

## **50 MPH: EPISODE 30**

### **“A NEW ACTION SCORE”**

Transcript (00:45:39)



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**KRIS TAPLEY**

This is *50 MPH*!

**[INTRO MUSIC]**

**DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)**

Pop quiz, hotshot!

**DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)**

There’s a bomb on a bus.

**JEFF DANIELS (as “Harry Temple”)**

You’re deeply nuts, you know that?

**DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)**

Once the bus goes fifty miles an hour, the bomb is armed.

**SANDRA BULLOCK (as “Annie”)**

Stay on or get off?

**DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)**

If it drops below fifty...

**SANDRA BULLOCK (as “Annie”)**

Stay on or get off?!

**DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)**

...it blows up.

**ALAN RUCK (as “Stephens”)**

Oh, darn.

**DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)**

What do you do?

**KEANU REEVES (as “Jack Traven”)**

You have a hair trigger aimed at your head. What do you do?

**DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)**

What do you do?!

**KEANU REEVES (as “Jack Traven”)**

What do you do?

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I’m your host, Kris Tapley, and you’re listening to an oral history of director Jan de Bont’s 1994 summer blockbuster, *Speed*, straight from the people who made it happen. Now, don’t forget to fasten your seatbelts. Let’s hit the road!

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Welcome everyone again to another episode of our painstaking investigation of the making of *Speed*. You know what? We’ve got what they call a picture lock. Everything on the screen is in place. What we’ve shot on location, what we’ve shot on soundstages, it’s all edited together. The post-production visual effects elements have been conceived and executed and now, in the final stages, we move from what we see to what we hear. And we’ll start today with the film’s original score by composer Mark Mancina. We hear a little bit of every week here on *50 MPH*. After all, what better way to get you in the mood for each episode than this energetic, pulse-pounding music that would ultimately influence countless movie scores, particularly in the ‘90s? It’s frankly, somehow, underrated. And today, we’re going to meet Mark, but before we do, let’s have a few old friends catch us up in the timeline. Here is former Fox executive Jorge Saralegui.

**JORGE SARALEGUI**

OK, so now we’re done. We’re in post. We hire Mark Mancina as the music guy. I think it was his first job, because Hans Zimmer guaranteed him. You know what I’m saying? Like, I’ll backstop him. I’ll supervise. He didn’t supervise him. I mean, as you would imagine, that was – and it’s totally fair – that was his way of getting his guy the job, and he trusted his guy, and he was right to trust his guy and nothing ever went wrong, so he never had to backstop anything, right? So, in effect, it was Mark Mancina, and he did this fantastic job.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

And here’s producer Mark Gordon.

**MARK GORDON**

Mark Mancina, he was, you know, Hans’s – one of Hans’s guys. I remember sitting down with Mike Gorfain and Sam Schwartz, who were his agents and may still be his agents, and them coming in and saying, “What do you think about this guy?” And they played me some stuff and I went, “Yeah, that’s pretty interesting.” And everybody got excited about it and he wasn’t expensive, and we didn’t have a budget to pay, you

know, a Hans Zimmer or some of the other, you know, major action composers at the time. And again, I mean, Mark is a really talented guy, but I think *Speed* is one of his best scores.

### **JORGE SARALEGUI**

It's really good. It does everything. And it figures, it was the guy's, you know, first job doing it on his own and he had a lot of good material and he just nailed it.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

Now, let's hear from director Jan de Bont on this. Every source tells me that Jan was not interested in a major name even if one was in the cards, and that he fought hard for Mark to get the job. Jan himself told me this as well, so let me pull him in here for some quick thoughts on the direction he wanted to take with the original score for *Speed*.

### **JAN DE BONT**

Mark Mancina is great. I was so lucky to have found him, you know. He had the right background from working with big recordings from rock bands and he came from the right place to really be a composer for this, because this movie needed a composer who actually wasn't very experienced in film composing. It was actually really great in getting the feeling of the action across, the feeling of the motion, the feeling of the intensity. If you work with a lot of composers, you know that they use their repeat performance quite often, what they've done on other movies and that worked really great, they then keep using it. And for him, this was the first time, so he could only think about his old recordings for bands and things like that. That, to me, was perfect, so. He was a composer that worked with Hans Zimmer in his studio at a little room in the back. He kind of takes care of a lot of young composers. He gives them little things to do, and I met him and I was listening to what he was doing and I instantly liked it. So, it was a little hard to get him to work, because studios, they always like, like, known names, people who have done it before, so they can be guaranteed a good score, what they call a "solid" score, and I didn't want a "solid" score. I wanted an original score, something that really supports the movie, not only in suspense but also in the street feeling, in the present-ness of the city all the time, because it is not a studio movie. I mean, everything is on location, and it's really, to see that, to record that, to feel that. And also, in the title credits, to me, that is actually the intro of a city opera, of *Speed* the opera, you know? Because we all know the city, at least people in LA, and you can see that everybody recognizes where they are and why it's so different, why downtown is so different from Santa Monica, from Westwood, from all the different areas we went through, and that is really – to me it's like a kind of mish-mash of different cultures that you see in this particular city, and you don't see that many times in other cities. That beautiful intro by Mark, I remember asking him, "Think a little bit of an opera, you know? So, you see all the introductions of all the songs, all the areas you go through, all the drama. You kind of pre-tell the story. You kind of introduce the audience to the story."

