

MASON DARING, Film Composer BIOGRAPHY

Film composer Mason Daring has explored many paths on the way to his current career - entertainment lawyer, folk singer, cabbie and truck driver, commercial director, and potential rock star among them. But his professional life has always returned to the world of music.

Born into the family of a GE lifer, Daring's childhood was spent criss-crossing the Northeast as his father's jobs with GE moved about. He attended schools twice each in three different towns: Clarks Summit Pennsylvania, Lee MA and Marblehead MA. But it was the time in Marblehead that proved most influential, as Marblehead is where Mason chooses to base his composing career, keeping his writing and recording studio in this town on the north shore of Boston. He also maintains a home in Santa Monica, his base for frequent trips to LA to work with Hollywood directors and producers.

Mason's musical explorations began early. He picked up the trumpet in the 4th grade, and it continued to be his primary instrument through high school and college. He played in the prestigious Five College Orchestra while a student at Amherst, graduating as a *cum laude* music major in 1971. In the 7th grade he picked up his first guitar, and formed his first rock band, *The Squires*, in 8th grade.

Daring continued his path into the pop/rock world while at Amherst, playing with the band *Things That Go Bump In The Night*. Having spent his previous summer breaks digging post holes on a Texas ranch, the summer before his senior year Daring received a fellowship to write his first major composition, *Greenbriar*, a rock suite that premiered to SRO crowds at Amherst's Buckley Hall. He spent his entire senior year on an independent study in music composition, and used that status to gain access to Hampshire Colleges' new recording studio. He used his weekly shift -midnight to 6 a.m. on Saturdays- to teach himself music recording, production and technology - skills still vital to his composing career. In between, Mason also found time in 1969 to spend a semester at Voorhees College, a historically black college in Denmark, South Carolina.

His college band *Daring Jones Southworth and McNeer* -the culmination of Mason's rock career- signed with Columbia Records shortly after graduation. While the band was playing out and preparing to record their first album, Daring was teaching English and American History at the Applewood School in Amherst. But a record company shakeup left both Mason and the band as collateral damage; they were dropped from the label and the band soon broke apart. Daring then moved to Boston and spent the next year as a subsistence folk singer, becoming the house act at the famed Bull & Finch Pub - the model for the TV show *Cheers*.

But the coffee-house circuit was a netherworld, not quite big enough to break into pop radio, and Daring decided it was time to move ahead. He enrolled at Suffolk Law School, but soon thereafter met folk-singer Jeanie Stahl. Her extraordinary vocal talent persuaded him to renew his performance career -while maintaining his status as a full time law student and paying the bills driving a Checker Cab- and the duo quickly became a staple on the North-East singer/songwriter circuit, playing as far afield as Chicago and New York. Their signature song, *Marblehead Morning*, became a hit on regional radio, they released a pair of albums on Philo, and they became such a fixture at Cambridge's famed Passim's Folk Club that their *Passim All-Stars* still gather for semi-regular reunion gigs.

Daring took an additional course in copyright law at Harvard Law, graduated from Suffolk Law School in 1976, and was admitted to the Massachusetts bar in 1977. He spent a few years working as a legal analyst for Arthur D. Little Consultants specializing in hazardous materials, and

maintained a private practice entertainment law. Growing weary of law and trending back toward his entertainment roots, he started working for Boston production company Aydelott Associates as a film editor, eventually directing TV commercials - gaining a filmmakers eye for picture. During this time he remained active in the music world, performing and recording with Jeanie Stahl and producing records for singer/songwriters Bill Staines and David Mallet.

But it was his law work that led, ultimately, to his first film score. He served as legal counsel to first-time filmmaker John Sayles during the production of *The Return Of The Secaucus Seven*. Sayles had heard Daring's recordings, and at the end of editing came to Mason with an offer to write the music score for the film – for a total budget of \$700 dollars. The film was a critical success, and when Sayles started his next film, *Lianna*, he returned to Mason for both the legal and musical work. Daring turned down the legal work but eagerly accepted the job as composer. He has gone on to compose all the scores for the films of John Sayles, from *The Brother From Another Planet* to the soon to be released *Casa De Los Babys*. From these beginnings he embarked full time into a wide-spanning composing career. While he has managed to leave the practice of law well behind him, he maintains his membership in the Massachusetts bar to this day.

Mason also established a record label, Daring Records (a sub-label of Rounder Records), as an outlet to release his film scores and early recordings with Jeanie Stahl. The label soon grew to include Stahl's solo recordings, an expanding library of film scores, and instrumental titles from the musicians he came to know during his film work - Butch Thompson, Billy Novick, and Duke Levine; musical talents Mason was so enamored with he felt they deserved creative outlets of their own.

The scores of Mason Daring are wide ranging indeed. He has done full-out traditional orchestral scores (*Music Of The Heart*, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *The Great War*), blended orchestra with guitars (*Prefontaine*), piano (*Where The Heart Is*), or swing and jazz (*The Opposite Of Sex*, *Eight Men Out*). He is equally adept producing a tender, piano based score (*Tru Confessions*) as basing entire films around small group rock/pop instrumentation (*Say It Isn't So*, *Cold Heart*, *Wallace: Settin' The Woods On Fire*). But he might be best known for having honed the ability to place a film in a particular time and place by putting together small ensembles of talented musicians. Such settings include the Irish coast (*The Secret Of Roan Inish*); Central America (*Men With Guns*); the Louisiana bayou (*Passion Fish*); the Tex-Mex border (*Lone Star*); and early rural Americana (*Matewan*). His range of projects include feature films, TV movies (the Emmy™ nominated *Bailey's Mistake*), epic documentaries (*The Carter Project*), the long running themes to the PBS series *Nova* and *Frontline*, and occasional episodic network TV. He has also produced numerous songs and featured instrumentals used as source material in his films.

Daring splits his time between the East and West coasts, and when he's taking a break from composing, spends time exploring the life of a gentleman farmer with his wife and two children, on Boston's North Shore and on a recently acquired spread in Vermont. In between building paddocks for the horses and miniature donkey and chasing the chickens, Mason is an avid golfer and fly fisherman, and spends time collecting and driving classic cars and motorcycles.

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