

6

Legacy and influence

The vitality and breadth of Elfman's compositional technique seems to reach maturity in the *Batman* score and it is no surprise that, having shown what he could do with a large budget and a potential summer blockbuster, Elfman has been in great demand as a composer ever since. The score itself became the basis for Elfman's second *Batman* film, in which the dark and gothic tone of the original is more accentuated. It seems that the score for *Batman Returns* owes almost as much in this respect to Elfman's score for *Edward Scissorhands*, which many critics regard as his masterpiece.

Elfman did not return to score the third *Batman* film (*Batman Forever*), following Tim Burton's own decision not to direct it. Elliot Goldenthal's music for this 1995 film seems to try to break away from Elfman's own distinctive theme, but still retains its dark minor/major character. The music for the animated *Batman* series similarly owes to Elfman's 1989 score.

Interestingly, the subsequent *Batman* films (*Batman and Robin* 1997) shrugged off much of the sinister style of the previous Burton films and leaned more towards asking the camp humour of the 1960s television series. Elliot Goldenthal's music retains the same theme that was used for the caped crusader's previous outing, but matches more closely the lighter tone of the film.

The most recent Batman film (*Batman Begins* 2005) seems to have brought the genre around full circle. Acting as a form of prequel to the 1989 film, but updating the style and characters, this is another dark rendering of the Batman legend. The score, by Hans Zimmer and James Newton Howard, is a little more neutral than any of the previous *Batman* series. Although it is a more darkly toned score than either of the Goldenthal offerings, it lacks the distinctive character of either those or the Elfman series.

Because of Batman's mysterious nature and the accentuation of this within Burton's and Elfman's interpretation of the Batman legend, Elfman's treatment of the superhero in scoring terms (as opposed to the style of John Williams' *Superman* theme of 1978, for example) was radically different. Since *Batman*, there has been a tendency for superhero themes to have an ambivalent edge to them, perhaps using minor keys in an awe-inspiring context rather than a melancholic or tragic one (Elfman's own score to *Spider-Man* is an excellent example of this). It is no accident that Elfman was asked to score several similar comic-book transfers after *Batman*; scores like *Dick Tracy*, *Spider-Man* and *Spider-Man 2*, and *Hulk* seem to bear this tendency out. Despite this, Elfman has been