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

And with that, I'd like to introduce everyone to the man of this particular hour, Mark Mancina. Mark has gone on to become the wildly successful composer of other films

like *Twister*, *Con Air*, *Training Day*, and Disney's *Tarzan* and *Moana*, as well as TV's *Criminal Minds*. Prior to *Speed*, he had some experience composing for movies in a collaborative fashion on a series of films produced by actor and choreographer David Winters' Action International Pictures. I've never seen them, but these look like schlock-fests in the vein of Roger Corman with titles like *Rage to Kill*, *Mankillers*, *Code Name Vengeance*, *Space Mutiny* – just a slew of these things. But mostly, Mark was entrenched in popular music. He was also, as you heard, and like many young composers over the years, part of Oscar-winning composer Hans Zimmer's brain trust of musicians who would get opportunities through their affiliation with him. And that's how the *Speed* gig would come to Mark. The result, in my opinion, is one of the greatest action movie scores of all time. We're going to hear from Mark now and I'm going to handle things a little differently today. As I listened back to my chat with Mark, I couldn't quite figure out how I would chop it up for the usual format. After all, there isn't a lot of back and forth to be had here. We've set him up with Jorge and Jan and Mark Gordon, but now he's off to work on his own. So, I figured I would just run the interview basically as is. I thought it was a pretty great conversation that flowed really well, and Mark is just super easy to talk to and listen to. So, here's Mark Mancina, starting right in on where he was in his career in early 1994 when this job arrived, and in fact, why it would prove to be such a great year for him. I'll pop in once or twice but mostly I plan to just let this thing run, so enjoy.

### **MARK MANCINA**

That was a really good year for me. That was '94, right? A couple years before that I toured with Trevor Rabin, who was the guitarist for Yes. I toured as his keyboard player. And during that time, I was writing a lot of songs, and I wrote a song for Yes, which they recorded and I co-produced, and I wrote a song for Emerson, Lake & Palmer, which they recorded, and I produced the entire record. So, that was kind of what I was doing in, like, 1990. You know, right when 1990 started. So, after that was all done, I moved back to America and I was doing trailers for movies. So, I had this really good skillset at taking three minutes and compacting it into a three-minute piece of music and making it say the entire movie, because that's what trailers used to do. They weren't just about bashing you in the face and hitting you over the head and making you go see the movie. They were more like a story. That was really good training. I was also, you know – I was doing the songs for a movie called *The King of the Jungle*. I was arranging and producing those songs, because I was really good at that, and that became *The Lion King*. So, *The Lion King*, that energy, and *Speed*, those two movies going out into the universe really changed my life.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

Within five days, they were released, of each other. Crazy.

### **MARK MANCINA**

You know, it's a hard time for me to remember because it was just – it was out of my realm of things that I had experienced.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

### **MARK MANCINA**

The other thing was that I had done a movie called *True Romance*. I worked on that with Hans. I did about, I remember now, I did about three or four scenes that he gave me to score, and some of that music ended up as a temp music to *Speed*, which is how I heard of Jan and how they told me that Jan went to Hans and said, "I want you to do this. Or, I don't have the budget to get you, but whoever did this music, I want," and Hans said, "Oh, that was Mark." That's the story I heard, and I was in the studio with Hans at the time, so I think it's probably accurate. But the other side of this thing is that Michael Kamen had been hired to score *Speed*. He was hired. He was working on it. And I think that Jan felt like he wanted more of an electronic score. I think he was thinking – I don't know exactly what he was thinking, but I know *Terminator* was some of the stuff that they temped with, and I think Jan was thinking, "I don't want a traditional score. I want it to be more electronic." So, I think the studio was pushing Jan to have Michael do it, I think, in fact, and they hired him. And it's a drag, you know? Because what Jan told me was, "No, no, no, you're doing my movie. Pay no attention to the studio. They don't know what they're talking about." Well, then the studio would call me and say, "Don't touch the movie. You're not doing the movie. You're a nobody. So, don't do anything." So, I had this thing going on. It ended up that Mark Gordon, who was producing the movie, was sort of calling me. He realized Jan wasn't going to change his mind, but he was also banned from talking to me. He knew the studio was really mad. So, he was kind of, like, just calling me, going, "Just tell me that it's going OK and that it's a good score and that it's going to be OK."

