

**C-RED-IT5:** This is C-RED-IT5, Credits and Attributions Droid, with a special announcement. Mission to Zyxx is returning to the Bell House in Brooklyn for a serious finale spectacular April 10th at 2pm. Join us for an all new live episode, special guests, and glorious prizes as we prepare to bid this crazy show farewell. Get tickets at [thebellhouse.ny.com](http://thebellhouse.ny.com) or [missiontozyxx.space](http://missiontozyxx.space).

[intro music]

**ALDEN:** Hey everybody, Alden Ford here.

**SETH:** Hey it's Seth.

**SHANE:** And Shane.

**ALDEN:** Yes, a triumvirate of cool dudes.

**SETH:** Of post production.

**ALDEN:** We are hard at work on sewing up our last moments of season 5 and Mission to Zyxx itself. And so we thought this would be a good opportunity for us to sort of give everyone a little bit of fun BTS content. And one of the unsung heroes of the show is a person who has been with us since the beginning. I wouldn't say like Justin Ballwheat, but he's one of those guys who is an OG member of the crew and he doesn't get enough time on the actual podcast.

**SETH:** Yeah, and he's not just screaming that stuff is gross from his room.

**ALDEN:** Yes, he's also not an angsty teenager. But he and I go way back. We've worked together for many years. He was the first person I thought of when we needed to come up with some music for our show. And that of course is our intrepid composer, Brendan Ryan is here. And we're going to talk a little bit about how the show came together from a musical standpoint and how it continues to evolve and grow and become more and more crazy and ambitious. Hi Brendan!

**BRENDAN:** Hi guys. How are you?

**ALDEN:** Just terrific. Happy to have you here. One of the things we had talked about as sort of a-a inspiration for this particular episode is a terrific podcast that we all really love called Song Exploder.

**SETH:** Such a good show. And if you don't know it, Song Exploder is a podcast hosted by Hrishikesh Hirway. And in it, musicians deconstruct one of their songs and take it apart piece by piece where you'll hear original demos, individual instruments, pulled out the story of the songs. And I often come out of it caring about a musician or song that I didn't at all.

**ALDEN:** Yeah. So we thought it would be fun to sort of do a Song Exploder style kind of breakdown of some of Brendan's music on the show throughout the years, kind of

how it's evolved from the original themes and the original approach that we took. And kind of break apart some of the songs and talk about individual instrumentations and stuff. And I think it's going to be really fun.

**SETH:** And unlike Song Exploder, it's not going to be short or incredibly elegantly produced like they do, where they cut out all of the interview questions, and it just sounds like this musician is in a dark room speaking from their heart. We're just going to leave all of Alden and Shane and me in there.

**ALDEN:** Yeah, just goofing off. But by way of kind of getting into this, I just want to introduce Brendan and sort of talk about his background a little bit. Actually, you know what, if we're going to do sort of the Song Exploder thing, maybe we should have Hrishikesh Hirway introduce Brendan as only Hrishikesh Hirway can do.

**SETH:** Wouldn't that be awesome?

**ALDEN:** Yeah.

**HRISHIKESH:** Brendan Ryan is a composer and musician from Katona, New York. He's a self-taught guitar player and his high school rock band, 10 Feet Deep, played the New York City club circuit through the early 2000s, opening for major pop acts. Brendan went on to study composition and orchestration at Manhattanville College, where he got a BFA in music performance. Later he studied film scoring with veteran composer John Lissauer. In this episode, Brendan breaks down how he made the Mission to Zyxx theme, from its origins through its various iterations, as well as the show's orchestral transitions.

**SETH:** Wow, Hrishikesh, thank you.

**ALDEN:** Thank you. Thank you, Hrishikesh.

**SETH:** For that.

**ALDEN:** Hope that was accurate, Brendan.

**BRENDAN:** Yeah. By the time I was 17, I actually was opening for Justin Timberlake and Avril Lavigne at Hammerstein Ballroom with my band, 10 Feet Deep.

