

Synanon | Enter Laughing

ADDICTED TO COOL

Synanon, initially a drug rehabilitation center, was founded by Charles E. “Chuck” Dederich in 1958. In the early 1960s it also became an alternative community, encouraging members to live a self-examined life. Synanon lasted until 1989, when it finally closed down because of all sorts of accusations of all sorts of illegal doings.

In 1965, director Richard Quine made a film about Synanon called, not surprisingly, *Synanon*. The film starred Edmond O’Brien as Dederich, and the denizens of Synanon were played by Alex Cord, Chuck Connors, Stella Stevens, Richard Conte, Richard Evans, and Eartha Kitt. Shot on location in Santa Monica at Synanon, the film is filled with the usual soul-searching, bad withdrawal, falling off the drug wagon, romantic entanglements, more bad withdrawal, really bad withdrawal, more soul-searching, and, of course, some more bad withdrawal – and music. Lots and lots of very cool music composed by the very cool Neal Hefti.

Neal Hefti, born in 1922, came to prominence as big band and jazz were fusing in the 1940s. He began as a trumpet player and played with several different bands, but his joining the Woody Herman troupe was his first major step to becoming an arranger and composer, and his work for Herman’s band was so innovative that it even inspired legendary classical composer Igor Stravinsky, who ultimately wrote his *Ebony Concerto* for the band. Hefti left the Herman band and joined forces with Count Basie in 1950. His work for Basie produced many classic Hefti charts and compositions – Basie’s album, *Atomic Basie*, was an all-Hefti affair and included the soon-to-be Hefti classics, “Li’l Darlin’” and “Splanky.” Later, there was another all-Hefti album called *Basie Plays Hefti*.

In the 1960s, Hefti went Hollywood and began scoring films. His first score was written in 1964 for Richard Quine’s comedy,

Sex and the Single Girl. It was classic Hefti right out of the gate and introduced a fresh, melodic, and, yes, cool voice into film scoring. He followed that with *How To Murder Your Wife* (released by Kritzerland), which was followed by *Synanon*. But some of his most famous work lay ahead – the following year he’d work on TV’s *Batman*, do brilliant scores for two Neil Simon comedy films, *Barefoot In The Park* and then his iconic music for *The Odd Couple*, whose theme was also used in the TV series based on the play and film.

Hefti’s score for *Synanon* opens with a moody and evocative main title, and the rest of the score consists of variations on that main theme, along with some swingin’ ups, bluesy ballads, and even a couple of vocals, including “The Whiffenpoof Song” – all in the unique Hefti style and loaded with his usual melodic invention. There was no one like him.

WELL, HELLO WORLD, COME IN AND ENTER LAUGHING

Enter Laughing began life as a semi-autobiographical novel by Carl Reiner, about a young man longing to break into show business. It was adapted for Broadway by playwright Joseph Stein and opened in 1963 to excellent reviews and a run of 419 performances. The play starred Alan Arkin as Reiner surrogate David Kolowitz (Arkin won a Tony Award for his performance), and co-starred Vivian Blaine, Alan Mowbray, Sylvia Sidney, and Michael J. Pollard. In 1967, *Enter Laughing* was brought to the screen, this time written and directed by Reiner himself. The film version starred Reni Santoni, Janet Margolin, Jose Ferrer, Elaine May, Jack Gilford, Don Rickles, Shelly Winters, David Opatashu, and, repeating his stage role, Michael J. Pollard.

Roger Ebert said, “*Enter Laughing* is funny and well played. If you think a movie like that is nice to go to sometimes, you should maybe go to see it, already.” Those who did go see it were treated to a frequently hilarious movie filled with expert turns by expert actors, especially Ferrer and May, who are

both brilliant in the film. Capturing all the fun and spirit of the movie was its score by the great Quincy Jones, another of the cool set of composers from the 1960s.

Jones, like Hefti, started out in big band and jazz as an arranger and composer. And, like Hefti, Jones wrote his first Hollywood film score in 1964, for Sidney Lumet’s *The Pawnbroker*. He instantly became a sought-after and very prolific film composer, scoring such 1960s films as *Mirage*, *Walk, Don’t Run*, *The Deadly Affair*, *In The Heat Of The Night*, *In Cold Blood*, *Mackenna’s Gold*, *The Italian Job*, *Bob and Mary* and *Ted and Alice*, *Cactus Flower* and many others, as well as his great theme for the TV series *Ironsides*. The 70s were no less fruitful, producing such great scores as *The Anderson Tapes*, *\$*, *The Hot Rock*, *The New Centurions*, *The Getaway*, *Roots*, and, in 1985, *The Color Purple*. Jones has had continued success as a recording artist and producer, and has received every kind of accolade you can get – he has multiple Grammy, Emmy, Golden Globe, and Oscar nominations and, in 1995, won the Academy Award’s Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award.

Jones was a completely fresh voice in film scoring – he combined the best of all worlds – big band, jazz, and classic film scoring, into his own unique sound. While his score for *Enter Laughing* is on the more traditional side, it is infectiously tuneful, fresh as a daisy, and fits the film like a glove. It’s the kind of score no one really knows how to write anymore.

Both *Synanon* and *Enter Laughing* were originally released on Liberty Records and this is the first CD release for both. They are mastered from the original two-track album masters housed in the Capitol vaults.

— Bruce Kimmel