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

I hear a lot of stories of just, you know, Jan had a vision and he pushed it through. They would push back and he was definitive, he's kind of cutthroat, like, "This is my vision. This is what I want."

### **MARK MANCINA**

Yeah, he stood by me. I would have been thrown off that movie in two seconds. I even – when I called my agents and I said, "Hey, I'm going to do this movie, *Speed*, with Jan de Bont. He just was at my studio. He loves what I'm doing." My agents went, "We already signed somebody to that. You don't have that job." So, it was really confusing.

### **KRIS TAPLEY**

Let me interrupt just for a sec to get some reactions to that. First of all, the late Michael Kamen was the acclaimed composer of the *Lethal Weapon* and *Die Hard* franchises. So, obviously, he's someone the studio might think of for *Speed*. He also worked with bands like Pink Floyd and Metallica in his time and picked up Oscar nominations for songs he co-wrote for *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* and *Don Juan DeMarco*. I asked a few folks about his involvement here and I've heard yes, he was definitely hired, and I've heard no, it didn't quite get that far. I'll start at the top of the food chain with former Fox exec Jorge Saralegui. Was Michael Kamen actually hired to compose the score for *Speed*?

**JORGE SARALEGUI**

His name rings a bell. I mean, obviously his name rings a bell, but I'm saying it's quite possible that he was and then something happened. It might have been that the studio wanted Michael Kamen and he said no, and Jan wanted Mancina, who is not Michael Kamen at the time, right? OK, and Jan did fight for him. I mean, Jan fought for everybody who he wanted for whatever reason. You know, sometimes they were good reasons, sometimes they were bad reasons. In this movie, they were almost all good reasons.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Alright, fuzzy memory. Let's go to producer Mark Gordon.

**MARK GORDON**

Michael Kamen was a discussion, and I was talking to – I think Sam and Mike represented Michael Kamen, too. So, he was a serious conversation, but ultimately, was never hired. I think somebody may have given him – somebody talked to him and said, "You're going to get this job," but he was never hired. And Jan didn't want him.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

A discussion. OK. Though it's starting to sound like a couple agents got out ahead of their skis to me. Finally, here's what Kevin Ross, one of editor John Wright's assistants, recalled, quite vividly.

**KEVIN ROSS**

Michael Kamen, like, came in our cutting room and we thought he was going to be our composer, and then, like, a week later, Jan's the one that was like, "No, I already hired this other guy. I like this other guy." And so, they had to pay off Michael Kamen.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Somewhere in there lies the truth. Kamen passed away in 2003. But for Mark Mancina, this had to be a rough start and a blow to his confidence when he's saddling up to his first solo gig as a film composer. Let's get back to that interview.

**MARK MANCINA**

The whole thing was weird. You know, I must have smoked two packs of cigarettes a day. The other thing that was weird was that the head of production for Fox, his name escapes me.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Tom Jacobson at the time?

**MARK MANCINA**

What's that?

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Was it Tom Jacobson?

**MARK MANCINA**

Tom Jacobson, that's his name. He called me up like about, I don't know, five in the afternoon, and he said, "I'll be in tomorrow morning at six AM to hear the theme to *Speed*." And I was like, "Well, Jan says I can't let, you know, anybody in, you know?" And he goes, "I'll be there at six AM to hear it." So, I remember getting up at five o'clock and just sweating, going, "This is going to be a disaster," you know? And I played him the opening title, and he just kind of stood there and then he said, "OK," and then he walked out. And that's all he said. So, you know, I still didn't know. Is he going back to fire me? Is he going back to have a meeting with Jan? Is he – what is he doing, you know? But I guess he just went back and said it's really good and, you know.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Well, let's talk about that theme. When you watched the movie or whatever the process was here, how did musical ideas start to take shape?

**MARK MANCINA**

The first thing I did, which at that time, nobody had ever done – now I've heard of about five composers that are out there and tell the exact story – but what I did was I took – I had a friend of mine who was really, really great at sampling instruments and putting them on your keyboard, and I had him sample bus sounds. I had him sample wires, metal, crashing hubcaps, all sorts of stuff like that. Now you can buy those libraries, but back then, that was extremely cutting edge. And what I did was instead of using necessarily orchestral percussion, I used those sounds, and that sort of represented the bus. This friend of mine was able to take those different sounds, put them on my keyboard, and I could trigger them, play them, instead of playing timpanis, instead of playing cymbals, instead of playing any type of orchestral percussion, instead of doing that, I had all these sounds.

**[SONG: "RUSH HOUR" FROM *SPEED*]**

**MARK MANCINA**

So, you know, instead of a high hat going "tacka-tacka tacka-tacka tack," I had a hubcap, "tacka-tacka tacka-tacka tack." You know? And it just gave it a much earthier – it just gave that score a sound that sounded like the bus, you know? And it made sense.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

And no one was doing that?

