

The Studio Years of CHAUNCEY HAINES

As told to Stu Green. Photos are from the Haines Collection.

PART II

In Part I, we traced the Haines career from childhood through the silent movie era. Then came "talkies."

By 1930, even the most optimistic observer had to admit that live music in movie theatres was a thing of the past. For three years theatres had been installing hastily-developed sound equipment and studios were already discontinuing the preparation of separate "silent versions" of films whose only plus factor was the "sound version's" singing and talking by heretofore silent stars. This they did for a time to accommodate still "unwired" houses. By 1930, sound equipment had become more reliable. Gradually, sound-on-film (movietone's "variable density" and Photophone's "variable area") systems had largely replaced Vitaphone's "sound on disc" which all too often got "out of sync" when the needle jumped a groove.

True, in 1930 there were still many theatres not yet equipped with sound, and these neighborhood houses became the refuge of organists who had so recently been starred at the big downtown houses. But their continued employment was threatened by a nefarious device called the "non-sync" machine, a two-turntable phonograph which played records through amplifiers to accompany films. Many an organist who belonged in the pit found himself stuffed into a booth near the projection room with a raft of records from which he was supposed to "cue" the film, segueing from one disc to the next by means of a "fader" knob. This was a cheap substitute for synchronized sound. It was frustrating but shortlived experience for the organist-turned-record player. By 1932 even the neighborhood theatres had been wired for synchronized sound.



Chauncey during the busiest days of his sound-films scoring career, about the time he married Willow Wray.

Chauncey enjoyed one final theatre "blast" in that year of the Olympics in Los Angeles. The prestigious Carthay Circle Theatre decided to go "all out" with a 50-piece orchestra conducted by famed Carli Elinor and Chauncey at the Wurlitzer. That was the era of gigantic stage prologues to films, with elaborate scenery and scores of dancers. The movie was an earlier version of the all-time tearjerker, *Backstreet*. Chauncey recalls that one of the featured dancers in the stage prologue was Rita Cansino. She was later known as Rita Hayworth. It was wonderful while it lasted, but the run was short. Here and there Chauncey picked up a few organ jobs before the theatres became "all talkie" ghost houses.

This is the picture Chauncey Haines faced, and it was further darkened by the depression which continued to get worse during the early '30s.

After the demise of live music in theatres, Chauncey turned to radio and musical shows. One bit of luck was an unpleasantness between *California Melodies* radio conductor Raymond Paige and his employer, Don Lee, then a wheel in west coast broadcasting. There were rumors of fisticuffs and Paige took off rather suddenly for New York where he became conductor of the Radio City Music Hall symphony orchestra.

Back in Los Angeles there was a 45-piece concert orchestra in need of a leader — and Chauncey Haines was available. He took the orchestra over to "the music station," KLAC, for several years of concert broadcasts. Later, KLAC decided to subsist on a diet of recordings. Then Chauncey heard that Sonya Henie was looking for a conductor to organize a band for her traveling ice review. Chauncey got the job and for two years it was roadshow work.



Max Steiner, one of the giants of the art of film scoring. Born and educated in Vienna, he came to the USA in the early years of this century and was soon absorbed in New York show business, orchestrating and conducting the pit orchestras for the musicals of Jerome Kern, Victor Herbert and George Gershwin. He arrived in Hollywood in 1929 and a year later he was made head of the RKO Music Department. He died in 1971 at age 83. His music is preserved and commemorated by the world-wide Max Steiner Music Society. Steiner lured Chauncey Haines out of the dance band business, back into film scoring.

"Then I organized a danceband and was perhaps on my way to becoming a 'name band' leader. I had organized the band around my Hammond. Then it happened."

One day, following a performance Chauncey got a call to bring his Hammond to the Warners studio scoring stage for a recording session. After the session, the conductor approached Haines.

"Chauncey Haines — how would you like to get back to playing organ?" he asked in broad Viennese accents.

Would he ever!

The conductor was Max Steiner, staff composer at Warner Bros film studio. Steiner already had a string of top rate film scores behind him, e.g. *Bird of Paradise*, *Cimarron*, the original 1933 *King Kong* and *The Informer*. He was one of studio music chief Leo Forbstein's fair-haired prodigies, the other being Erich Wolfgang Korngold. Both are only now being accorded the appreciation their contributions to film scoring deserve.

