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Introduction and background

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Danny Elfman is well known today as a film and television composer. Even if his name is not too familiar, his work should be: he is the composer of the themes to *The Simpsons* and *Desperate Housewives*, of the music for (among many others) *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Good Will Hunting*, *Sleepy Hollow*, *Men in Black*, *Spider-Man*, *Hulk* and Tim Burton's two *Batman* films, of which this book examines the first (made in 1989) in detail.

For a detailed list of Elfman's film and TV work, his listing on IMDB (the Internet Movie Database) is a good place to start: www.imdb.com. His unofficial fansite 'Music for a darkened people' may also be a useful reference point: <http://elfman.filmmusic.com>

It is Danny Elfman's score for *Batman* which really launched him into the mainstream and amongst the top-flight Hollywood film composers. It was a similar turning point for the film's director and long-time collaborator, Tim Burton. Elfman had worked with Burton before (on *Pee-wee's Big Adventure* and *Beetlejuice*, for example), but this was the first time either of them had been hired to do a major summer blockbuster. The bigger budgets inherent in this led to a substantial score of some 80 minutes, for large orchestra (and occasional use of choir) coupled with extra synth and sampled lines added by Elfman. It is still one of the best known of Elfman's scores and shows a great deal of the stylistic traits and influences that were to pervade his later work, as well as inspiring other composers.

The film was a commercial success for Warner Brothers, due in no small part to some well-timed hype and an aggressive marketing strategy for the film and its associated products. In addition to grossing over \$413,000,000 (£209,300,000) worldwide, it received the Oscar for Best Art Direction-Set Decoration in 1990 and remains the best known and most commercially successful *Batman* film.

Elfman's background and early career

Danny Elfman was born in 1953 in California and from an early age was interested in films, though at high school he wanted to be a film-maker rather than a film composer. Elfman did not go to university after leaving school, choosing instead to follow his brother Richard Elfman (a film-maker) to Paris and play in a music troupe there. He then went travelling around Africa, which brought him into contact with a wide variety of unusual ethnic instruments, particularly percussion instruments.

To this day, Elfman's music has a fascination with rhythm and percussive timbres, many of which are actually laid down by Elfman himself as pre-recorded tracks (whether samples or played live) on the film score.