

LARRY HOPKINS - BIOGRAPHY



Larry Hopkins was always part of a musical family. His father taught music and art at several California universities, his mother played piano and sang opera and his older brother has a PhD in Music from Cornell (now a faculty member of the University of Iowa). Starting his musical education on the violin at age 4 (taught by dear old dad), he soon progressed to play in several local orchestras enjoying a wide range of classical repertoire. Larry continued his studies on the violin until age 12. He switched musical directions and began to learn the bassoon and the piano. About this time, his older brother introduced him to a great wealth of Jazz music artists.

About this time, Larry also discovered the electronic music synthesizer through recording by Walter Carlos, Beaver & Krause and Isao Tomita. Larry's love of synthesizers was immediate and would soon change his future in ways he could not imagine. Now 15 years old, Larry was invited to perform at the "Fete de Genève" (World Cultural Festival at Geneva, Switzerland). Because Larry was pushed forward a couple of years in school, Larry graduated high school at barely sixteen and then moved away from San Diego County to Mission Viejo, California to attend Saddleback College. While this college choice may seem strange at first, Saddleback College was known as one of the few schools in California (at this time) to have a full program in learning all about electronic music. His love of synthesizers soon turned into private study with the school's main electronic music teacher, Len Sasso. Soon after, Larry became the main intern at Saddleback tutoring other students in synthesis techniques. Larry quickly became an expert on Moog, Arp, Oberheim, Emu and other synthesizers of the time.

At this same time, Larry also began to study with the well-known jazz pianist, Wally Ruth (who was a pianist and saxophonist for Judy Garland at MGM). This led to Larry playing many local jazz clubs and concert performances in the California area.

Saddleback College soon added to their faculty by hiring Don Dorsey, a famous recording engineer and synthesist. That year Don was the recording engineer on several Stevie Wonder albums and also writing/recording the music for Disneyland's "Main Street Electrical Parade". Larry attended classes and private study with Don Dorsey, learning all about the latest techniques in electronic music. By this time Larry and his girlfriend Dora were married with a child soon on the way, so Larry began to expand his work experience and soon landed work in Las Vegas as musical director at both the Tropicana and Show Boat casinos. During this time, Larry got an inspiration into to attend a major music conservatory. After careful consideration of what each school had to offer, he found the Berklee College of Music in Boston to best suit his musical goals.

The money earned at Las Vegas would serve two main purposes. It would allow him to seriously study piano (enough to pass the Berklee audition) and move the family to Boston, Mass. Larry soon found the right piano teacher named Ernest Hughes who had studied at Julliard and privately with the well known composer, Mario Castelnuovo Tedesco. Mr. Hughes also gained fame as pianist for the Tommy Dorsey big band and as a pianist in Hollywood for Victor Young. Larry soon buckled down and dove into classical piano pieces by Brahms, Chopin, Bach and Debussy. He also was taught very traditional 4-part traditional harmony techniques and species counterpoint. After two years of intense study and a letter of recommendation from Mr. Hughes, Larry auditioned for attendance at Berklee. Fortunately, the two years of study had paid off and Larry, Dora and their two daughters moved to Boston immediately.

Larry soon became absorbed into the Berklee lifestyle and studied with instructors such as Gary Burton (then, dean of music), Herb Pomeroy (known for giving the hardest class at Berklee - Line Writing) and Robert Winter (known for his stride piano as well as being the pianist for John Williams and the Boston Pops). After his first year at Berklee, Larry was granted a half-scholarship (which led to a full scholarship the following semester). Larry worked in the school's music library (which led him to many study scores of classical, jazz and television/film scores as well.

Larry graduated from Berklee (Magna Cum Laude - GPA3.91) and decided to attend graduate classes in electronic music at Boston's "New England Conservatory of Music". He rediscovered his love of electronic music all over as the digital electronics revolution had invaded the synthesizer world and Larry began his first use of using computers to generate sound and music.

