

# This Day in History... May 10, 1894

## Birth of Dimitri Tiomkin

Dimitri Zinovievich Tiomkin was born on May 10, 1894, in Kremenchuk, Poltava Governorate, Russian Empire (present day Ukraine). Tiomkin was a celebrated composer, producing more than 100 film scores including those for *It's a Wonderful Life*, *High Noon*, and many more.

Tiomkin's mother taught him piano when he was a young boy, hoping he would one day become a professional pianist. He went on to attend the Saint Petersburg



*Tiomkin got his big break working with Capra, and they collaborated for a decade.*



*Tiomkin won two Academy Awards for his score for the Gary Cooper film High Noon.*



*Tiomkin scored four Hitchcock films.*

Conservatory. Tiomkin worked for the Petrograd Military District Political Administration and played piano for Russian silent films. There were few musical opportunities in Russia following the Russian Revolution, so he moved to Berlin where he had his performing debut. Tiomkin spent some time in Paris, where he was invited to go to New York by theatrical producer Morris Gest.

Upon arriving in New York, Tiomkin

provided piano accompaniment for a ballet troupe on the vaudeville circuit. He also performed at Carnegie Hall and toured Europe. Following the 1929 stock market crash, he and his wife moved to Hollywood in search of new opportunities. Tiomkin scored a few minor films and his first major film was *Alice in Wonderland* (1933). He hoped to support himself as a concert pianist, but after breaking his arm in 1937, he was unable to pursue that dream. He decided to dedicate his career to film composing.

In 1937, Tiomkin became a US citizen. That year he also composed the Frank Capra film *Lost Horizon*, which helped bring Tiomkin praise throughout Hollywood. Tiomkin continued to work with Capra for the next decade on such films as *You Can't Take It with You* (1938), *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), *Meet John Doe* (1941), and *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946). Tiomkin worked with Capra during World War II on the seven *Why We Fight* films commissioned by the US government. These films were created for US soldiers to display why the US entered the war and were later released to the public to gain their support.

In 1952, Tiomkin scored Fred Zinnemann's *High Noon*. When the film first premiered to the press, it was widely panned, and the studio considered not releasing it to the public. Tiomkin purchased the rights to its theme song, "Do Not Forsake Me, Oh My Darlin'" ("The Ballad of High Noon") and released it as a single performed by Frankie Lane. The song became an international hit and inspired the studio to release the film, with the song performed by Tex Ritter. The film was a major success, earning seven Academy Award nominations and two wins for Tiomkin for Best Original Music and Best Song. He was the second composer to earn two Oscars for the same film. Tiomkin was the highest paid film composer in Hollywood during the 1950s, composing about one movie per month.

Tiomkin went on to earn two more Oscars for *The High and the Mighty* (1954) and *The Old Man and the Sea* (1958). Tiomkin scored many Westerns, including several John Wayne films – *Rio Bravo* (1959), *The Alamo* (1960), *Circus World* (1964), and *The War Wagon* (1967). He also scored films for other genres including *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1950), *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964), *Great Catherine* (1968), *The Court-Martial of Billy Mitchell* (1955), *The Guns of Navarone* (1961), *Town Without Pity* (1961) and *36 Hours* (1965). Additionally, he scored four Alfred Hitchcock films: *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), *Strangers on a Train* (1951), *I Confess* (1953), and *Dial M for Murder* (1954). Tiomkin also provided the theme songs for the television shows *Rawhide* (1959) and *Gunslinger* (1961).

Tiomkin continued working into the 1970s. He died on November 11, 1979.



*Dimitri Tiomkin stamp From the 1999 Hollywood Composers issue*



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