**MARK MANCINA**

No one was doing that. No one was doing that. People were sampling. I was a Peter Gabriel fan. Peter Gabriel was ahead of everybody. Peter Gabriel was ahead of everybody in the music business. He had PeterGabriel.com, I think, in '86. He was so far – and he was doing that. And, you know, he had probably the only Fairlight, I think, in Europe. Hans had one. But, you know, Peter was doing that thing where he was

taking a weird sound, putting it here, then using it as a keyboard pad. And I was such a fan of his and following him, so in the '80s, I was doing that. You know, it wasn't like that was foreign to me. So, when *Speed* came up it was almost like, "These are old ideas, to take samples and use them as, you know, that's – I've been doing that since, like, '86." But in the movie business, you know, it was a fairly new thing. And the rest of it was just a straight orchestra. You know, there's some guitar. Allan Holdsworth did some guitar for me that was really awesome. He just did some guitar effects that I took and used. Allan played with Bill Bruford, who's a great drummer, but he played in a band called UK. But the thing about Allan Holdsworth, people like Eddie Van Halen and those people will tell you – would have told you – that he's the greatest electric guitar player in the world. There wasn't anybody that could touch him. Very kind of unknown, because he just did his own thing, but absolutely unbelievable, if you listen to his work. And I thought it was a great call to have him play textures, because the way he plays guitar is so strange, and the way his guitar sounds is so strange. And he agreed, and he did, and he just recorded ideas and gave them – he didn't like any of them but I loved them, so he gave them to me and I kind of put them where I could put them. I played some guitar, but other than that, it was really a traditional score with all of those sort of metallic, percussive sounds in it, which made it really different. You know, it's become a sound that you hear all the time, especially, like, in the '90s and the early 2000s.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**MARK MANCINA**

Everybody was doing that. But at that time, nobody had done it, so it was really pretty fresh.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

No, it's quite seminal. And I love – that's one of the reasons I love the score so much, because it felt like the beginnings of what would become a kind of adopted aesthetic through action films of the '90s. Which, I love action films of the '90s. I look back on them all fondly.

**MARK MANCINA**

Yeah, I think that was a genre, for sure. And the problem for me, of course, as any actor will tell you, is they wanted me to just do the same thing on every score. You know, they wanted me to do the exact same score on *Bad Boys* and I said, "But *Bad Boys* isn't about a bus." But they wanted the same approach, and after two or three or four of those things, I just went, you know, this is not – I loved doing *Speed*, but that's not my goal in my life is to write, you know, the same action score over and over again.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah. How about just melodically? How did you come up with just what we know as that *Speed* theme that kind of soars and comes back? It's got an interesting structure to it.

**MARK MANCINA**



Well, the first thing I came up with was the little bit, the “bum bum bum bum bum bum,” that little thing. That was like a little tag that just sounded like the bus racing through town, so that tag was really useful. I didn’t come through with the theme until I did the bus – near the bus rescue, when he’s getting people off the bus. Not when the bus crashes, but when he’s getting people off the bus. That scene is what gave me – that’s what gave me the theme to *Speed*, the E minor – I think it’s E minor – theme. And I just kept working with it until it sounded heroic and memorable and, you know, four notes, whatever it is, simple, you know? Which is always hard. Once I had that, what was great about that theme is it worked in a major key, so when he saved her from the bus, I went to a major key, which Jan loved that. He went nuts for it.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

It’s the only time it happens, right? It just opens up wide like that.

**MARK MANCINA**

That’s right.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

And they used that bit for the *Braveheart* trailer!

**MARK MANCINA**

Did they?

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Do you remember that?

**MARK MANCINA**

No.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah, at the end of the *Braveheart* trailer. I remember that music well, and maybe just at the time not placing it as *Speed* because it’s just one moment of the score, right? And then I happened to be watching something the other day. I watch a lot of VHS in my garage. Like I say, I’m a creature of the ‘90s. And the *Braveheart* trailer came on and I’m doing some work at my desk in there, and I hear the *Speed* soaring moment come through. I’m like, “What? Oh, that’s right, they used it for the *Braveheart* trailer.” Of all things.

**MARK MANCINA**

Yeah.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

It’s the only thing from that score that probably would have made sense for the *Braveheart* trailer.

**MARK MANCINA**

Right, right. The other stuff would have been weird, yeah.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

But yeah, I walk every morning listening to the score. I drive around town listening to the score. I mean, it's a killer piece of work, and I love how it's got movements. Like, there's a different kind of flavor when they go out onto the tarmac. It seems like it just hits a different – it just sounds like it goes into a different space there.