**ALDEN:** What! Whoa!

[music playing in background]

**BRENDAN:** I played lead guitar. We entered into this nationwide contest with Teen People Magazine, where I guess high school bands submitted songs and we were selected as a finalist. Long story, but that was an amazing experience and we basically played the New York City club circuit pretty frequently. In my time with that, I had opened for a bunch of bands like Rusted Root and Gin Blossom.

[Music kicks in]

**SHANE:** So we're doing the Song Exploder on that song, right?

**ALDEN:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. So how did the baseline come together on that?

**BRENDAN:** Right, right... But that ended up coming and going and out of college, I was asked to score a movie. I said, "Yeah, sure, I'll do it. I don't know anything about doing this, but I'll give it a shot." And Alden happened to be one of the main characters in the movie and he played such an asshole in this movie. It was like- I mean, I spent probably four or five months scoring this film and watching Alden do the most dickish and asinine things imaginable. So when Alden approached me after the movie, it was such a shock because here was this guy who I was expecting to be like this character in this film and instead he's like...

**ALDEN:** The character's name was Alden. They changed the name of the character from like Jeff to Alden because they thought it was a funny name. So the character's Alden and I'm like doing all this insane shit.

**SETH:** That's much more of an asshole name. Yeah, yeah!

**ALDEN:** Yeah, yeah, exactly.

**BRENDAN:** So anyway, from there I hit it off with Alden.

**ALDEN:** Yeah. Well, you know, it's funny because when we started doing Mission to Zyxx, the reason I immediately thought of you, Brendan, was not only that you're very talented, but I was like, you're the kind of person who like, you go that extra mile that is what I wanted to do on the show. For me, the thing I'm proudest of about Mission to Zyxx is that all of us really feel the same sort of drive to make the show not only as good as it can be, but like ludicrously ambitious with how we make the show and like have all these insanely lofty goals. And so not only was, you know, when I asked you to do the show, I knew that you were going to go all out on the music and make something that was really a great theme for a great sci-fi property, not just like a funny sci-fi podcast. But also I knew that like, if this ever gets to be something else, if we ever have the money to do more, that there's no ceiling for what you're able to do.

**SHANE:** Brendan was working with the crew before I joined up with you all. And in the process of me, like, at the time, mixing the first episode for fun, or at least what I thought was just going to be for fun.

**ALDEN:** Oh, you fool!

**SETH:** You fool! There will be no fun.

**SHANE:** We got the first versions of Brendan's music and that sort of changed the whole way I personally thought about the show. Like hearing his stuff, I was like, "Oh, so they're actually going for it, trying to make something great." And it made me try to-

**SETH:** Not from the comedy?

**ALDEN:** None of our performances gave you that impression?

**SETH:** What?

**ALDEN:** None of our performances gave you that impression.

**SHANE:** No comment. But yeah, it caused me to change the way I approached it, trying to match his level.

**BRENDAN:** Aw.

**SETH:** Well, I would love to hear about the origin of the original theme. Like just what were the first demos like? I think this was just an exchange between Brendan and Alden.

**BRENDAN:** You know, I didn't know anything about any characters, I don't think. But he just essentially said it's going to be along the lines of Star Wars, Star Trek. So The Next Generation was my main original starting point for me. So the first thing that I came up with was not too far from that. It's very jaunty.

[prototype theme fades in]

**BRENDAN:** It's a shocking departure from what we ended up going with or where it morphed into.

**ALDEN:** Still slaps after all these years.

**SETH:** Good track...

**ALDEN:** Well, you know, it's so funny because if you're listening to this episode and you're caught up with the show, you may recognize that version of the theme because we actually used it in 510, the episode that started from the perspective of the sort of Next Generation-y crew.

**SETH:** Right.

**ALDEN:** So we actually had Brendan kind of retool that original theme and have it be part of the 510 crawl.

[510 snippet with music]

**NARRATOR:** Bring Themm anywhere they'd like to go!

**BRENDAN:** Yeah, so there I actually had the theme sort of basically right. The main, bah dah dah buh dah dah! you know, but when I finally got Jeremy's voiceover for the crawl.

