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THIS IS THE MONTEREY PENINSULA

The Sonic World of Silvestri  
Alan Silvestri





When three-year-old Alan Silvestri first wrapped his hands around a pair of chopsticks no one could have guessed it would lead to notebook “drumming sessions” that would escort him through a decades-long career in the movie industry as a music composer.

Raised in an Italian family in Teaneck, New Jersey with a sister who served as the family’s obligatory accordion player, Silvestri took a more cerebral interest in music. “I’ve always been interested in the theoretical side,” says Silvestri. With little formal training, he has spent numerous hours with his nose between the pages of books learning about music, from writing it to the science of it. “That is a component of how I interface with music to this day.”

Silvestri grew up a Jersey boy, having spent much of his early teens playing baseball. Summers were often spent at the Jersey shore or at Cape Cod where the family would sun-ripen two weeks at

a time. “My dad’s dream was for me to be a ball player. But he’s made peace with that,” jokes Silvestri, pointing to his arsenal of music equipment.

There’s practically no instrument that Silvestri has left un-played, from saxophone, clarinet, and guitar, to the bassoon.

At 14, Silvestri journeyed from the suburban sway of New Jersey to the seam-splitting chaos of 125th Street in New York City for guitar lessons, lugging his guitar from the subway to his lesson. “This teacher was really good. You just watched him and hoped something fell off on you,” Silvestri recalls, his glasses dangling between his index finger and thumb.

Music has always found a way to wind itself around Silvestri. In high school, he once obtained a job as a busboy in order to save up money to visit a girl in Louisiana. By summer’s end, Silvestri opted to buy a new amp in lieu of visiting the girl. “I guess I liked music more than her,” he laughs.

The following years were peppered with a two-year stint at Berklee School of Music—which he left to play with Wayne Cochran and the C.C. Riders—a self-taught career as a silk screener, a series of lounge acts, a run-in with an unsavory fella who promised Silvestri a music contract, and eventually his first scoring session, which he prepared for by visiting Pick Wick Book Store on Hollywood Boulevard, and reading *How to Score Films* by Earl Hagen. Things like fear, deadlines, and similar unknowns bring coherence to a rag tag psyche, according to Silvestri, which is arguably his secret to success.

What eventualized was a four-year stretch with the TV series *Chips*, and later an on spec job that would catapult his career in the movie industry. “Next thing I knew, the music editor put me on the phone with the director [Bob Zemeckis].”

Call it fate, or call it coincidence, Zemeckis and Silvestri were wearing identical Calvin Klein sweaters the day they met. “The next thing you

know I wound up doing *Romancing the Stone*,” says Silvestri with shrug in his voice.

Silvestri has since been nominated for eight Grammy Awards, winning three for *The Bodyguard*, *Cast Away*, and *The Polar Express*, and nominated for two Academy and Golden Globe Awards for *Forrest Gump* and *The Polar Express*. “The recognition is fun, but I’m just happy to be working. I’ve got kids in college, elderly parents, extended family that needs me, and ‘we need the eggs,’” a smirk glides across his face.

Today, Silvestri and his wife Sandra own Silvestri Vineyards, a subconscious rebirth of his grandmother’s “home vintages” in New Jersey. And he’s currently working on a Broadway musical, new territory for the music mastermind.

The Silvestris spend much time working with the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (JDRF). Sandra, who served on the International Board, started the Children’s Congress, a bi-annual event where over one hundred children with type 1 diabetes gather in Washington, D.C. to meet face-to-face with top U.S. decision-makers. Sandra, Alan, and their son Joey, who has type 1 diabetes, recently attended the Children’s Congress’ 10-year anniversary event. Alan and Sandra, through Silvestri Vineyards, are this year’s Corporate Walk Chairs for the Monterey Bay branch of the JDRF’s Walk to Cure Diabetes event.

Silvestri continues to feed audiences aural constellations through technological artistry while feeding his own mind with elemental practice. “I’ve recently picked up the guitar again,” he points to an acoustic gem nearby. “I play scales. It’s like meditation for me.” Considering his cool-cat demeanor, the practice is paying off. ◦

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