

The Man Behind the Music

Composer Danny Elfman takes his music from Tim Burton films to the stage.

BY EMILY THOMPSON

On Nov. 15, the Columbus Symphony Orchestra will perform “Danny Elfman’s Music from the Films of Tim Burton,” a concert entirely dedicated to the director-composer relationship between the two. Elfman, who wrote the score for nearly all of Burton’s films, has a far-flung resume spanning from his days as Oingo Boingo’s lead singer to creating “The Simpsons” theme song to scoring “Pee-wee’s Big Adventure,” his first Burton film. We caught up with Elfman to talk the transition from recording studio to the stage, working with Burton and what he has up his sleeve next. columbussymphony.com

How do you create music for films as varied as “The Nightmare Before Christmas” and “Big Fish”?

That’s the fun of it, of course. I try to find different genres to work in as much as I can. The more similar things are, the more difficult it becomes. You don’t want to do the same score again unless it’s a sequel.

How did you translate your music from film to the stage?

Live, I had to adjust how many instruments were playing, bolster up parts that would’ve gotten lost on the live stage. There’s a huge section in “Pee-wee” where there’s no violins at all because two instruments were driving the whole recording. But to have an



orchestra do it, I would find ways to have the strings really fill it out.

Tell me about the first time you heard the concert performed at the premiere last October.

Well, that was terrifying. First off, we didn’t know whether the entire program was too ambitious. Doing 15 suites is very difficult. In the best of all worlds, you give yourself time to work the bugs out. At Royal Albert Hall, it was literally two days and find as many mistakes as possible. It was very stressful, and I lost nights’ sleep over it. But in the end, it was fabulous. The London audience was incredible, and it was really one of my greatest nights for a live performance.

What’s it like working with Tim Burton?

It’s very nonverbal. Some directors really talk about their stuff and explain the backstory. And he’s just like, ‘Here it is. Not much to say about it.’ He doesn’t ever analyze or deconstruct his work. And when I have music to play, he’ll either respond or he won’t. It’s all an emotional process.

Do you have anything new in the works?

I’m in the middle of [writing the score for] “50 Shades of Grey,” which is an interesting challenge. And I’m doing [the music for] a little film about the writer David Foster Wallace and his last book tour.

BEER AND A MOVIE

By combining film screenings with expert-led beer tastings, two Columbus cinemas are elevating two art forms. The Gateway Film Center and Studio 35 Cinema & Drafthouse each do their movie-and-beer events a little differently, but the idea is the same: Taste a bunch of great beer before watching a great movie. The result is greater than the sum of its parts.

Gateway Film Center started offering beer tastings over two years ago in an effort to grow Columbus’ movie-going population, says Johnny Diloretto, director of communications. “It’s an exciting time for the arts in Columbus,” he says. “But I see the audience for independent cinema stagnating a little.” The tastings begin at 4:30

p.m., and the films start at 6 p.m. During the tasting, there is trivia in the Gateway’s lounge. The films vary but are often a mix of fun, nostalgic and cultish, DiLoretto says. “We try to find that sweet spot.” For \$15, you get three pours, one pint of your choice and a movie ticket. This month, Gateway is showing “Fight Club” (Nov. 9). gatewayfilmcenter.com

Studio 35, which has been hosting monthly beer tasting-film screenings since 2007, typically partners with a specific brewery (or sometimes two) for its tastings, co-owner Eric Brembeck says. There’s a rep from the brewery or distillery, an emcee, prizes and movie clips. At 5 p.m., “once the 10 beers are served, we show the movie,” Brembeck says. And don’t worry if you arrive late to the tasting. “There’s a catch-up table,” Brem-

beck says. For \$25, guests get 10 4-ounce pours and a movie ticket. This month’s tasting-screening film is “Weird Science” (Nov. 16). studio35.com
—Tristan Eden