**SETH:** Jeremy Crutchley.

**BRENDAN:** That's right. Hearing his voiceover for me has always been such a like, oh man, it really sort of transports me. I've had many instances where I've had music that I

just basically canned because I wanted to hear Jeremy more. And, um. There was this notion of the Federated Alliance and we wanted to try and give them a musical representation in some way, so we were discussing a march of some kind. I came up with the main percussion as this very monotonous, you know, that typical thing that you hear.

[Federated Alliance march]

**SHANE:** The undercredit music now.

**BRENDAN:** The undercredit music, yeah, exactly. And I was writing it to the narration as I got towards the end of the voiceover where we were going to have a little musical cue to sort of kick off the show. What happened actually, is I was playing around with a French horn cue, um, a French horn sound. It was a very sort of boisterous sound and it was something like, here, let me get something sort of akin to that here.

[French horn cue]

**BRENDAN:** And just with me doing that, that was when I realized that I could do the theme in a bombastic, you know, explosive manner that was not at all like the dexterous flighty version that I had done before. And so that was basically it! Just that one lucky, you know, afternoon landing on a French horn sound that just kind of kicked off that direction.

[Original Zyxx theme plays! A classic!]

**ALDEN:** I love that first theme. And it's so fun and like, so next generation-y. But there is something about the newer one. Like, it just clicks, and it just starts working. And you're like, OK, now it feels like the show.

**SHANE:** Right.

**ALDEN:** Yeah. You said that last was like, that's it. That's the thing. It basically didn't change for two seasons.

**BRENDAN:** Yeah.

**ALDEN:** And we still use that original intro crawl for our credits to this very day.

**BRENDAN:** Yeah. I mean, I'm sure Shane can relate. There are moments when you're writing music where something just clicks, and it just works. And you don't even have to think about it when you're writing it. It just sort of flows out. And that's what happened. And, you know, because of that, I didn't want to mess with it too much. I liked the idea of doing new versions of the theme for each season. But I also didn't want to go too far away from that original concept.

**SETH:** Well, and it's so emotional. I mean, it's like the first time we did live shows where we played it in a room full of people when it just swells. And it just- And I don't

think they were planning to cheer in the dark. But there's sort of spontaneous applause, because I think people-- it's like, emotional to hear that huge swell of orchestral music, even before there was a real orchestra. So...

**BRENDAN:** Yeah.

**ALDEN:** Well, Brendan, can you talk a little bit about the kind of tweaks you try to make from season to season without messing with it too much? One of the things, for example, I think on season two, you kind of took the marchiness out of the theme, because you were like, well, they're not in the Federated Alliance anymore, so there's no reason for there to be that like dun, dun, dun, dun, dun.

**BRENDAN:** Yeah.

**ALDEN:** Because you're like, it's not an imperial march anymore. They're with the good guys now, so it can be the same theme, but we're taking that snare drum out, which I thought was so cool. Are those differences things that you just think musically are more interesting? Or do they always have like a plot or emotional component to them when you make those changes?

**BRENDAN:** There's almost always a plot-related motivation. And it usually, again, comes through the crawl narration that Jeremy Crutchley gives us, y'know, what you've written. Honestly, a lot of the time, I'm improvising over Jeremy's lines, and that's where a lot of it just comes from. I will find a very simple sample that I can use. Usually, it's either a piano, or I'll use like cellos, for instance, frequently, because they have a lot of range. [cello strumming] I can just improvise something if it's supposed to be dark. [cello low pitch] Or something heroic might be more major sounding. [cello high pitch]

**ALDEN:** And do you try to fold that into the main theme portion as well, or is that just tweaking that you sort of do to kind of add something new to it each time?

**BRENDAN:** There is a ton of going back and tweaking.

**ALDEN:** So you're George Lucas-ing the theme every season.

**BRENDAN:** Yeah, basically.

**ALDEN:** Special edition every year.

**BRENDAN:** I feel like I've stopped at this point. But no, I mean, the fun thing-- the music that I love, I love music that's very complex and has a lot of range. And one of the pillars of Western music is essentially the idea of taking a musical motif and then using that motif to build off of itself, so like Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, that duh duh duh duh, just those are two notes and that rhythm. He builds the entire movement just off of that.

