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DANGER MAN (D.109)

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Introducing "Danger Man's" Musical Director.....

MUSIC-MAKER TED ASTLEY

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The Mersey sound has gained international fame because of the Beatles and other British pop groups. But another Merseyside musician has an equally deserved claim to attention. His name is Edwin Astley, better known to most people as Ted Astley. He's not the sort of man people would call Edwin. A down-to-earth Lancashire lad, he hails from the Merseyside town of Warrington.

Ted Astley has what must be an unique place in the television world. His name is on the credits of 90% of British-made TV films as composer, arranger and musical conductor.

It is not that Britain doesn't possess other musical directors. It is simply that, early in the days of TV films, Ted Astley acquired the technique of accentuating the action in musical form, underlining each scene in a manner which, though similar to the musical score of a feature movie, needs its own distinctive style. It's a style with a sting.

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Ted admits that the lucky chance of becoming British TV's leading musical director came about because a producer embarking on a series of modest-budget TV films wanted an unknown composer. "Not as a gimmick or anything like that," Ted confesses, "but simply because an unknown would be cheaper than an established name! Of course, I didn't realise this at the time".

So Ted Astley got in on the ground floor of British TV films, and after this initial series of inexpensive productions he was asked to become musical director on the "Adventures of Robin Hood" series.

Since then, he has been the music man on the vast majority of British TV films. They include such series as "The Buccaneers," many of the "Sir Lancelot" episodes, "Ivanhoe", "The Scarlet Pimpernel," the original half-hour "Danger Man" productions, "The Invisible Man," "Whiplash," "Man of the World," many of the "Sentimental Agent" episodes, "Zero One," "Gideon's Way," "The Saint," "The Baron" and now the one-hour "Danger Man" productions.

His feature film credits include the Peter Sellers' picture "The Mouse that Roared" and "Phantom of the Opera." He has also arranged the music for several Son et Luminiere shows.

Yet, except for a spell of violin lessons at the age of nine, which he dropped after a time, he is an entirely self-taught musician, and his only connection with the musical or show business worlds is that he is a descendant of a well-known circus family of years ago, the Philip Astley Circus.

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He is the son of a Lancashire builder. His father was musically inclined and played in an amateur jazz band, but never at any time thought of becoming a professional. Ted didn't think of taking up a musical career, either, and when he left school he went into the cost accounting office of a local firm.

It wasn't the sort of life he wanted. This was why he ran away to join an Army Band.

"I certainly joined the Army at an odd time to start a musical career in it!" he exclaims. "It was in 1939. And war broke out soon afterwards!"

The Army, however, kept him on the musical side as arranger and instrumentalist (he played the violin and clarinet) with the Army Band Show which played to troops all over the European theatre of war and in North Africa. The band was also used strategically to dupe the Germans into believing that troops were relaxing at rest centres while they were, in fact, taking their positions for assaults.

Ted completed his war service and returned to Civvy-st. as an experienced musician and arranger, and worked with bands in the North of England for the next few years. He also became musical director for a stage show, and band leader Geraldo liked his arrangements and engaged him as his arranger - a job which meant that, in addition to arranging for stage shows he was working in television for the first time. At the same time, he was employed as an arranger for a London firm of music publishers and, as such, did a lot of sound radio work.

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Then came television films and big success.

He works at home. His London house, designed especially for him by a Swedish architect, overlooks the capital from the top of a hill. His workshop is a large music room adjoining the house, and Ted built it himself.

He is married, with five children, the eldest now aged 13. The eldest is a girl, the next two are boys, and there are twin daughters to complete the noisily happy household.

Ted attributes his success to a touch of inspiration, a lot of hard work and the ability to work against time. "TV films," he comments, "can't wait for inspiration. The musical score is always needed yesterday!"

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