**MARK MANCINA**

You know, I grew up with – I mean, if you listen to that main title, you know, the main title I wrote near the end of working on it. I didn't have that opening, because I didn't know what the opening should be, theme-wise, you know? And it was really fun to do it once I had all those themes. I kind of had a really good idea of what I wanted to do. But I'll never forget playing that for Jan because there's one place – it's building at the beginning and you have that pulsing thing and then it builds and there's this big, long note, and then you hear Allan's guitar, which sounds like a wire, it's like, "Chiizzzzzhhh." And then, "Dun-nun-nun dun-nun-nun dun-nun-nun dun-nun-nun, dun-dun dun dun-dun dun," you know, that thing all starts.

**[SONG: "MAIN TITLE" FROM *SPEED*]**

**MARK MANCINA**

And Jan just fell off his chair laughing. And I didn't know if he was laughing like he hated it, you know, like, laughing like, "Are you kidding me?" Or if it made him feel so excited, and it turned out it made him feel so excited. He could not stop laughing. So, he would have me play that over and over for him in the studio just so he could laugh. I think he just felt like it was going to be a really good movie. I think he felt like that thing sets you up for, you know, "This is going to be a ride," you know? So that was really, really exciting.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah. He used that for the title wipe-away, too. That guitar screech, when the title wipes away.

**MARK MANCINA**

Yes. And Allan did those for me, which was really great. He was one of my favorite guitar players. I grew up – you know, I grew up on progressive rock. I mean, progressive rock – if you listening to the opening, it might as well be Phil Collins playing drums. It's me playing drums, but it's me trying to sound like Phil Collins, you know? There's no cymbals. It's all toms. It's a Peter Gabriel kind of approach and a Phil kind of feel, and it's so weird that I ended up working with him after that. It's just a strange thing. That's why, as you were saying, chapters, you know? I'm really into – you know, progressive rock had all these sort of chapters and sections and then it would bring back the themes and, you know, come back around, and all that kind of classical approach to pop music, I really liked that a lot.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

What did you think of being able to have just that showcase for all of it in the credits. It seems like it's a little bit of a rarity.

**MARK MANCINA**

Yeah, boy, that was one of the last ones, too, I think. Back then it wasn't as rare to have a main title. But yeah. The movie I did right after that, which was completely left-field. I don't know why the director hired me. It was called – oh, shoot, I'm not going to remember it. It was Goldie – no, it was Farah Fawcett and Chevy Chase and it was a romantic comedy. And that movie, I got to also do a main title. Completely different. More like a *Forrest Gump* kind of a score. Completely different theme, but those are the last kind of main titles I think I ever wrote, because they kind of got rid of them, you know?

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**MARK MANCINA**

They fell out of fashion.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

*Man of the House.*

**MARK MANCINA**

*Man of the House.* But for me, it was great to have that main title. I'll never forget, one of my thrills was – because I didn't have many thrills. I mean, as great as I feel that score is, and as influential as I know it is, because everybody is still copying it, I didn't get a lot of accolade or a lot of people, you know, wanting me to do stuff because of it. You would have thought that I would've.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**MARK MANCINA**

But I didn't. But I was at a BMI dinner. David Newman walked up to me, and at the time I didn't know David Newman. I have big respect for him, but I didn't know him and he looked at me and he goes, "Score of the year, *Speed*," and he just kept walking by. And I was like, "Wow, that's cool."

**KRIS TAPLEY**

That's awesome.

**MARK MANCINA**

Then I met Jerry Goldsmith and he didn't even want to talk to me, so, what are you going to do?

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Well, what does Jerry Goldsmith know?

**MARK MANCINA**

Well, he knows a lot!

**KRIS TAPLEY**

But yeah, just thinking about those opening titles and the moments within them, and you were speaking to the toms. I do know there's that one great part where it's, like – the score just settles early, like, very early, like, within a minute it's kind of gotten quiet, and then the, “doom-doom, bum, bum, dun-nuuuh,” and then the soaring theme comes in. And I just – I love it. I mean, Jan refers to that as an opera, that opening bit. He just wanted to treat it as, you know, the opening of an opera, just go through all the movements of the movie.

**MARK MANCINA**

Yeah. It's definitely an overture. I mean, there's no question about it. That's why I'm saying I wrote it at the end, because I had all the parts, so I took them and kind of re-pieced it together, you know?

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah. What can you tell me about – and we were sort of touching on it – but just the status quo for film music composition at the time, and I guess that world that you were kind of coming into and, unbeknownst to you, preparing to influence and send in another direction? What was radical about what you were doing and just tell me about that status quo and what you did and didn't like about it at the time.