[Beethoven's Fifth]

**BRENDAN:** You know, just moving it around and placing it here and there. So my much more humble theme is um, [hums theme]. I've had an immeasurable amount of fun reharmonizing it, putting it through all sorts of different wacky iterations. Many of them don't even see the light of day. I have a version-- oh, I've got to try and find it now. It's like a sexy '80s sax version.

**SETH:** What?

**SHANE:** We've been sitting on that.

**ALDEN:** You haven't told us?

[Sexy 80s Sax Theme]

**ALDEN:** Cool.

**SETH:** What are these feelings I'm having? I don't know. I feel weird now.

**BRENDAN:** I think... I think I was playing-- I was probably like replaying Final Fantasy VII or something.

**ALDEN:** Yeah, that sounds about right.

**BRENDAN:** And--

**SHANE:** We could have had a whole storyline where Beano plays saxophone.

**BRENDAN:** It goes into minor. I'm doing a minor version now.

[Minor Sexy 80s Sax Theme]

**ALDEN:** Very good.

**BRENDAN:** All right, so anyway, it just keeps going, I guess. I don't know.

**SETH:** Amazing. And Shane has gotten to do that too with ringtones.

**SHANE:** Oh, yeah.

**SETH:** The Zyxx theme has appeared so many--

**SHANE:** Yeah, I try to incorporate it into any episode of music I do. Like--

[Zyxx theme ringtone]

**SETH:** Jan's ringtone.

**BRENDAN:** [laughing] Yeah, I know. I love that.

**SHANE:** My surf theme at Teechee's Tiki bar.

[Rockin' surf Zyxx theme]

**SETH:** Yeah, Teechee's lounge.

**SHANE:** Doing the Dick Dale guitar style of the theme. Very fun. And Torto Troopers. Torto Troopers.

**TORTO TROOPER:** [singing] Torto Troopers assemble. Torto Troopers assemble.

**SHANE:** And the worm music too.

**ALDEN:** Yeah. Yeah. Have you heard 518, Brendan?

**BRENDAN:** What, the-- oh my gosh. The most recent. Yeah, it was amazing.

**ALDEN:** Yeah.

[Worm theme]

**SHANE:** I got very lucky that the female singer sample pack that I downloaded, it just happened to have a phrase that was a version of the theme melody in G harmonic minor. I was like, oh, this is great. This is so easy. I just had to edit it a little bit. Had to get it in there.

**BRENDAN:** Oh my gosh, that's amazing. Yeah.

**ALDEN:** I was really convinced that was just you pitched way up.

**SHANE:** I wish.

**SETH:** I really thought it was too. That's funny.

**BRENDAN:** I tried.

**ALDEN:** Had a little bit of a Shane to it.

**SETH:** Yeah, there was a little Shane to it. That's funny.

**ALDEN:** So Brendan, could you give us an example of how you compose to the content of the crawl?

**BRENDAN:** Well, I have my mock-up for 501 right here. Let me just--

**ALDEN:** Oh, that's cool.

**NARRATOR:** [no music] The situation has been grim since Hot Beano's self-sacrificial destruction of the Allwheat flung the crew of the Bargerean Jade through a--

**ALDEN:** I'm only hearing dialogue.

**BRENDAN:** Yeah, I'm doing it just because it's so good. It's almost like it doesn't need anything. But so I came up with this--

**NARRATOR:** [music comes in] The situation has been grim.

**BRENDAN:** And that essentially plays throughout the entire crawl.



**NARRATOR:** -self-sacrificial destruction of the Allwheat flung the crew of the Bargerean Jade--

**BRENDAN:** So this part is very intentional with all the passing around of the melody between all the different woodwinds, just entirely based on what Jeremy is talking about right there.

