

“No matter what project I’m working on,” says composer-arranger Bennett Salvay, “I’m always asking the same questions: What can I do to create a different sonic palette? What can I do that hasn’t quite been done before in this medium? I approach everything from that standpoint.”

Throughout his eclectic career – which has encompassed acclaimed orchestral scores for the hit *Jeepers Creepers* horror-film franchise; the uniquely lyrical theme and underscore for beloved TV series *Friday Night Lights*; and arrangements for artists as far-flung as Glen Campbell, Rob Zombie, Cheap Trick, and Mötley Crüe, among countless other projects – Salvay has always gone the extra mile to locate the emotional crux.

Finding that touch point may necessitate creating strategic mayhem with 60 string players, building a mosaic of guitar tones, or conducting a lounge version of a Soundgarden song – but that’s the sort of challenge he craves.

A native of the Los Angeles suburb of Encino, Salvay began studying piano at age 7. But it was less the formal rigor of study than free-form improvisation – “Figuring out the things I heard in my head,” as he puts it – that caused him to fall in love with making music. Enamored of bebop, blues, rock and pop, he was also captivated by Mike Oldfield’s chilling score music in *The Exorcist* and the distinctive film and TV themes of Lalo Schiffrin.

At 13 he formed a pop-rock band and began playing at high-profile L.A. venues like the Troubadour and the Roxy. Though Salvay’s fortunes with this and other rock bands didn’t lead to stardom, the experience would ultimately serve a vital function in his career.

He enrolled at UCLA but soon found himself touring the Great White North as the pianist for British blues artist Long John Baldry. After returning to school, he was again tempted away, but this time for good. A gig opened up at Paramount Studios, working for famed TV producer Garry Marshall’s company. “I had to do everything – be on set, be in the studio cutting tracks, put bands together. That was my grad school,” Salvay recalls. “What an introduction to the business! I was all of 21 years old.”

A further benefit of the job: the chance to hang out on the Paramount soundstage run by famed mixer Danny Wallin (who worked on scores by John Williams, James Horner and other top composers), watching scoring sessions for films such as *48 Hours* and soaking up as much as he could.

In the mid-’80s he wrote and conducted his first orchestral film score, for the AFI short *When the Bough Breaks*, starring Jennifer Jason Leigh. “It was the greatest feeling I ever had, holding a baton and hearing this sound in front of me,” he remembers. “It was just thrilling. I thought, ‘I have to keep doing this.’”

Next came a lengthy period of all-consuming TV work with Miller-Boyett Productions, crafting (with partner Jesse Frederick) theme songs and underscore for the company’s string of hit comedy series, including *Full House*, *Family Matters*, *Perfect Strangers* and numerous others. “We had six shows on the air at once,” he notes. “There was no time to do anything else.” The Miller-Boyett machine kept humming into the mid-’90s, at which point Salvay began thirsting for new musical frontiers.

The remainder of the decade afforded him work scoring independent films (*Nature of the Beast*, *Love Stinks*, *Rites of Passage*), hour-long dramas (*Providence*, *Early Edition*) and contributing arrangements (and occasional keyboards) to records by such artists as Everclear, Mötley Crüe, Rob Zombie and Fastball, as well as contemporary projects for icons Steve Lawrence and Eydie Gormé (for whom he arranged and conducted an orchestral version of Soundgarden's "Black Hole Sun," a standout track on the cult anthology disc *Lounge-a-Palooza*).

2000 saw him conceive the score for horror film *Jeepers Creepers*, and his inventive music proved indispensable to the suspenseful flick's mood – even garnering an honorable mention for "Best Science Fiction, Horror or Fantasy Score" at the 2001 Movie Music U.K. Awards. "This is undoubtedly one of the best scores in years," reads an Amazon review of the soundtrack CD for the film, which calls it "a future classic ready to join the ranks of PSYCHO, HALLOWEEN, POLTERGEIST, JAWS, etc."

Searching for new sounds and emotional impact to accommodate the feature's mixture of outright terror and ghoulish whimsy, Salvay began by assembling a 60-piece string orchestra for a sampling session. Armed with electric alligator clips and other implements of torture for doctoring instruments, he gathered an array of new colors for his palette before he began writing. Avant-garde pianist Gaylord Mowrey also joined in the mayhem, contributing keyboard treatments that helped create the sound of monster-villain The Creeper.

"We also utilized a lot of low brass with strange clusters and harmonies," he points out of the horror score. "It was all calculated to create a sense of distortion and dismay." Not surprisingly, Salvay was also asked to score the 2002 sequel *Jeepers Creepers 2*.

His score for the 2006 drama *Peaceful Warrior* earned similar plaudits. The feature, co-starring Nick Nolte, required inspirational themes of great symphonic sweep; many fans of the film have credited Salvay's soaring cues for the production's emotional impact. "Fantastic work ... Truly epic stuff, and one of the best scores of '06 in my mind," reads one YouTube review.

More work on dramatic TV followed – on series like *Boomtown*, *Windfall* and J.J. Abrams' *What About Brian?* Not long thereafter, Salvay was summoned by Emmy-winning composer W.G. "Snuffy" Walden (who'd first hired him on *Early Edition*) to work on the score for fledgling TV drama *Friday Night Lights*. The two assembled a distinctive score orchestrated almost entirely for guitars.

"We spent much more time than TV people usually spend, but the result sounded unlike anything else on the air," Salvay asserts. "I appreciate Snuffy calling me in to work on the show; we've had a great time doing it." He adds that his experience working with bands has helped shape the show's music, which he's co-created for its entire five-season run.

He's kept his hand in the pop-music world as well, contributing string arrangements to Glen Campbell's rapturously reviewed 2008 disc *Meet Glen Campbell* and Cheap Trick's ballyhooed *Sgt. Pepper* show in Las Vegas, among other projects.

Bennett Salvay's career has had tremendous breadth, but the wildly divergent projects he's undertaken are united by his always inventive approach to sound cultivation and a never-ending search for the emotional heart of the piece. "I'm always seeking new ways to do things," he says. "That's what keeps the process as exciting now as it was when I first picked up a baton."