**MARK MANCINA**

Yeah, two things. So, technology was changing everything and where I had a huge advantage, and the reason that Hans Zimmer worked with me and the reason that Disney worked with me, was that I could mock up my music with synthesizers and make it sound very – pretty realistic, all things considered. And that became an art form – an unfortunate art form – but it became an art form because what it would allow a director to do is to really hear what the music was going to be and to not have to guess and then wind up on the scoring stage going, “I don't like this, but I'm paying \$250,000 today for this orchestra, so changes are going to cost a fortune.” It allowed them to sit in my studio and go, “No, I don't like that part right there. Change that.” And I could change it and it doesn't cost them a penny, right? So, that was the advantage and the advantage for getting work. The disadvantage is that people that don't know anything about music can write music. People that know a lot about computers and a lot about how computers work can become composers and make something that sounds good. It might not be real musical, might not be musical to my ear, but seems to be musical to that director's ear, and that director is the biggest director in the universe, so he gets to do whatever he wants. And there you have what you have today. You have scores that are a letdown, in my opinion. There are some great ones, but the general score is a same old thing. It's all about sounds. Whoever has the best sounds wins. The other thing that

happened in the '90s is there became a backlash to themes. I was writing themes. John Williams wrote themes. Tom Newman, all these guys write – Alan Silvestri – thematic scores, so that you know when you play that score, “Oh, I know that score. That’s *Back to the Future*.” You know, boom, right? Well, that became a curse, because for directors, it sort of put a stamp on their movie. It sort of dated their movie, and their movie became a signature that younger directors didn’t want. Older directors loved it. They were like, “Are you kidding? That’s what I want, is a signature. I want something that people go, ‘Oh yeah, I recognize that.’” But newer directors were saying – younger – were saying – so I would go to a meeting and they would be interviewing me for the gig and they would say, “Well, as long as you don’t write anything like John Williams, the worst composer of all.” And I would look at them, like, “What? John Williams is by far the finest composer in film that we’ve probably ever had.” So, I just couldn’t connect to those directors. I would leave those meetings going, “I don’t want to do this guy’s movie, if that’s his, you know, reference.”

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**MARK MANCINA**

Well, if you notice toward the end of the '90s and definitely the action movies all through the 2000s and everything, name the melody. I mean, name a famous Marvel melody.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Oh, absolutely.

**MARK MANCINA**

I can’t find one, and I don’t think they want one, you know? And it’s unfortunate to me because now action scores are just a bunch of stuff, and for me, *Speed* was an action score with a bunch of stuff, but it had a theme, you know? And that theme played such an important role and it became a character. And I’ll tell you, it was important to the actors. I saw Keanu at The Ivy one time, restaurant, in LA and I saw him and I thought, “I should tell him that I did the score to *Speed*,” because I know he’s a musician. Some of these guys don’t give a crap. So, I went up to his table and I said, “Hey, Keanu, my name is Mark Mancina. I wrote the score to *Speed*. We never met. I just wanted to say hi.” And he went, “Oh, pleasure.” And then I went and sat down, and then he got up and came over and he said, “I love the score to *Speed*. That’s, like, one of my favorite things about that movie, is the music.” I go, well, “Thank you!” That made me feel really good. Same with Sandy Bullock. I had dinner with her five or six years later, just ran into her with my publicist that I had at that time, and she introduced us, and as soon as I said *Speed* she went, “dun dun dun dun dun.” You know? So, I thought that was pretty cool, because I’ve met several other actors in things that really don’t have a clue what music does in their movies. They just don’t even – they know it’s important, but it’s like a necessary evil.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I mean, it adds to their character. They have to understand that. It's part of the fabric of what you're experiencing. It affects everything.

**MARK MANCINA**

You'd be surprised.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah, it's crazy. And it's funny, you mentioned Marvel movies, I think the only one that has anything approaching a theme I can remember is *The Avengers*, and that's Alan.

**MARK MANCINA**

That's Alan. And Alan is a thematic composer. I think it would be very hard for Alan to write – as it would be for me – to write a movie that has zero theme. It just is really not motivating. You know, composers and musicians use a phrase, “musical,” and we'll say things – “I didn't find his performance very musical.” Most laymen don't really understand what that means. They're kind of, like, “What does that mean? Does it mean he's not a good musician?” No. Musicality is subjective and it's all about ebb and flow and taste and texture and when to emote and when to pull back. There are so many nuances to being musical, and the only thing that I can say is it's very hard for me, and I'm sure for Alan and Tom Newman and those of that ilk, to write a score that's not musical. And often they want you to, because often the music serves a purpose like sound effects. Sound effects aren't musical, really, you know?

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**MARK MANCINA**

So, if they want the music to give you energy, but don't get in the way and don't do a theme and don't do this, but, “Give me energy,” then you have *Fast & Furious*. It serves a purpose. It's like sound effects. It's like sound design. You know, sound design has gotten to be very deep, and I'm just not interested in that kind of music. That's just not what I do.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Sure. I mean, some of it works if it's, like – in my opinion – if it's like – because I'm often interested in this blurring of the line between composition and sound design, and I think of, like, some of the Jóhann Jóhannsson stuff or Mica Levi. That's good stuff. But to your point about just the sort of prevalent work, yeah, it's just not memorable.