**NARRATOR:** -after months of floating adrift, desperately transmitting distress signals to no avail, it seemed all hope was lost. And now our storied starship has depleted her fuel reserves and run aground on an uninhabited, Rodd-forsaken island on an alien world, stranding our heroes as castaways. I'd love to say something about their resilience in the face of adversity.... but you and I both know the wheels are really going to come off.

**ALDEN:** I love that Looney Tunes [imitates sad sax] at the end of that phrase. That's exactly the notes that play when Elmer Fudd gets shot in the face.

**BRENDAN:** But the point being is that I definitely have a very romantic ideal of a composer. So I do try to kind of stick to the historic precedence. And so I'll use like leitmotifs and things like that in the music to try and distinguish certain characters. One of the transitions for season three, which is very romantic sounding, became an unofficial "Dar's theme," I think just basically between me and Alden. Probably no one else thought of that.

**ALDEN:** Can you play that from memory?

**BRENDAN:** Duh nuh nuh nuh..

[Dar's theme]

**SETH:** Oh, yeah.

**BRENDAN:** And then it's something like that.

**ALDEN:** I love those Copland castanets that come in.

**BRENDAN:** Yeah, yeah.

**SETH:** Oh, that end's so big. It's great.

**ALDEN:** Well, Dar is very big. So. That kind of reminds me, I wanted to ask if you had any specific influences going into writing this stuff. Do you think about other composers when you write?

**BRENDAN:** I mean, I've heard so much stuff that I don't have control, I feel, over my influences. But I certainly-- there are a few composers that during the Zyxx music I am listening to and studying. And of course, it's John Williams and the Star Wars, which I go back. And it's really a shame, honestly, because if you watch the movie Star Wars,

having listened to the soundtrack all by itself, you then realize how much of the soundtrack gets lost behind like pew, pew, pew, pew, pew, pew, pew.

**ALDEN:** [laughter]

**BRENDAN:** And it's just-- it's really-- like for me, it's just so tragic. But--

**ALDEN:** Yeah.

**SHANE:** Not for me. That's Ben Burt, my... god.

**BRENDAN:** Oh, yeah. I'm sure-- yeah, exactly.

**SHANE:** Doing those pew, pew, pews.

**BRENDAN:** Yeah, yeah.

**SHANE:** Changing the game forever.

**BRENDAN:** Yeah, right.

**ALDEN:** Dr. Pew. as he's also known. Dr. Pew Pew.

**BRENDAN:** And so obviously him. And then I am a huge Igor Stravinsky-ite. And especially during the orchestration periods where we've had a recording session with FAMES, I always have usually the Firebirds, like--

[The Firebird]

**BRENDAN:** Probably my favorite all-time piece of music. The Firebird and Petrushka.

[Petrushka]

**BRENDAN:** Just the interplay between all the-- it's called planing chords. I just love that sort of swirling, atmospheric effect that it creates.

**ALDEN:** Yeah.

**BRENDAN:** This is a huge-- obviously a huge influence on John Williams as well. So I often have his scores open. And I'm looking at how he's arranging the instruments and what combinations of instruments he's using, and all-- the whole nine.

**ALDEN:** That's really cool. Well, speaking of orchestration and instrumentation, do you want to hit some highlights of kinda, what the transition to the orchestra was like, and if you have any stories there?

**BRENDAN:** Yeah, I was at a friend's wedding out in LA. And there, I had met up with a high school friend who, at the time, he was working for NBC or something like that. And when I told him about Mission to Zyxx and I said, it's like, yeah, it's got this-- it's sci-fi and really going very old school, full orchestra with the music. He said, oh, are you using one of those orchestras from, y'know, Eastern Europe? And I was like, no. I

was like, could you elaborate? So that was where we heard about FAMES. And then I just emailed it to Alden, not expecting anything to come out of it, but just out of fun.

**SETH:** I remember Alden texting me saying, Brendan said, if you ever just happen to be interested in recording with an orchestra, there is a place. And I remember texting back, I was like, Alden, I think now that we know that it's possible, we have to do it, right? There's only one option. We don't even have to find out if we can afford it. We just have to do it.

