James Horner Biography

**Date of Birth:** August 14, 1953  
**Place of Birth:** Los Angeles, California

James Horner began studying piano at the age of five. Moving with his family to England when he was 10, he completed his primary schooling there, and would go on to study at the Royal College of Music in London before returning to California in the early 1970s.

After receiving a bachelor’s degree in music composition at USC (The University of Southern California), Horner would go on to earn his master’s degree at UCLA (The University of California at Los Angeles) and teach music theory there. He later completed his doctorate degree in music composition and theory at UCLA.

In Hollywood film music circles there has never been a meteoric success story like that of James Horner. In less than six years Horner rose from such low budget genre films as *The Lady in Red, Deadly Blessing, Humanoids from the Deep,* and *Battle Beyond the Stars* to the forefront of his field with such scores as *48 Hours* and *Cocoon.*

From the start, Horner worked on building a career that would catapult him to the tip in the fewest number of steps. Avoiding the temptation of easy money in episodic television, he resolved from the beginning to work only in film. Even when the projects were a tad compromised from a lack of funds, his scores always sounded first-class. Large orchestras and an avalanche of rich thematic material have been a hallmark of Horner’s work even when the film’s budget would seem to make any attempt of quality impossible.

It was Horner’s insistence in creating big-fish scores from little-pond pictures that caught the attention of Hollywood. After scoring three entries from major studios (*The Hand, The Pursuit of DB Cooper* and *Wolfen*), he was offered *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan.* Horner was now in the major leagues.

In a record amount of time he was the hot young composer in demand. For a while it seemed as if every week ushered in a new Horner film. Even at his most prolific (8 films in one year!), he lavished individual attention to each new undertaking. Horner would often trade in his full orchestral palette (*Brainstorm, Something Wicked this Way Comes* and *Krull*) for more intimate works such as *Testament* and *Stone Boy.*

This composer is forever in search of a new sound to underscore old situations: traditional Irish instruments were used to off-set the teenage
hijinx in *Heaven Help Us*, pounded steel drums were featured in the urban adventure film *Commando*, a boys’ choir commented poignantly on the dramatics of *Testament*, and the cymbalom provided eerie ethnic flavoring to *Gorky Park*.

Just as quickly as one tries to pigeon-hole Horner as an action film tuner (*Star Trek III: The Search for Spock, Project X, Uncommon Valor*), he comes up with such diverse works as the comedies *Off Beat* and *Volunteers*, the family adventure, *The Journey of Natty Gann* and the dramatic character study, *The Dresser*.

Though still quite young, James Horner has firmly established himself as one of the most distinctive and important voices in film scoring today.