

'Breaking Bad' at 90 for former TSO trumpeter Johnny Cowell of Scarborough
Pop songs 'Walk Hand in Hand' and 'These are the Young Years' used in television hit series
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Johnny Cowell



Music legend Johnny Cowell, right, and his wife Joan both celebrated their birthdays this week. Cowell, a member of the Scarborough Walk of Fame, turned 90. - Photo/BRANDON STEWART

There's nothing like a little Breaking Bad to spice up a 90th birthday, or so 2007 Scarborough Walk of Fame inductee Johnny Cowell has found.

Both Johnny and his wife Joan celebrated their birthdays Monday, Jan. 11.

And leading up to the occasion, Johnny was more than pleased to get a cheque from the producers of Breaking Bad for using one of his songs in Episode 10 of the fifth and final season in 2013.

The song used in the 'Buried' episode was These Are the Young Years and the version was the one that Floyd Cramer turned into an instrumental hit back in the 1960s.

It's by no means the first – and certainly won't be the last – royalty check the Cowells have fished out of the mailbox of their Scarborough home they've now lived in for six decades.

Actually, Joan said they watched the Breaking Bad episode, but found the song remained in the background.

A series currently in production, however, where one of Johnny's songs was much more prominently featured was Call the Midwife.

The series' Christmas Special from 2012 featured Johnny's song Walk Hand in Hand. It actually sparked a lot of viewer interest, so much so that series writer Heidi Thomas posted the following on her Facebook page:

“Many thanks to everyone who has enquired about the music in the Christmas special - particularly Walk Hand In Hand With Me, sung by the late, great Andy Williams. I have always been a huge Andy Williams fan and felt this song perfectly summed up the stories we were telling in our one-off Christmas episode. I chose Walk Hand In Hand as long ago as last April, when I was writing the script, and we filmed it in June – not knowing that Andy would no longer

be with us by Christmas. I had quite a lump in my throat when he passed away, but realised what a nice little tribute it would make. Interestingly, in the same year (1956) this song was a hit for no fewer than three singers – Andy, Tony Martin, and Ronnie Carroll. Perfect for the Christmas special!”

It was also made a hit a decade later by Gerry and the Pacemakers, with Johnny actually striking up a friendship with lead singer Gerry Marsden.

Joan figures it’s the song that has generated the most royalties for Johnny.

His string of pop hits, however, is not even what he’s best known for.

He was a virtuoso trumpet player for the Toronto Symphony Orchestra (TSO) from 1952 to 1991 – nearly four decades. When he retired, the TSO gave him his own tribute concert.

For readers who wish to explore Johnny’s music more in depth, visit bit.ly/200f0vQ where you will find a previous feature with links to his music on YouTube and iTunes.

Norm Nelson

by Norm Nelson

Norm Nelson is the news editor for Metroland Media Toronto. He can be reached at nnelson@insidetoronto.com.