnership with another man. However, in 2003, he established a domestic partnership with a younger man, who is not involved in the entertainment industry and who generally prefers to avoid the publicity associated with Ottman's work.

### **Initial Professional Endeavors**

While studying at USC and working full-time at a hotel, Ottman assembled a music studio in his apartment from second-hand MIDI equipment, which he used to create scores for student films by friends. After completing his degree in 1988, he worked for seven years at a marketing firm. At night, he gained valuable professional experience by editing and scoring training films (for Ampco Parking and Kwikset Locks, among other corporations) and other short commercial projects.

In 1993, Ottman was asked by Singer to edit *Public Access*, his first feature-length film. When the scheduled composer dropped out after most phases of the production had been completed, Ottman persuaded his friend to give him a chance to score the film.

Thus, with the minimal equipment that he had assembled in his home, Ottman created his first feature-length musical composition. Ottman did not yet own a computer and relied solely upon a music sequencer, a couple of sound modules, and an electronic keyboard to create the entire score. Because *Public Access* did not have sufficient budget for an orchestra, the music was largely left in electronic form, although the sound engineer played guitar in some places to enrich the effect.

As Ottman explained to Mike Shapiro in 1995, he sought to create "disturbing, dark, and twisted" music to complement the mood of Singer's film. Because *Public Access* was considered too unsettling to be shown in mainstream theaters in the United States, Ottman's provocative score has been heard by relatively few

people (despite the DVD release in 1999). However, *Public Access* was released theatrically in Europe, and it attracted significant attention within the international independent film community. In 1993, it received the Grand Jury Prize for a dramatic film at the Sundance Film Festival, as well as the Critics Award at the Deauville [France] Film Festival.

Because of his association with *Public Access*, Ottman was quickly stereotyped (even by the many people who had not seen it) as a composer of dark films, and he only recently has been given significant opportunities to develop more lighthearted compositions.

In 1993, Ottman also produced another full-length score for a very different sort of film. Denied permission to reproduce the original music by Frank DeVol, Gemstone Entertainment commissioned Ottman to re-score the classic John Wayne western *McClintock!* (1963) for video release. Within three weeks, he created a new score, over one hour long. Because DeVol's music was literally married to the original film, much of the original dialogue had to be re-dubbed by other actors. Obviously, that factor limited the appeal (and consequently the distribution) of this release, despite Ottman's melodic and heartfelt score.

### ***The Usual Suspects***

In 1995, Ottman collaborated with Singer on *The Usual Suspects*, a neo-noir thriller that would change the course of both their careers. When he arranged to direct *Usual Suspects*, Singer insisted that Ottman be hired as both editor and composer. Because Ottman had not yet been involved with any motion picture that had been commercially released in the United States, producers feared that he would not fulfill these responsibilities adequately. Fortunately, Singer was able to deflect the repeated efforts of producers to intervene in Ottman's editing and scoring by enforcing provisions of their contracts that guaranteed their creative independence.

Because of constraints of time and funding, Ottman had to edit the picture within three months, although the editing of a film of this complexity normally would take five months. Virtually all of the film was edited on an old and cumbersome Steenbeck flatbed machine, set up in Ottman's living room. He showed notable resourcefulness in resolving mistakes in the filming process. For instance, he had to correct thick black bars that covered approximately 25% percent of each of the frames of a very important sequence, which could not be reshot. Therefore, he painstakingly blew up the good portion of each frame in order to salvage the segment.

In editing *Usual Suspects*, Ottman consistently favored performance over continuity, although he did try to establish logical flow, whenever possible. In a few places, his determination to feature the most powerful moments of acting meant that he was compelled to accept inconsistencies in props and in other minor details. In order to strengthen the portrayal of the characters, he effectively rewrote the script: rearranging parts of the dialogue, entirely cutting out statements that he considered ineffective, and, occasionally, even inserting some new dialogue to clarify transitions.

To encourage the audience to focus upon personalities, Ottman employed extensive close-ups, sometimes shifting quickly from one face to another, to emphasize interactions. Yet, despite this emphasis, *Usual Suspects* also deliberately frustrates efforts to understand all of the characters. Establishing the theme of mystery in the opening sequence of a burning ship, Ottman interwove close-up shots of the face of one of the protagonists, Keaton, with images of the torso and limbs of a mysterious and ultimately unidentifiable figure.

To intensify the sense of frenetic and sometimes deliberately confusing action, Ottman utilized rapid cross cuts and jump cuts (involving the splicing together of the beginning and end sections of a continuous shot). However, he also sought to establish continuity among shifting scenes by employing visual and audio wipes

(involving the layering of scenes over one another). In some places, he blurred the wipes in order to create a mood of sensuousness, later enhanced by the gliding melodies of his score.