**SHANE:** And it turned out that it's within reach. Y'know, Mission to Zyxx isn't a HUGELY popular show. So that should let you know that every big show you listen to could have an orchestra playing its theme, and they choose not to.

**BRENDAN:** That's right. Well, I'll tell you probably the main reason why they don't is because it is super hard.

**EVERYONE:** [laughter]

**BRENDAN:** It's like-

**ALDEN:** It is.

**BRENDAN:** I mean, it takes an enormous amount of extra work.

**ALDEN:** I mean, I think for a lot of people, me included, at first, I sort of thought, oh, well, just give the MIDI file to the orchestra and let them play the associated instruments, and it'll sound great.

**BRENDAN:** No, I can't just export it from Logic and send it over to them. So this is a super-- for me, it's extremely fascinating. Music is a... universal language. So if you know how to read music, there are articulations. There's dynamics, ways to notate how a piece of music is supposed to sound. And if you're not good at notating that, then you can't expect a professional musician to play it back for you. And that's before you then have to have an understanding of the ranges of the instruments and their physical capabilities. It's easy for me on a keyboard to play a high E on a trumpet, but a trumpet player [laughs] is not going to be able to do that. So there is an enormous amount of work that goes into that. I had the luck of studying with a man named John Lissauer, who is a-- he's a veteran film composer. He's famous because he was the producer of Leonard Cohen's Hallelujah.

**ALDEN:** Whoa!

**BRENDAN:** And he was a ghostwriter for Howard Shore. So he was the one who got me started on this whole thing. And he is a brilliant orchestrator. And so I learned a lot from him. But even without that, I have two different textbooks that I refer to, like a Bible, when I'm orchestrating. Yeah, and then just the nitty gritty, sitting in front of a computer and going through each and every line for each and every part, making sure that all the articulations are there, the slurs, the dynamics, the crescendos, the

decrescendos, the tempo markings, everything. It just-- it's probably, if it takes me 10 hours to write a theme on the computer in Logic, it could easily take an extra 20 hours to make sure it's prepared and orchestrated in a way that will sound good from a real live orchestra.

**ALDEN:** I didn't realize how important that was, especially when you're dealing with 55 people who all have to play the same-- with the same emotion. And also, they're not rehearsing it. These guys are pros. Some stuff we would get, and it would be exactly how you wrote it the first time they would rehearse it. But what's funny is that when we first recorded the first take of the main theme with the orchestra that first day in season three, I remember thinking, what don't they get about this?

[Orchestra ambience]

**ALDEN:** It was very-- the tempo was right. The notes were all right. But it just sounded very lackadaisical.

**CONDUCTOR:** 3, 2, 1.

[Prototype orchestral Zyxx theme]

**ALDEN:** But then I realized, you know, these chords and these notes, they could just as easily be played for a totally different situation, and it would be right. Like, the way they were playing it wasn't wrong. It was just not how--

**BRENDAN:** Yeah.

**ALDEN:** --we had all been hearing it this whole time.

**SHANE:** There's a little scene in that audio recording from the Zoom session where the conductor-- we're talking to him about it. He's like, oh, so less mariachi on the horns?

**BRENDAN:** Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, exactly.

**ALDEN:** Well, and season three especially, their first chair trumpet was a real goof. I was like, this trumpet player is every trumpet player I was ever in a concert or a jazz band with. Just a guy, even in a totally different country at a totally different level in a totally different genre--

**BRENDAN:** The brass section is--

**ALDEN:**--trumpet players are the guys who still keep noodling after the guy says stop. Like, they're still fucking around. That is universal.

[Just a Zyxx theme trumpet]

**ALDEN:** I remember, especially in that first session, there was a lot of repetition of the word "maestoso," which means majestic. But that's the kind of thing that even that is a little bit subjective, right? Depending on what movies you watch, depending on what

orchestras you have played with and what kinds of things you're used to hearing, majestic can mean different things to different people, right? So there's even an extra layer of subjectivity to that that we needed to convey by talking to the conductor and talking to him about what you were envisioning.