After receiving his certificate from NEC, Larry returned to California. By this time, MIDI, synthesizers and samplers were no longer just used for popular dance music or SFX; they were being used by most of the top composers and recording studios to create film and television scores. Larry soon found out his synthesizer knowledge would serve him well as he began to be known as one of the recording industry's top synthesizer/sampler programmers. This led him to work with many well know composers. Many of the companies that were producing sample libraries were hiring Larry to produce sounds. Larry won several awards for his sound design and began to attract the attention of companies that manufacture synthesizers and samplers.

Larry began producing sound sets for many manufacturers (such as Yamaha, Alesis). When Larry was using a Kurzweil K2000 sampler one day at a Hollywood music store to demonstrate his latest sound set for one of the sample library companies. A Kurzweil Rep was present and approached Larry. Kurzweil had just produced an orchestral set of sounds and they needed demos to show off these new sounds. Larry came back with a fully orchestrated demo of the Nutcracker Suite and the Hallelujah Chorus. Larry was asked immediately to become a full time Kurzweil employee (which he gladly accepted). After all, Kurzweil Music Systems was the state of the art synthesizer company at the time.

While at Kurzweil Music Systems, Larry quickly became involved with many successful Kurzweil sound projects and instruments such as the K2600 and the PC2. He also demonstrated Kurzweil instruments for trade shows, conventions and music store clinics. During his tenure at Kurzweil, he became responsible for the Kurzweil artist program. His duties included working with many composers and recording artists who all used Kurzweil instruments. In reality, Larry would also work for these people as an independent contractor as well. This led Larry to work in the studio with such artists as the Rolling Stones, Ray Charles, Alf Clausen (on the "Simpsons"), John Williams, Harry Connick Jr., Stevie Wonder, Brooks & Dunn, Kenny Rodgers, Cirque Du Soleil, Al Jarreau, BoyzIIMen, Loggins & Messina, to name just a few. Larry also became known as a top arranger for many composers at Universal and Warner Bros. working on many television and film scores.

Late in 2002, Kurzweil Music Systems became financially unstable and basically let almost all of its staff go. Since he was already working for so many composers. He decided to try his hand at composing full time.

About this same time, one of Larry's best friends from Universal Studios (Robb Navrides) became the sound supervisor on ABC's "Desperate Housewives". Robb asked Larry to compose music for the pilot episode. Executives at ABC loved the pilot episode and decided to pump a large budget into the show. Larry still continues to provide music for this TV show. Soon after, the same friend got a call from one of SONY's video game divisions and was asked to recommend several composers for their next project. After a meeting with Larry, it was decided that Larry would compose music for SONY's "Jak & Daxter" video game series in which he scored music for Jak & Daxter 2, Jak 3 and Jak X.

After this, Larry got the opportunity to work with director Steven Spielberg and composer John Williams designing synthesizer sounds for the feature film "Minority Report".

Soon after, Larry joined the post-production team at Technicolor Audio. While there Larry worked as an audio engineer on many feature films (such as 2012, Angels & Demons, Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull, Star Wars III, Ratatouille, Cars, Pirates of the Caribbean 2 & 3, The Simpsons Movie) and Television Shows (such as Grey's Anatomy, Lost, Desperate Housewives, Ugly Betty, Greek, Young and the Restless, Hanna Montana, My Friend's Tigger & Pooh, Mickey Mouse Clubhouse, Handy Manny, Ghost Whisperer and Criminal Minds).

While still working for Technicolor, Larry got the opportunity to work with sound designer Steven Spielberg and composer James Horner designing synthesizer sounds for the feature film "The Spiderwick Chronicles".

To this day, Larry Hopkins continues to compose, arrange and work as an audio engineer/session pianist/synthesist for Video Games, Television and Feature Films. Be sure to visit larryahopkins.com's NEWS page to see what his latest projects are.