

= Johnny 's Theme =

" Johnny 's Theme " is an instrumental jazz song played as the opening theme of The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson from the show 's inception in 1962 through its finale in 1992 . The piece was composed by Paul Anka and Johnny Carson , based on a previous composition by Anka . It was performed by The Tonight Show Band , which released an arrangement by Tommy Newsom in 1986 as part of its Grammy Award @-@ winning eponymous debut album . The single release also garnered a Grammy nomination .

" Johnny 's Theme " has since been released in cover versions and on compilation albums . It has appeared in several films , and been played live in concert by school bands and by amateur and professional musicians , including Doc Severinsen 's Big Band .

= = Development and evolution = =

= = = 1959 : Two songs = = =

" Johnny 's Theme " began life as " Toot Sweet " , a pop instrumental composed in 1959 by Paul Anka and recorded by Tutti 's Trumpets . It was released on Disney 's Buena Vista label as the B @-@ side to The Camarata Strings ' single " Lost In a Fog " .

" Tutti " Camarata , who was Annette Funicello 's producer at the time , asked Anka to write some songs for Funicello 's first album to follow her work on The Mickey Mouse Club . Anka added lyrics to " Toot Sweet " and published them under the title " It 's Really Love " , and the song was released as part of Annette Sings Anka . He recorded his own version of " It 's Really Love " that same year for the French film Faibles Femmes ; it was released on seven @-@ inch EPs in France , Italy and Spain .

= = = 1962 : Johnny Carson = = =

When Johnny Carson , a fan of jazz music , was preparing to take over as the permanent host of The Tonight Show starting in October 1962 , he recognized that he would need a theme song . Carson and Anka had worked together in England on the television special An Evening with Paul Anka in 1961 ; when they happened to meet up again in New York City the following year , Carson manager Al Bruno mentioned needing a theme .

Anka created a new instrumental arrangement for " It 's Really Love " and sent a demo to Carson and Ed McMahon , who were in Fort Lauderdale , Florida , making preparations for the show . McMahon said " it was the first time either one of us heard [the song] ? and magic . "

= = = 1962 ? 92 : The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson = = =

Shortly after sending the demo , Anka received a telephone call and was told that Tonight Show bandleader Skitch Henderson was angry because Carson wanted to use a theme song written by " a 20 @-@ year @-@ old kid " . Anka said he then offered to let Carson write and publish new lyrics in order to claim a songwriter 's credit , along with half of the royalties every time the song was played . Those lyrics were never used on the show . Anka estimated that " Johnny 's Theme " was played live on Carson 's Tonight Show more than 1 @, @ 400 @, @ 000 times over the course of 30 years . As its original composer , Anka also was paid each time the song was broadcast , earning each man an average of about US \$ 200 @, @ 000 per year .

The song was retired along with Carson in 1992 ; his iteration of The Tonight Show was called " the last widely public big @-@ band forum " . Incoming bandleader Branford Marsalis composed a more " funky " theme for successor Jay Leno because " a swing tune doesn 't reflect Jay at all [and] jazz doesn 't come to mind either . "

= = Releases = =

Henry Mancini and his orchestra recorded a 2 : 44 arrangement of " Johnny 's Theme " in 1972 for the German EP Theme from Nicholas and Alexandra . A version also appeared as part of Mancini 's 2010 compilation Big Screen , Little Screen . Paul Anka produced a recording by Top Brass for Buddah Records in 1973 . Lawrence Welk and his orchestra performed the song for their 1976 album Nadia 's Theme .

Doc Severinsen and the band recorded " Johnny 's Theme " and 12 other tracks for their album The Tonight Show Band , released in 1986 . Amherst Records also released the track as a single , titled " Johnny 's Theme (The Tonight Show Theme) " , which debuted at # 27 on the Radio & Records Jazz Top 30 chart . The song has been released on compilations of television themes , the 1995 compilation 25 Years of Chrysalis Music , and The Very Best of Doc Severinsen (1998) .

= = Reception = =

" Johnny 's Theme " earned a Grammy Award nomination for Best Pop Instrumental Performance , losing to " Top Gun Anthem " at the awards presentation in 1987 . The Tonight Show Band was honored for Best Jazz Instrumental Performance , Big Band .

= = Legacy = =

In 2005 , Doc Severinsen , Carson 's bandleader starting in 1967 , said the song worked so well because it was " accessible . People could understand what it was , and it was associated with Johnny . " Larry King called it " one of the most familiar themes in American television history . " Paul Anka said the song was played for only a short time each night , " but everybody knows it . Simplicity is indeed royal . "

The Washington Post in 2008 said the days of the television theme song were fading into nostalgia , though they " used to abound " , with or without lyrics . For example , " Anka 's Tonight Show theme was inseparable from late night and Johnny Carson . "

" Johnny 's Theme " has been included in numerous films , including This Is My Life , Isn 't She Great and Talk to Me . The song has been performed live by musicians at varying skill levels , from student to professional . Iowa State Cyclones men 's basketball coach Johnny Orr came onto the court pumping his fist as the pep band played " Johnny 's Theme " before games at the Hilton Coliseum . Orr 's tenure ran from 1980 to 1994 .

Doc Severinsen has kept the song alive on tour . His Big Band opened its shows by playing the theme in its entirety , " just to let you know who we are . " Severinsen and The Roots played " Johnny 's Theme " during a 2015 episode of The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon .