

# Mid-century movie music with a twist

Bay Area's own Orchestra Nostalgico ensemble takes on classic film scores that scream "we're from the 1960s"

THERE'S SOMETHING SPECIAL about film music.

"It's inspired by a storyline," says Steve Kirk, guitarist with Orchestra Nostalgico, the Bay Area ensemble behind this most appealing disc. "It is meant to be affecting emotionally. In *Once Upon a Time in the West*, each cast member in the movie—the Henry Fonda character, the Jason Robards character—has his own theme."



**Orchestra Nostalgico: Plays the Film Music of Ennio Morricone, Nino Rota, Bernard Herrmann, and more!**  
CD. Self produced. Available through CD Baby and Bandcamp.

"There are a lot of film buffs in our band, and we all love film music," Kirk says.

Here, Orchestra Nostalgico delves into some film scores that just scream "we're from the 1960s"—like the James Bond themes by composer James Barry with their rich, lazy, debonair, very loose-limbed melodies. Orchestra Nostalgico extracts the full fruitiness that can be found in these *Playboy*-pad melodies.

There are composer Nino Rota's slow, ghostlike, deeply nostalgic melodies for *Juliet of the Spirits*, so artfully composed they tell the whole story



**NOSTALGIC MELODIES.** Orchestra Nostalgico, whose members are all film buffs and writers, is a real treat, delving into emotionally compelling film scores with many a twist.

of the film—regret, love lost, old age upon us, life is lost. Yet, yet...there is still some hope for love, or is there?

Orchestra Nostalgico plays this music straight—if you can play Rota or spaghetti-western composer Ennio Morricone straight. This is emotionally compelling music, and they don't ham it up, though they play it with many a twist.

Cha-cha-cha, free improvisation, surf guitar—you'll hear it all on this album, with styles and centuries shifting within a single track.

And how about *Thunderball* sung in Italian by an operatic tenor, guest artist Zoltan di Bartolo?

"Everyone in the band is a writer," Kirk says, "and comes in with arrangements that we think work."

This is a true blowing session, recorded live in the studio with, Kirk says, "just a few overdubs and sweetening." You can hear the musicians having fun.

We have musicians such as reedman Philip Greenleaf, well known for collaborating with performers in the 'post-jazz continuum'; guitarist Myles Boisen, who's performed with John Zorn and worked with 'prepared' guitars; classical violinist Catharine Clune, best known for leading a tango ensemble; and jazz saxophonist

Sheldon Brown, whose recent large group compositions include the Beat jazz project *Blood of the Air*.

Orchestra Nostalgico, a part-time aggregation composed of otherwise busy musicians, grew out of San Francisco-based Club Foot Orchestra, which in the 1980s pioneered the concept of music-making during screenings of classic films, such as the



**Linda Lawson: Easy to Love**  
CD. Fresh Sound Records.

If you love old TV shows from the '50s and '60s, you're probably a fan of Linda Lawson, though you may not recall her name. She played guest roles on such classic series as *Peter Gunn*, *77 Sunset Strip*, *Bonanza*, and *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*.

But did you know she could sing?

silent *Nosferatu*.

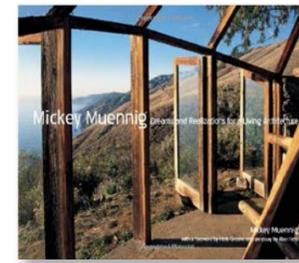
This is their second album. The first, released under the name of the earlier band, *Club Foot Orchestra Plays Nino Rota*, came out 15 years ago.

The members of Orchestra Nostalgico get together for about two concerts every year. One is at the 'Garden of Memory' concert every June 21 at Oakland's Chapel of the Chimes.

This CD reissues her first and only LP, *Introducing Linda Lawson*, recorded in 1960 with a swinging band led by arranger Marty Paich, along with four numbers she'd recorded in 1957 arranged and conducted by Henry Mancini.

It's a delightful record, if a little heavy on warhorses, and suggests she could have had a career behind the mike if TV had been less of a lure. It was as a singer that she began her career, singing at the Sands Hotel in Vegas.

Lawson's voice suggests Ella Fitzgerald's at times, in its richness and a relaxed delivery that can quickly erupt with drama. But she has a lighter sound of her own, with a subtle vibrato. Especially check out her version of the classic 'Where Flamingos Fly.' She's worth rediscovering.



**Mickey Muennig: Dreams and Realizations for a Living Architecture**  
By Mickey Muennig (Herb Greene: forward; Alan Hess: essay). 192 pages. hardcover. Gibbs Smith.

Few architects have ever meshed as completely with a locality as Mickey Muennig has with Big Sur. The homes he has designed for its edge-of-the-world promontories seem to emerge, dreamlike, from the rocks, cliffs, and the waves, fantasy houses for a fantasyland.

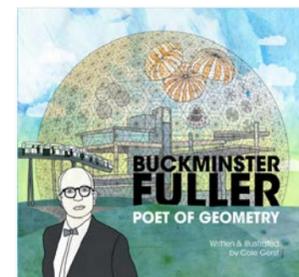
"Big Sur belongs to Muennig as the prairie belonged to Frank Lloyd Wright," Alan Hess writes.

Muennig comes across as an easy-going guy as he tells his own story, taking us from house to house. Invariably he likes and befriends his clients.

There's the early Foulke House, 1963, in Joplin, Missouri, nothing but a sinuous, shingle roof sheltering three window-filled bays.

