



## **INTERVIEW: SMOKE TREE RANCH ROUNDUP: RICHARD SHERMAN**

While attending D23's Smoke Tree Ranch Roundup this past January, the Insider chatted with composer and Disney Legend Richard Sherman. Richard and his brother Robert were the first (and only!) staff songwriters hired by The Walt Disney Company – specifically by Walt himself. They're known around the globe by generations who grew up on their film, television, and Theme Park music, most notably the score of "Mary Poppins," "The Jungle Book," "Chitty Chitty Bang Bang," "The Parent Trap," "Winnie the Pooh," "Zorro," "It's a Small World," and Disneyland's Enchanted Tiki Room.

### **HAVE YOU EVER BEEN TO SMOKE TREE RANCH?**

I've heard a lot about it, but never had the opportunity. So this is my first time, and it's very thrilling to be in this environment.

### **WHAT'S IT LIKE ATTENDING THESE TYPES OF EVENTS?**

Oh, it's always a joy coming to a Disney event like this because I see lots of old friends and faces that I don't ordinarily see every day. And it's always a great reminiscing with them. It's like family, like seeing relatives you love but don't see too often.

### **DO YOU LIKE MEETING THE FANS?**

Yes, they're lovely. It's funny, being a fan myself, I feel like we're kindred spirits. I have a great deal of love for all things Disney. Walt was a major turning point in my life -- he gave me opportunities, inspiration, and encouragement. I'm a very lucky guy to have had the Disney experience, and I like to tell people about it. It was very special.

### **HAS YOUR CREATIVE PROCESS CHANGED OVER THE YEARS?**

No, I still do the same thing – it's my hobby and I still can't believe I get paid for my hobby! I truly love writing music and lyrics, especially instrumentals. I had an album of my music come out a few years ago called "Forgotten Dreams," which was just pure instrumentals. It's nice. I also wrote the featured song in "Iron Man 2" -- "Make Way for Tomorrow Today." They wanted a Disney-esque song for this picture and I said, "I know exactly what you want."

### **WHICH AWARD MEANS THE MOST TO YOU?**

That's a tough one ... I think the biggest award I ever received was when Walt Disney asked us to work for him. But how can you measure these things? We won two Academy Awards® for Best Score ("Mary Poppins") and Best Song ("Chim Chim Cher-ee"), which was great. Then about 3 years ago, President Bush gave us the National Medal of Arts, and that was a HUGE honor.

There are many wonderful accolades that we've gotten over the years – we received a star on Hollywood Boulevard across from Graumann's Chinese Theater and an honorary doctorate in music and fine arts. I don't know, the biggest honor I can imagine is that we worked for Walt. That, to me, was the greatest because we worked with animation and creative geniuses that Walt himself hired to be his "people." And we became part of his family, part of his team. That was the greatest honor. As time goes on, I think about how we worked with the "Nine Old Men," the original animators of the Walt Disney Studios, and

with some incredible musicians like Buddy Baker, George Burns, Irwin Costal, and people like that. They were all so wonderful and important to us. We were part of a great team.

### **WHO INSPIRED YOUR MUSICAL INTERESTS EARLY ON?**

Growing up, my heroes were Artie Shaw and Bennie Goodman. I played clarinet, but started out on the flute & piccolo -- they were the instruments I trained on. I was inspired to play the flute because of Disney's "Fantasia." There was a sequence where they had Tchaikovsky's "Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy" and I heard this heavenly sound. Four of the finest flutists were playing the most gorgeous music and I fell in love with it. I asked my dad what the instrument was and he said it was the flute -- so I thought I could play one flute and make it sound like four!

I was fairly good at it, but then I branched out into swing music. At 15 years old, I had a little band at Beverly Hills High for two years -- Dick Sherman's Beverly Hills Swing Band -- and played lead clarinet. I recruited kids from the marching band as they came down the football field. I started a tradition -- they'd play at half time and everyone loved it.

I'm mostly self-taught on the piano ... I had lessons to begin with, but was so fast I used to play by ear. I'd hear something once and be able to play it. So I was cheating rather than reading the notes like you're supposed to do. My father said that unless I read the sheet music, I wouldn't get any more lessons. I said I didn't need lessons and would just play without them. I can't really explain how -- it's a gift, an ability that God gives you. I can't draw but some people pick up a pencil and make miracles happen.

Then this [songwriting] ability sort of sprang out of me. I started hearing things in my head and began picking them out on the piano, which became my major tool. So I stopped playing instruments and started writing songs ... and that's what I really wanted to do.

### **CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WORKING ON "MARY POPPINS"?**

We're celebrating our sixth year on Broadway with "Mary Poppins" ... there are about five other companies touring the U.S. and the rest of the world, including Holland and the Far East. It's amazing how successful and popular it is. A lot of our music is still featured in the show and that's just thrilling.

Stiles and Drew, the new composers, are wonderful writers. They wrote all the new songs, as well as additional lyrics so our songs fit in with the fleshed-out storyline -- actually, they used about nine of our songs and we collaborated with producers Cameron Mackintosh and Tom Schumacher as much as possible. I still help promote the show, doing presentations around the country and all over the world. Sometimes Stiles and Drew and I get together ... we play and sing the songs. I sing their songs and they sing mine. We do a lot together.

### **WHAT PROJECTS ARE YOU WORKING ON NOW?**

Currently I'm working on a follow-up to my first album, which is completely instrumental. It's what I consider "semi-pop" - a cross between pop and light classic. I call them "Piano Poems" because obviously I play the piano. It's a lot of fun.

### **ANY LAST THOUGHTS ON YOUR DISNEY CAREER?**

We've had a wonderful career! Thanks to Walt Disney, we had the opportunity to write for many projects, not only at the Walt Disney Studios, but also with other people. The story always comes first -- without a great story, even the best songs don't mean a thing. You need a really good set of characters and a good situation to work with. People always talk about what we've done, but I like to credit the people who create the stories and characters because they're really the ones responsible for our inspiration.