Because Ottman felt that a love story would detract from the primary thrust of the film, he omitted most segments involving the relationship of Keaton with his fiancée. By keeping the allusions to love so minimal, Ottman was able to evoke a profound sense of loss, which he emphasized through his haunting music. Moreover, he created an emphatically homosocial world, with a minimal female presence.

Ottman was not able to work on the score until he completed the editing, and he had about three weeks to write all the music for the film. Although audiences probably expected hip, emphatically contemporary music, Ottman devised a lush, sensual score that often runs counter to the brutality of the action. As he explained in an interview with Mike Shapiro, "from the moment that the theme begins, the audience is immediately keyed in that this is going to be something they didn't expect."

Determined to create an effective title sequence with the limited resources at his disposal, Ottman appropriated footage of light reflecting in waves, which he complemented with elegant, almost classical music. As the film progresses, the theme evolves into soaring symphonic melodies, which endow scenes with mystical power. In contrast to *Public Access*, in which he had to rely on synthesizers, Ottman was able to exploit an extensive range of orchestral effects, despite constraints on studio time.

Utilizing the music to establish continuity of narrative, Ottman intended his score as an homage to film composers of earlier generations. Because the fates of all the men in *Usual Suspects* are controlled by one individual, Keyser Söze, the composer devised a single main theme, which he constantly altered to fit the principal characters and the actions in which they become involved. Recognizing that silence can sometimes be most effective, he omitted music from some of the climactic sequences.

For *Usual Suspects*, Ottman won a British Academy of Film and Television Award (BAFTA) for Editing, as well as a Saturn Award (given by the Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror Films) for Best Music.

The immediate commercial and critical triumph of *Usual Suspects* enabled Ottman to quit his day job and devote himself to film scoring and editing. Since 1995, he has been engaged continuously on various film projects, in which he has refined the techniques that he developed for *Usual Suspects*.

### **Horror and Thriller Scores of the Later 1990s**

The success of *Usual Suspects* confirmed Ottman's reputation as a specialist in scores for dark and unsettling films. While he had occasional opportunities to produce lighthearted scores (for instance, the main theme and cues for several episodes of *Fantasy Island* in 1998), during the later 1990s he primarily was called upon to create music for routine horror and action films. Although such films normally would be scored in a simple and straightforward way, he consistently produced exceptionally intelligent and subtle musical compositions for these projects.

Ottman's determination to create complex and distinctive music has had its cost, as some of his most beautiful scores have been ruthlessly butchered. Occasionally, as in the case of Roger Kumble's *Cruel Intentions* (1999), he even has been dismissed from projects, and his completed scores have been entirely replaced by music that adhered more obviously to conventional expectations. Fortunately, he has released the original versions of some of the altered and unused scores on CD.

The first project on which Ottman worked after *Usual Suspects* was Ben Stiller's *Cable Guy* (1996), which starred Jim Carey in an unusually dark role, as an emotionally unbalanced cable installer who attempts to force his friendship on customers. Because this was Stiller's first film with a score composed especially for it, Stiller "was under the misconception that the film composer is on from day one of the shooting," Ottman remarked in an interview. Acceding to Stiller's demands in order to foster a good working relationship, he

felt that he "was on the movie forever."

Because of his long involvement in the project, Ottman produced over three hours of innovative and varied music, which eloquently embodied the contradictory aspects of Carey's character. Although his music included some very humorous passages, Ottman generally produced eerie cues that accented the unsettling aspects of the protagonist's personality. The extensive use of a boys' choir served to intensify the haunting qualities of the music.

In the end, only twenty-four minutes of his score were retained in the film, which largely featured popular songs that Stiller and Carey supposed would better fulfill audience expectations. The score was further diminished by the extensive use of loud sound effects that masked virtually all of his music in the film. Justifiably proud of his work for *Cable Guy*, Ottman made approximately thirty minutes of his original score available on promotional CDs, which have been eagerly sought by film music fans.

Perhaps Ottman's most frustrating professional experience in the later 1990s was his assignment to produce the score for Steven Miner's *Halloween H20* (1999). Although he recognized that the film was formulaic, Ottman was determined to produce a character-driven score, which he believed would help make the horrific aspects of the film more convincing.

Ottman was particularly inspired by the opportunity to produce a new version of John Carpenter's theme for the original *Halloween* (1978). In an interview with Jason Comerfeld, Ottman explained, "This is part of my dream, to turn Carpenter's theme into this epic version with orchestra."