Steiner wanted to bolster orches-

tral climaxes with Hammond organ backing, and also sometimes needed solo-quality playing for film scenes which included an organ. There was also the then new Novachord, a versatile instrument which blended well with strings and could also sound organ-like. For example, in Frank Capra's *Lost Horizon*, there are two scenes in which the Grand Lama (Sam Jaffe) informs Conway (Ronald Colman) that the latter will soon inherit leadership of the ancient Tibetan lamasery of Shangri-La. The accompaniment calls for something both mystical and religious. It was Dimitri Tiomkin's music, Steiner conducting, and Chauncey Haines practically soloing on the Novachord. It's a memorable scene and the music adds just the right support.

The personal life was somewhat hectic after Haines entered the film scoring scene. There was plenty of work in those days when movie studios were known as "dream factories" and produced as many as 450 movies a year. But it didn't leave too much time for social relation-

ships. This was somewhat complicated by the film scoring community's acceptance of Haines. He was invited to their parties in the evenings after a day of working with them. But the film scorers were "Haines' people"; he had been at it longer than most of them. And there were some very attractive girls at the parties.

One gal looked very familiar.

"Didn't you date King Kong a few years ago?" asked Chauncey. That's how he met Fay Wray, who indeed had been Kong's "intended" — if it hadn't been for those darn airplanes. Fay was single, too, and several dates ensued. Then Fay made what might be called a tactical error; she took Chauncey home, and he got a look at her sister, Willow. It was practically love at first sight.

Chauncey and Willow Wray were married shortly thereafter, and the union lasted for 17 years, the longest marriage up to that time for Chauncey. Indeed, it had to be a little on the hectic side for both; they were strong-willed individuals, but Willow

Chauncey recalled that Fay (reclining) had some strange playmates. The King would be a difficult act to follow — but Chauncey was determined. (Max Steiner provided a landmark musical score for the 1933 *King Kong*.)



was there during Chauncey's era of greatest film scoring activity, and his memories of her are pleasant ones. But they finally decided to tread separate paths. Even so, the marriage had a longer "run" than those of most of Haines studio associates.

Who were Haines' associates? Besides Steiner and Korngold, there was Franz Waxman, whose score for *Rebecca* (with Eddie Dunstetter playing the dead woman's weird Novachord theme) is considered one of the all-time greats. There are many more but we are getting ahead of the story.

The first days at Warner Bros. were filled with apprehension for Chauncey. The scoring sessions were gatherings of the best musicians in the business and they often attracted a coterie of famed musicians who came to observe.

Erich Korngold brought his family to many sessions, including his father, a Viennese music critic who had escaped from Hitler's Europe. Visitors included such distinguished names as conductors Bruno Walter and Leopold Stokowsky; the wife of composer Gustav Mahler; composer Aaron Copland and violinist Jascha Heifetz, to name a few. Then there was pianist Oscar Levant.

"Oscar I could have done without!" says Haines.

It was the presence of such an array of musical talent that gave Chauncey "butterflies." He wondered whether an ex-movie organist could possibly be in league with such artists.

"I can't begin to describe the hell of nervous anxiety that was mine on the way to the studio each morning. I'd had the good fortune to be thrown in with these God-gifted musical giants. Each was a European-schooled genius — and realizing this made me feel like Daniel in the lion's den. Could I meet their strict performance standards?

"The answer was forthcoming when Max Steiner learned I was leading a 'double life.' I was playing at Warner Bros. during the day, then I hurried off to my night time dance-band job at Long Beach.

"One afternoon Steiner wanted to hold the scoring orchestra for an overtime session. We were scoring *The Green Goddess*, with George Arliss. I explained to him about my night job and Steiner was plainly annoyed.

"To him I was moonlighting with a jazz orchestra when I should be devoting all my time and talent to film work. He said I had a good future with the studio, if I wanted it, but that I'd have no time to lead a dance band. So, I followed his advice — and never regretted it.

"That incident not only got me out of a field then being well served by Benny Goodman, the Dorseys and Artie Shaw, but provided the reassurance I needed to get rid of the 'butterflies.'