**MARK MANCINA**

Well, I'll tell you something. My score that did that for me that I felt was extremely one of my best scores, and it got really copied, but I never really received the credit for it, because it was subtle, but *Training Day*. *Training Day* has a lot of textures, a lot of cues that are kind of sound design-ish, you know? But when it needed it, it has music and it has heart and it has pathos and danger. It has those things in it. And that was an overlooked score. It's funny, because it wasn't an overlooked movie.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**MARK MANCINA**

And Antoine loved it, the director. But I don't know. It was just interesting. It spawned quite a bit, and it spawned the TV series *Criminal Minds*, which, basically they just wanted me to write *Training Day* for *Criminal Minds*. The main theme is almost similar to one of the cues in *Training Day*, and it was that kind of a score, too, but I like the blend of sounds and music, but you have to have the music in there when you need it. You have to know what it is and how to use it. That's what I find challenging and intriguing sometimes.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

And there's an interesting sort of use of it at the beginning of *Speed* in the credits when kind of hear what sounds like elevator shaft stuff kind of blending into the beginning of the score and whatnot.

**MARK MANCINA**

They gave me that elevator scene early on. When they were talking about hiring me, the studio gave me the elevator scene and said, "Let's see what you can do with this." And I wrote something and they hated it and that was the end of it, and then somehow Jan came back around and all of a sudden, I was doing it. So, it was really weird.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Was it just the elevator or was it them running on the roof and stuff, too?

**MARK MANCINA**

It was just the elevator, like, doing some of its falling. It was an early cut of it.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah, that's a tough one to dive into, I would imagine.

**MARK MANCINA**

Well, yeah, and also, I just – I didn't even know what the movie was about.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah

**MARK MANCINA**

I think they were – I think what they were doing was trying to make me fail so that Jan would get off of this idea, you know?

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Is all of this why you moved away, I guess – I mean, one answer is they moved away from making these kind of movies, but is that kind of why you moved away from working on these kind of movies? Because I look at your career and I'm like-

**MARK MANCINA**

Yeah, and I worked with Michael Bay. I did *Bad Boys* with him and I didn't care for him much at all.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I don't think you're alone on that.

**MARK MANCINA**

No, I'm not. And Jerry – you know, I like Jerry a lot. You know, really a difficult – can be a difficult guy. I don't know how much respect he has – he respects music. He knows that music is super important, but he doesn't understand the amount of work that goes into it. I always felt like he felt like we spent about an hour working on something and then would show it to him, instead of a week. Because he could really dismiss it. So, when I did *Bad Boys*, they said – Don Simpson and Jerry said, "You're doing *The Rock*. You have to do *The Rock*. That's our next movie. You have to do it." And I called my agent and I said, "Enough. Enough. You know, I want to do something else. I don't want to keep doing this bash-bash-bash, sixteenth notes everywhere, music everywhere, action." I had done *Speed* and *Bad Boys* and I think *Twister*. There was just a lot of action and I just wanted to do something else. And luckily, I had some Disney – you know, I had two careers. I had that career, that action thing, but I had relationships at Disney, having done *The Lion King* and having arranged all of those songs. I mean, that was a big amount of work and it did really well, so Disney kind of came back around in 1996, 1995, when they were going to do *Tarzan*. They started with Alan Silvestri and there was something about Phil and Alan that didn't quite click. I don't know what, because they're both great guys, but they called me and they said, "You know, the first thing we want to do is give you this song, 'You'll Be in My Heart,' and see if you can make it fit into the picture and see if you can make it feel like it can be in a *Tarzan* movie." So, I just took Phil's voice, erased everything else and just wrote and did my thing all around it and it worked great and Phil loved it, and so, that started an eight-year relationship with him. So, I sort of had two careers going on at once.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Very cool. And Hans ended up doing *The Rock*, right?

**MARK MANCINA**

No, I think Nick Glennie-Smith did it.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Oh, OK.

**MARK MANCINA**



We actually gave it to Nick. We didn't want it. We were, like, "Nick, you go take the abuse." Nick is a – well, first of all, Nick is a wonderful, awesome guy, but a much more patient man than I am and he doesn't let his emotions get the best of him, as I do. Because I get really wrapped up in what I do in my music and it doesn't work real well with people like Michael Bay.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah.

**MARK MANCINA**

You know, you have to look at that like you're going to paint his house and if he doesn't like the color, just repaint it. You just have to look at it that way. You can't think in terms of "it's musical" and "it's a musical score" and "it's emotional" – forget it.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Yeah. Did you ever clash with Jan on anything?