For the main theme, he devised an innovative variation of Carpenter's music, blending together piano, percussion, heavy brass, and choir. Interwoven throughout the film, subtle variations on that theme produced a sense of growing tension. Comerford accurately described the completed score as "richly layered, elegantly textured, almost Gothic music."

However, shortly before *Halloween H20* was to be released, executive producers insisted that Ottman's score be radically altered because, at test showings, a version with a track of popular songs received higher scores than the film with Ottman's score did. Therefore, significant portions of the score were eliminated. Furthermore, those cues, which were retained, were significantly altered by being combined with music commissioned from Marco Beltrami.

In contrast to these experiences, Ottman has in many instances benefited from the strong support of individuals who were directly involved in the films that he scored. For instance, star Sigourney Weaver successfully opposed the attempts of the producers of Michael Cohn's *Snow White: A Tale of Terror* (1997) to replace Ottman's provocative score with a more conventional one, because she realized that his music greatly enhanced the performances.

Despite the significant problems with *Halloween H20*, Ottman remained on friendly terms with the director, Steve Miner, and he thus undertook the score for Miner's *Lake Placid* (1999) immediately afterwards.

On this film, Miner was not handicapped by excessive interference of executive producers, and he was able to give Ottman the leeway to devise an innovative and unexpected score. To keep the audience engrossed in the primary suspense theme (concerning a crocodile that posed dangers to the characters), the composer introduced dynamic action music throughout the movie. However, he also developed more quirky themes that evoked possible personal backgrounds for characters, even though they were essentially cardboard figures. In addition, he created some beautifully textured music that evoked the beauties of the natural setting.

Ottman particularly enjoyed working on Roland Joffé's *Goodbye Lover* (1999), a neo-noir comic thriller with a convoluted plot involving multiple double-crosses. For this hybrid film, Ottman created a lively jazz-influenced score, alternately lighthearted and serious.

For each of the several characters in the ensemble cast, Ottman produced a distinctive theme. Thus, for Detective Pompano, played by Ellen DeGeneres, Ottman devised a dark theme that reflected her cynical, rather mournful personality. In contrast, for the very different character of a philandering wife, played by Patricia Arquette, he created quirky music--at once satiric and erotic--that expressed her combination of innocence and deviousness.

Ottman has remarked that he considers his finest work to be the score that he created for *Incognito* (1998), concerning an artist who makes his living by forging Rembrandts. Because studio executives decided that this subject was too esoteric for regular commercial distribution, *Incognito* was released directly to video in the United States (though shown theatrically in a few European countries), and it has been seen by relatively few people. Although disappointed by the restricted distribution of *Incognito*, Ottman found his work on this project to be thoroughly exhilarating.

Director John Badham gave Ottman complete freedom to devise whatever score he felt appropriate. In his interview with Christian DesJardins, Ottman described the film as a "sort of composer's wet dream because there's no dialogue or sound effects in these long, extended sequences."

For *Incognito*, Ottman created a predominantly dark, but occasionally romantic, score that recalls not only his own atmospheric themes for *Unusual Suspects* but also Bach's elegant Baroque concertos. In "Creation" and other themes for this project, Ottman evoked the tortured longing of an artist who realizes that he is betraying his talents. Typical of his characteristic innovative uses of instruments, the composer employed the saxophone, normally associated with jazz, in the more obviously Baroque parts of the score.

### ***Apt Pupil***

In 1998, Ottman again had a chance to collaborate on a film directed by his friend Bryan Singer--working as both editor and composer on *Apt Pupil*, an exceptionally dark film. In contrast to the exuberant pleasure that he experienced on *Usual Suspects*, Ottman was emotionally drained by his work on *Apt Pupil*. As he explained to Mike Shapiro, he was profoundly affected by the mood of the story: "the film was so dark and dreary and relentlessly unforgiving. There's no redemption whatever."

Based on a novella by Stephen King, this provocative movie concerns the complex interactions of a high school student, Todd (played by Brad Renfro), with a Nazi war-criminal, Dussander (Ian McKellen), who has been living undetected in Todd's hometown. Intrigued by stories of Nazi concentration camps, Todd blackmails Dussander into narrating accounts of the atrocities he committed.