"With the leadership of Leo Forbstein, Warner Bros. had built a musical organization never before dreamed of under one studio. The scoring was a Mecca for musical greats and near greats, and I was an accepted part of it. But it had been through the danceband that I met Sonya Henie, an event which opened many doors — even that of newspaper tycoon William Randolph Hearst, so I never regretted organizing the band. Incidentally, one of my sidemen was now famous trombonist Si Zentner.

"Oh, the films we scored. They were some of the best of Hollywoods 'golden era.' Under Steiner, I helped score *New Voyager* (Bette Davis), *Saratoga Trunk* (Bergman & Cooper), *Dark Victory* (Bette Davis), *The Big Sleep* (Bogart), *Since You Went Away* and a whole raft of Bette Davis movies — *Jezebel*, *The Letter*, *A Stolen Life* and *Beyond the Forest*. We'll discuss *Gone With the Wind* later.

"Under Erich Korngold's direction, I played in the huge ensem-



Bette Davis (in costume) and Erich Korngold on the set of *Deception* (1946). Korngold started composing his scores as soon as the scripts were finished, and often watched the actual shooting of scenes. He came to Hollywood from his native Vienna in 1934 to adapt Mendelssohn's music for a Warner Bros. production of *Midsummer Night's Dream* which flopped badly. But Korngold remained to add musical zest to such Errol Flynn swashbucklers as *Captain Blood* and *The Sea Hawk*. His 13 years at Warners earned him a place among the immortals of film scoring.

bles which scored *Kings Row* (Ronald Reagan), *The Sea Wolf* (Eddie Robinson), *Of Human Bondage* (Bette Davis), *Deception* (Paul Henreid), *Anthony Adverse* (Frederich March), *Elizabeth and Essex* (Errol Flynn) and *Another Dawn* (Errol Flynn).

"And I was in the orchestras which recorded Franz Waxman's music for *Prince Valiant* (Robert Wagner), *Old Acquaintance* (Bette Davis), *Rebecca* (Lawrence Olivier), and *Sunset Boulevard* (Gloria Swanson). And that's only a partial list.

"One pleasant aspect of working at Warner's was that I liked my bosses and associates. I got along famously with both Steiner and Korngold and I found the studio mu-

Erich Korngold (top, center) conducting the Warner Bros. studio orchestra during the scoring of the Errol Flynn-Bette Davis starrer *Elizabeth and Essex* (1939). Chauncey Haines worked with Hammond and Novachord during this film's scoring.





In this informal snap, Chauncey chats with conductor-composer Max Steiner (right) in the garden which surrounds the Steiner home, in the mid-'40s. Steiner was a three-time "Oscar" winner. Chauncey was often his guest.

sical director, Leo Forbstein, to be a great human being. Not only had he built a matchless musical organization in the Warner's orchestra and its stable of arrangers and composers, but his dealings with people can be regarded as a monument to human relations. It was a wonderful but brief period which disinte-

Chauncey contemplates some music being played by Franz Waxman, another of Hollywood's great musical talents. Waxman is remembered for his haunting scores for *The Bride of Frankenstein* and *Rebecca*. Waxman was European-trained and came to the USA just in time for the era of the great musical scores in Hollywood.



grated on the death of Mr. Forbstein in the mid-'50s.

"But I was secure in my reputation as a studio musician and went on to work with other great film composers, for example Alfred Newman and Bernard Herrmann at 20th Century Fox. Words can't describe the excitement and satisfaction of hearing, and playing, those monumental orchestral scores for the first time, scores for such memorable films as *The Robe*, *The Captain From Castile*, *The Razor's Edge*, *Beyond The Ten Mile Reef* (all by Newman) and *The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad*, *the Day the Earth Stood Still* and *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (by Herrmann).

"Paramount, MGM and RKO-Radio had extensive music departments, too, with scores by Victor Young, Roy Webb, John Green, Irving Talbot and Sir Anthony Collins. Even while I was still with Warners I was permitted to take outside assignments. Thus I went to Columbia Pictures to play organ Novachord for Dimitri Tiomkin's score for *Lost Horizon*. Tiomkin had "a thing" for

electronic instruments and I think I helped score most of his Hollywood productions. One of his scores rates special mention, his adaptation of diverse themes by Claude Debussy for *A Portrait of Jenny*. It's a masterpiece of piecing together vaguely related fragments into a cohesive and meaningful whole. As usual, I was there to play the novachord parts.