His Big Sur studio, 1972, has stone walls and a glass cone roof. When he showed plans to building officials, "They looked at me like I was a nut," Muennig writes.

Muennig, a child of Arkansas, first came to Big Sur to attend a session at Esalen. His daring structures, expressive architecture, and attention to solar and environmental concerns have given Big Sur a unique style. "Big Sur felt like home," he writes, "and I stayed."



**Buckminster Fuller: Poet of Geometry**  
Written and illustrated by Cole Gerst. 144 pages. hardcover. Option-G Visual Communication.

Like all great visionaries, Buckminster Fuller was a bit of a huckster, a brilliant engineer and inventor whose creations included himself.

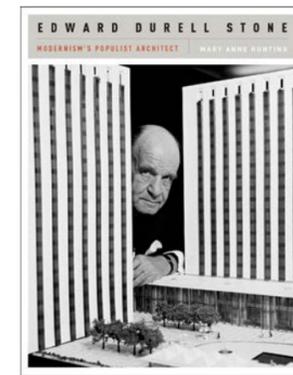
This odd, nicely illustrated book, sort of a 'Buckminster Fuller for Dummies,' never quite catches that quality of Bucky Fuller, nor the endearing utopianism of the man who popularized the term 'Spaceship Earth' and became a darling of the early environmental movement.

Gerst, a Portland, Oregon illustrator and owner of the design firm Option-G, admits he's more of an enthusiast than expert on Fuller. "I mean, he did get an official stamp from the U.S. Postal Service!" he writes in the introduction. The goal of the book is to spread the word about Fuller's ideas, Gerst writes.

Gerst illustrates some of Fuller's more fantastic, utopian schemes, like his floating spherical cities, but rarely quotes Fuller nor delves into his thought, which is sensible and reform-minded.

"For the first time in history," Fuller wrote, "utopia is, at least, physically possible of human attainment."

"Why can't we set about to make this Planet Earth work?"



**Edward Durrell Stone: Modernism's Populist Architect**  
By Mary Anne Hunting. 176 pages. hardcover. W.W. Norton & Co.

For a time, Edward Durrell Stone was, after Frank Lloyd Wright, America's most famous architect, gracing the cover of *Time* magazine, as admired by average folks as by clients who hired him to design buildings "on four continents, in 13 foreign countries, in 32 states."

He was "one of the best liked architects of his generation," Hunting

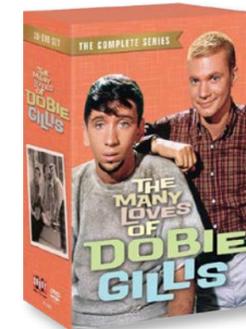
writes. Even Wright liked Stone, calling an embassy building in Delhi one of the most beautiful buildings he had ever seen.

Stone was also one of the inventors of the modern atrium. Atriums, often two-story, can be found in many of his residential and commercial structures.

Why then, did his name become, to many, a synonym for kitsch, Hunting asks.

Blame the "filigree" in which Stone (1902-1978) cloaked so many of his buildings, which include portions of the Stanford Medical Center and Palo Alto's main library. "Schmaltzing it up with decoration," one friend called it.

This is a fascinating, shockingly compact book about architecture, perception of architecture, and social attitudes. Bigger pages, bigger photos, and color would have helped—less austerity, more filigree.



**The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis: The Complete Series**  
Directed by Rod Amateau. 21 DVD set. Shout Factory.

What's the worst thing about growing old? The back aches? The lack of a certain, shall we say, vim and vigor? No! It's coming upon a TV show that was a favorite of your youth and hating it.

No fear of that here. Indeed, these 147 half-hour episodes from 1959-'63 seem a bit too adult, from the opening credits that are jazzy both musically and visually and that focus on a rather suggestive hole in a fence.

The plots mainly focus on Dwayne Hickman, as teen Dobie, chasing women, often Tuesday Weld as gorgeous, money-grubbing Thalia, with beatnik buddy Maynard G. Krebs (Bob Denver) as foil.

A shockingly young Warren Beatty appears as Dobie's successful, wealthy and dandy-ish rival, Milton Armitage.

Dobie squirms while Milton makes time with Thalia by describing his wardrobe. "I always hang my clothes six inches apart," he coos, "so the materials don't rub together."

Thalia, bursting with passion, wonders how many suits he owns? Too many to count, Armitage suggests, but adds, "My closet is 16 inches long."

"Say," he continues, "would you like to come over after school and look at my suits?"

Be glad you're old enough to watch these shows.



**1964 (American Experience)**  
Written and directed by Stephen Ives. DVD. PBS.

At the start of 1964, as we are informed by historian Stephen Cohen, "I think a lot of people would say that we still weren't out of the '50s. America hadn't taken its coat and tie off."

This was the year, we learn, that opened with the treacly 'There, I've Said it Again,' by Bobby Vinton as a top hit, and the look for women included "a modest sky-blue blouse and jaunty straw hat."

This film has the qualities you expect from a PBS documentary. It's well made, filled with talking heads and great film clips, and is both illuminating and slightly stodgy.

It starts with the November 1963 assassination of John F. Kennedy to reveal how the following year saw, in America, "the letting loose of everything," in the words of Jann Wenner. Yep, the '60s had arrived.

But first we are entertained by such oddball confrontations as Muhammad Ali versus the Beatles. Ali, one of the film's heroes, was glad to ham it up in the ring with the lads from Liverpool for a photo shoot, asking afterwards, "So, who were those little sissies?"