**BRENDAN:** And also, too, it's like you learn as you do. And part of the nerve-wracking part of this whole process is, like, we have a couple hours with them max and a lot of music to record. So there's not a lot of time to sort of go through and everything. And basically, what it was, the first version of the theme was just not nearly as huge and bombastic. It wasn't the same sort of conception. It was a lot more lyrical. That was the way they took it. And the reason, the main reason for that is because I didn't score the brass properly, as I had mentioned. That whole theme was born out of this French horn thing, where they're playing chords, basically, down an octave and up an octave. And it's all well and good to do that with samples. But with an orchestra, a French horn is facing the other direction. It's not nearly as loud as it comes through a sample, where you can mix it differently. And so I had scored the four horns in four-part harmony, thinking that that would project over 18 violinists and however many other cellists and everyone else in the orchestra. And you need two French horns to equal one trumpet or one trombone, you know-

**SETH:** Yeah.

**BRENDAN:** -basically one instrument facing the other direction. And you'll see a lot of orchestras-- if you want four-part harmony in French horns, you need eight French horns. And we only had four of them. So we technically had two voices that would have really projected. So I reorchestrated all that when we did it the second and then even the third time. The second and third time are great. The first time out was my first time with an orchestra. But they did also do a great job giving us a more-- just sort of in-your-face version instead of the lyrical one that they had sort of been going towards. Yeah, it's all a learning experience.

**SETH:** Yeah.

**BRENDAN:** So in the middle of season 2, we had a listener by the name of Brian Galleon, who is a tuba player from Louisiana, who asked if there was a brass arrangement of the theme. This was before we went to the orchestra. And I'm a trumpet player. It was like my vehicle instrument in college. So I've written for brass before. And I was like, I don't have an arrangement yet. But I would love to do an arrangement for you. Like, this sounds amazing.

[Brass Zyxx theme fades in]

**BRENDAN:** And so I went way overboard with this brass arrangement. He just basically wanted the main theme. And I wrote, like, a five-movement brass piece for him. Just like all these different sections. And it took me-- I don't know, I probably spent like a good three months or so on it.

[Brass Zyxx theme]

**BRENDAN:** The Chimes Street Brass Quintet from Baton Rouge. That was the birth of all the season three music, was that brass quintet.

**SETH:** So this guy, Brian Galleon, writing in, asking for a, like, a brass arrangement, led to you writing the music that ended up being recorded by the orchestra.

**BRENDAN:** Yeah.

**ALDEN:** Yeah.

**SETH:** Wow.

**BRENDAN:** Yeah. I don't know why-- I honestly don't remember what possessed me, other than perhaps just the excitement about having, at that time, a live ensemble playing my music. And I felt like just the one theme wasn't quite enough in my-- I wanted to capitalize on the scenario.

**SHANE:** Yeah.

**SETH:** I think that's the opposite of capitalizing in a technical term.

**BRENDAN:** [laughing] Yeah.

**SHANE:** Yes.

**ALDEN:** Doing, like, pre-work, yeah.

**BRENDAN:** We work more for this.

[Brass Dar's theme]

**BRENDAN:** So that was season three. But season four was also very interesting, because this is my opportunity to go back to the theme and get that take that I wanted. And at the time, I had started a new job that took a lot of my time up. And I was commuting to New York every day on the train. And I had very little free time. But I had my laptop. And I had Sibelius on my laptop. So I basically, over the course of like a month or so, I reorchestrated the theme. I actually basically wrote the season four generic on the train, going to and from New York. And even the chase scene in 401 I did on the train.

**SETH:** Oh, wow.

**BRENDAN:** And so it was--

**ALDEN:** And when you say that, you mean you would write out the music into Sibelius, but as music, not as--

**BRENDAN:** Yeah, without a keyboard.

**ALDEN:** --playing it on a keyboard.

**BRENDAN:** Exactly, yeah. I remember walking to the platform and mulling over the--  
[hums S4 theme] --like just that ostinato figure that ended up becoming part of the theme.