"Another musical director who liked the possibilities offered by electronically produced sound was Miklos Rozsa, composer of some of the greatest scores to come from the film music colony, for example *Quo Vadis*, *Ivanhoe* and *Ben Hur*, to name but a fraction. Remember the eerie theremin melodies in *Spellbound*? The theremin was played by Dr. Samuel Hoffman and won an 'Oscar' for Rozsa. He won four additional 'Oscars.'

"In the late '30s, Max Steiner was working on three films simultaneously. Since time was short, he asked several trusted associates to help with the scores. My assignment was some 'action' music for *Gone With the Wind*. What a durable score that turned out to be! And it earned Max a well deserved 'Oscar.' Yes, I was in the huge orchestra which scored GWTW.

"Another big one I worked on was *Around the World in 80 days*, composed and conducted by Victor Young, a man who had come up through the ranks from Chicago neighborhood theatres, then stage bands, radio shows and finally Hollywood. His *80 Days* orchestra often numbered 110 musicians. Victor was a man beloved by one and all. His twin weaknesses were big black cigars and Scotch whiskey — straight. He wrote many beautiful scores during his Hollywood period, but he considered *80 Days* his best. Unfortunately he didn't live to enjoy the favorable reaction; he died shortly after his scoring was finished. His long-time friend, Max Steiner, completed a score for another film which Young had started.

"My recollections of fine musicians I worked with in Hollywood would fill a book (I'm working on it) and I can't hope to cover them all here, but no listing of Hollywood's great musical directors would be complete without the inclusion of a theatre organist who, like me, sur-



Chauncey (standing) says this was the first time he heard "Laura," played by its composer, David Raksin, in the mid-'40s. Raksin has written many film scores but "Laura" remains his trademark.

MGM Musical Director Constantin Bakaleinikoff (standing) and Chauncey are amused by ornamentation in a scherzo in this 1950 photo. Bakaleinikoff's name may still be caught on TV late show credits, many for Universal Pictures.



vived the advent of the sound film. We mentioned him briefly in the first installment, but he deserves further appreciation. Our man is the prestigious theatre organist, Oliver Wallace. Jesse Crawford had forwarned me about Ollie's formidable talent in the art of accompanying silent films. Finally, in the early '20s, Ollie gravitated to Los Angeles, after triumphal engagements in northern cities on the west coast. I heard him play for the first time at the Rialto in Los Angeles. All that Crawford had told me proved to be true. His showmanship, sense of the dramatic, his amazing dexterity, his style and impeccable musical taste — these are difficult to put into explanatory words. Later, when Walt Disney set up his music department, he selected Oliver Wallace to organize and head it. What talent he brought to the Disney studio — tunesmiths such as Leigh Harline and Frank Churchill who wrote the deathless tunes and the scores for such monuments to



Concertmaster Lou Raderman, composer-conductor John Green and Chauncey Haines look over some of Haines' musical work during his MGM Studio days.

pop culture as *Snow White*, *Pinochio* and *Bambi*.

"I felt some of the old 'butterflies' when I got my first call from the Disney studio. Wallace was a perfectionist and he had a reputation for getting rough with musicians during scoring sessions. He could be a tyrant on the podium. Despite our long friendship he figuratively "fried me in oil" on occasion during rehearsals, but always in the pursuit of excellence. Then during a break he'd come over to the console, put his hand on my shoulder, and say:

'Guess I was a little tough on you, kid.'

"Then, one day it was my turn to return a blast, the day he told me that he was retiring. Here was a talent, one in a million, who could not exist sitting in the sun or playing golf. I told him so in no uncertain terms with no expletives deleted. I know there are people who are equipped and destined to stay with their work until their Maker decides otherwise, and I knew Ollie was such a man. But he had made his decision. He didn't live long in retirement.

"That experience steeled me against the idea of retirement. At 75 I'm still able to function effectively, accompany silent movies and lecture to college students. I trust my Maker to notify me when my time in this life is up.

In the next installment we experience Hollywood after the great days of the studio musical establishments when studio calls became sparse. It was during this period that Chauncey Haines established himself in a profession new to him; he became a pedagogue — "that's something like a college professor," adds Chauncey. □