As on *Usual Suspects*, Ottman involves the audience and gives coherence to the narrative through his editing and music. To explain the origins of Dussander's personality, he created for the opening title sequence an extended montage of old war photos, into which some images of McKellen had been incorporated. In accord with his commitment to going against the grain, Ottman wrote sweeping, symphonic music for this montage, thereby endowing Dussander's sordid history with an aura of epic grandeur. Foreshadowing their later interactions, scenes of Todd at school are blended into the opening montage at several points. As he had in *Usual Suspects*, Ottman interwove close-up views of the faces of the protagonists to add excitement to scenes of their conversations.

Throughout *Apt Pupil*, Ottman tried to intensify the drama of even mundane scenes--seeking "to suck in the audience and . . . to milk everything as long as humanly possible," as he explained to Gary Dretzka.

Ottman's ability to infuse suspense into slow moments can be exemplified by his handling of the lengthy scene following Dussander's operation, as he lies critically ill in a hospital bed. In editing the film, Ottman repeatedly and rapidly cut back and forth among a profile view of the sleeping Dussander, a close up of the face of another elderly patient, and a TV set, turned to an episode of the comic series, *The Jeffersons*. As the other man suddenly opens his eyes, the sound of the *Jeffersons* is drowned by harsh, dissonant music that emphasizes the dramatic importance of this incident, the full significance of which will only later be revealed to the audience.

In editing and scoring the film, Ottman tried to find ways to relieve the dominant mood of ruthless brutality. For example, he briefly evoked a mood of homoerotic pleasure by intercutting close-up views of Dussander massaging a homeless man's scalp with images of the man's eyes closed in passionate surrender. Of course, this is a very transitory moment as Dussander's massage is simply a prelude to his murder of his unwelcome visitor.

Although parts of the score for *Apt Pupil* have a dark and unsettling quality, Ottman managed to incorporate surprisingly beautiful, melodic music in many places, as he did, for example, in the scene in which Todd destroys the personal effects of the homeless man killed by Dussander. Ottman disturbed some critics by utilizing an idiosyncratic version of Henry Mancini's delightful *Elephant Walk* (from the film *Hatari*) to complement Dussander's attempts to bake a stray cat in his oven. As in this case, moments of pleasure, whether visual or aural, primarily serve to offset the terror of *Apt Pupil*.

### ***Urban Legends: Final Cut***

In 2000, Ottman had the opportunity to direct, as well as edit and score a feature film: *Urban Legends: Final Cut*. Although commissioned by Phoenix Pictures as a straightforward sequel to the popular slasher film, *Urban Legend* (1998, directed by Jamie Blanks), Ottman initially hoped to develop complex and sophisticated characterizations. To this end, he shot extensive footage that explained the backgrounds of the principal characters, but he was compelled to omit this material by studio executives, who wanted the movie to consist basically of a series of killings.

However, Ottman did find a way to develop a personal twist to the standard slasher formula by inserting numerous obvious references to earlier horror movies. In this way, he ironically deconstructed the genre of violent films and revealed the artificiality of his own movie. The plot and setting of *Urban Legends: Final Cut* were conducive to this sort of ironic revision. Set at a prestigious film school, the story concerns the successive deaths of students developing thesis projects in competition for an award named after Alfred Hitchcock.

Given the constant evocations of Hitchcock's name during the course of the movie, it is appropriate that the leading character, Amy (Jennifer Morrison), is a beautiful, morally conflicted blonde. The movie is organized very much like Agatha Christie's *Ten Little Indians* (directed by George Pollock, 1965), although no convincing explanation for the deaths is provided at the conclusion.

Recalling Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979), eerily flashing lights in dark corridors prepare the audience to expect acts of violence. One of the most compelling moments in the film is a scene--obviously modeled upon Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960)--of students viewing a film of the murder of one of their colleagues. With the exception of Amy, all the students regard this as a really cool event; in another context, Ottman undoubtedly would have developed the interesting moral issues raised by this general response. Inserted between deaths, scenes of professors discussing fine points of film construction remind the audience of the director's tongue-in-cheek approach.

Although Ottman was not able to develop the characters in the way that he wanted, he did devote a great deal of attention to devising effective settings for the action. Determined to avoid the neo-Gothic architecture that might have been expected in this sort of movie, he filmed *Urban Legends: Final Cut* on the modernistic campus of Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario; located along a river, this university provided a setting that was at once sophisticated and dramatic. At an amusement park near Toronto, Ottman also cheaply but innovatively reconfigured several rides to suit the needs of the film. Occasionally evoking themes that Bernard Herrmann composed for *Psycho* (1960) and other films by Alfred Hitchcock, Ottman created a dynamic, but melodic, score that underlined the violence.