**MARK MANCINA**

The only time – we never clashed. The only time I really had a hard time with him was on *Speed 2*.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

I think we'll pump the brakes on that. We'll hear from Mark, and others, about *Speed 2* in due course. For now, let's have him start to bring us in for a landing today. I'll airdrop us in here where we're talking about Mark Gordon because I was curious what kind of interaction he might have had with the producer.

**MARK MANCINA**

Well, I did later, because I did *Criminal Minds*.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Oh, of course, yeah.

**MARK MANCINA**

And he was the producer of *Criminal Minds*. I couldn't understand – when I saw him – the only reason – because this is how Hollywood works, right? You would think that me and Mark Gordon did *Speed*, why did we not work together? I never heard from him again. Never heard from him, until, I knew his brother, who is a recording engineer, and he said, "How come you've never worked with my brother again?" And I said, "Because your brother's never called me or talked to me or anything. I don't know. I don't even know what your brother is doing." So, we went in and I showed Mark Gordon some of my stuff and I showed him *Training Day*, a couple of cues from *Training Day*, and he was, like, "I love that. I love *Training Day*. I love that music. I love it. I love it." So, he had this new series and he said, "Why don't you write something for it?" And he really liked it, so we began working together again after that for a while. Not too long. I did that show for a while and then I kind of gave it over to a couple of guys.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Anything else come to mind anecdotally working on *Speed*? On the day-to-day, being in there?

**MARK MANCINA**

It was just terrifying. It was terrifying. You know, it was really my first – it was a small movie. I think it was like a \$30 million picture. So, at that time it was a pretty small film. Sandra Bullock was unknown. Keanu Reeves was known, but he wasn't, you know-

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Not an action star.

**MARK MANCINA**

Not a big star. Not an action star. And Sandy being completely unknown, it wasn't a movie that everybody was anticipating was going to be this great movie. But Jan – I mean, it's so great. It's a great movie. It's a great movie in a Hitchcock world, you know? It's like, the way he shot it and the way he did things and the way he keeps it moving along and keeps you on the edge the whole time. It doesn't lag. It never sits there for a while. You know, it's a really, really well-done movie and I was lucky to work on it. I was lucky to write pretty much whatever I wanted. He really didn't push me around too much. There was a few places he had some suggestions, and they were good suggestions, but it was a lot of music and it was in a relatively short time. I seem to remember it was six weeks to write it. And, you know, it was the first time going in with a full orchestra on an entire score written by – I had done it before, but I don't think a full orchestra just on my own. I'm not sure. So, it was – I was pretty nervous.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Well, it certainly worked out, didn't it? I said it before and I'll say it again, Mark Mancina's work on *Speed* amounts to one of the great action movie scores. And I'll take it a step further and say one of the great scores of any genre. And I love the story behind it. This guy, passionate about music, tinkering around in Hans Zimmer's shop, and a first-time director plucks him out of there and gives him a shot. And he just crushed it. I find that's honestly a representative story when it comes to *Speed*. Much about the making of this movie has to do with the right group of people getting the right opportunity at the right time. As I said, we've got more with Mark down the pike. After all, we still have an electrifying title song to talk about, and Mark has a perspective on that. But before we get there, the *Speed* puzzle is just about complete. Again, what we will see has been assembled and locked. What we will hear, however, still needs to be mixed and finalized. And that ticking clock ahead of release is only getting louder.

**[OUTRO MUSIC]**

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Next week on *50 MPH*...

**KRIS TAPLEY**

With the picture in place, we turn our ears to *Speed*'s Oscar-winning sound design.

**STEPHEN HUNTER FLICK**

*Speed* has an operational field of simultaneous events, and the job of the sound design is the bind it together.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

We talk to the key sound team members about their various challenges on the project.

**STEVE MASLOW**

I remember I had a unique problem with the dialogue, because every angle had a different gear whine. So, it would be from Sandra [high-pitch gear whine] and over to Keanu [low-pitch gear whine].

**KRIS TAPLEY**

And by all accounts, it was a race against the clock to meet the release date.

**GREGG LANDAKER**

He says, "We've got 21 days total all in." I said, "Ow, man, what I'm seeing as far as sound effects-wise in this movie – how are we going to do it?"

**ELLIOTT KORETZ**

This is, like, legendary or whatever. There was a meeting where you know, Cameron's movie was not going to make its release date, and they said, "The bank is open," which was the famous quote.

**KRIS TAPLEY**

All of that and more next week right here on *50 MPH!*

**KRIS TAPLEY**

Thanks so much for listening. *50 MPH* is written, produced and edited by yours truly, Kris Tapley. You can find us on Twitter @50MPHPod. I'm @kristapley. That's Kris with a K. You can also catch every episode and more at our website 50MPHpodcast.com. If you dug the show, please like and subscribe and do all the things. We'll see you next time.