Confused by the combination of violence and ironic references to cinema history, mainstream critics generally dismissed Ottman's debut as a director. However, the film was favorably reviewed in the gay media. Although not a commercial success, *Urban Legends: Final Cut* developed a cult following among gay audiences, who seem to have been attuned to the camp humor evident in Ottman's deconstruction of horror films and who undoubtedly enjoyed the subplot involving a sexy, flirtatious lesbian (played by Eve Mendes).

### **Ottman in the Twenty-first Century**

Building upon his achievements in the later 1990s, Ottman has been remarkably prolific in the opening years of the twenty-first century. Since 2000, he has composed music for over twenty movies, and he also has edited (with co-editor John Graham) two films directed by his friend Bryan Singer--*X2* and *Superman Returns*.

Although he is still sometimes stereotyped as a specialist in horror and thriller music, Ottman has produced notably diverse scores for recent films. For Blair Hayes's *Bubble Boy* (2001), he created an appropriately zany and irreverent comic score.

Recognizing the camp potential of the story of giant spiders that try to take over a western town, Ottman also incorporated many lighthearted, humorous cues in Ellory Elkayem's *Eight Legged Freaks* (2002), although he balanced these with dramatic music that accented the occasional tragic turns in the action.

In his themes for Luis Mandoki's *Trapped* (2003), a story about a botched kidnapping, he evoked a sense of impending doom beneath placid normalcy. For John Polson's *Hide and Seek* (2005), he devised a notably complex score that conveyed a variety of moods, ranging from tender innocence to melancholy and fear.

Conflicting schedules prevented Ottman from working with Singer on his initial *X-Men* movie (2000), but he was able to participate in the sequel, *X2* (2003). To insure continuity in the series, Ottman occasionally utilized passages from the main theme that Michael Kamen had created for *X-Men*. However, overall, he created a highly original, richly textured score that differed significantly from the straightforward action music produced by Kamen.

To give depth to the characters, Ottman sought to reveal the emotional difficulties that they experienced as individuals with exceptional gifts that caused them to be ostracized by the rest of humanity. In an interview with Jeff Bond, the composer explained: "All these characters have sadness in some way; not that the film is depressing, but I have to go with empathy for these characters."

For each character, Ottman devised a distinctive theme. Thus, for example, for the religious and kind Nightcrawler, he devised a profoundly spiritual theme with sweet, gentle undertones, whereas he created a darker theme to indicate the potential for evil in Pyro.

Ottman utilized a similar approach in Tim Story's *Fantastic Four* (2005) and its sequel, *Fantastic Four, The Rise of the Silver Surfer* (also directed by Story, 2007), providing individual themes for each of the primary

characters and interweaving them in the course of the narrative. Based on Marvel comic books, these films conventionally would have been scored in a more lighthearted way. Instead, for these films, Ottman created melodic, richly symphonic music that not only enhances the action but also makes viewers aware of the frustrations and loneliness experienced by the characters.

Ottman demonstrated his ability to create music of epic grandeur in his work for Singer's *Superman Returns* (2006). Because John Williams' score for *Superman* (1978) has been accorded iconic status by film music critics and fans, Ottman regarded *Superman Returns* as his most difficult and stressful assignment.

Ottman paid tribute to Williams by retaining his theme for the title sequence, but he composed nearly two hours of highly original music for the rest of the movie. For action sequences, Ottman managed to create action themes that are at least as exuberant as those produced by Williams, while featuring more complex orchestrations. In accord with director Singer's emphasis on Superman's frustrated love for Lois Lane, Ottman also devised many haunting melodies that eloquently express unrequited longing.

Ottman justly considers his music for Shane Black's *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* (2005) to be one of his most significant achievements, along with *Incognito*. For this tragicomic neo-noir mystery, he developed a jazz-influenced score that recalls--but does not imitate--such classic scores of the 1960s as Henry Mancini's *Charade* (1963) and James Barry's *The Ipcress File* (1965). Complementing the shifting moods of the movie, Ottman's cues are alternately comic and dramatic. However, he consistently infuses the score with wistful undertones that add profound emotional depth to the film.

## Conclusions

In conveying a "longing tone" in his scores, Ottman seeks to acknowledge the isolation and other difficulties experienced by gay people in a homophobic world. His insistence on "scoring against the grain" can also be regarded as an affirmation of his identity as a gay man.

Because he creates melodic scores that enhance narratives, Ottman is regarded as the heir of Jerry Goldsmith and other leading film composers of earlier generations. However, his music is not imitative, and it is distinguished by great emotional and orchestral complexity. Still a young man, he undoubtedly will continue to develop his music in exciting ways in the coming years.

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