[Zyxx S4 theme]

**BRENDAN:** So that experience was-- I got very up close and personal with the theme with that. It was like-- I mean, I was daily just working directly in the score sheet that the orchestra was going to be using. So for season four, I was able to do that. I did the 401 crawl, and then I did that chase music, which Shane did an extraordinary job. I mean, Shane does an amazing job of everything he does. But this, like... We had maybe 45 minutes to record the chase music. And the chase music was like--

[Chase music]

**BRENDAN:** It was difficult.

**SHANE:** It's a high difficulty level for any player, yeah.

**BRENDAN:** So--

**SHANE:** A lot of syncopation.

**BRENDAN:** The orchestra basically recorded it in two measure bits.

**CONDUCTOR:** We're ready one more time.

[Orchestra chase scene]

**ALDEN:** FAMES is like, great, we got that measure moving on. They're such pros that they're like, you guys figure it out. We're going to give you the notes. You guys do it. It's not our problem.

**BRENDAN:** Poor Shane had to piece the whole thing together. I mean--

**ALDEN:** I mean, it gets crazy at the end.

[Chase scene music ends, and boy, is it wild]

**SHANE:** That's math rock, baby.

**ALDEN:** It sounds amazing.

**SETH:** Oh, man, I didn't quite realize the amount that went into that. Not to mention the insane sound design on top of it. And that poor little squirrel before the music even kicks in.

**SHANE:** Yeah, I mean, like looking back, I was like, I'm disappointed that I wasn't able to get more of the music in that scene, which is one of the reasons why I brought that chase music back for 419.

[419 chase music]

**BRENDAN:** Yeah.

**SHANE:** I was particularly proud of the drum remix that comes in, that comes in there.

**BRENDAN:** Yeah.

**ALDEN:** One of my favorite things we've ever done is 419. I think it's maybe one of my favorite things--

**SETH:** The story of Beano.

**ALDEN:** --that we've ever done on the show. The Fellowship of the Legume.

[Medieval Zyxx theme]

**ALDEN:** Brendan, you had to rewrite some stuff in the main theme because it wasn't playable on medieval instruments.

**BRENDAN:** Yeah, I mean, we were using recorders from listeners.

**ALDEN:** Yeah, Peneli Miller, who is a listener, had mentioned randomly on the Discord that she played medieval flute and recorder. And we just happened to be in the middle of working on 419. And so we reached out and we said, would you be interested in recording for us? She's like, oh, yeah, my friend plays bass recorder, Cynthia Ann Sutton. So we enlisted both of them to help us.

**BRENDAN:** Yeah. So I had to do a good amount of research into what bass recorders' range was. Yeah, there was a good amount of rejiggering the actual music so that it just works with those instruments. But it, just, it was so much fun. It was like taking the Zyxx theme and turning it into 16th century lutenist music was a real pleasure.

**ALDEN:** One of my favorite pieces that you wrote is totally separate from that. And we used it for the credits. And I just have always loved that song so much. But that was another song that you're just like, well, I just also cranked out this rad lute song. It's so great.

**BRENDAN:** [laughter]

[Lute credits song]

**ALDEN:** We did have to go for samples on this one, the flutes, because it was just so intense.

**SETH:** On the lute? Oh, the flutes.



**ALDEN:** Yeah. But the lute is real. Ophira Zakai.

**BRENDAN:** Yeah, she was fantastic. She totally nailed everything. She sent me just two takes. And they were both perfect.

**ALDEN:** They were both perfect. I mean, truly, I think it's, like, maybe a perfect episode. It folds into the larger story so well. Everybody plays such great characters. I don't know. I'm so proud of that episode. I mean, the sound design is completely off the chain. The opening scene where there's like the arrows zinging across the-- it's so good.

**SETH:** Is the squirrel in it too?

**ALDEN:** Yeah, it is.

**SHANE:** It's his great, great, great, great, grand squirrel.

**EVERYONE:** [laughter]

**ALDEN:** It was 30,000 years before, in the past.

**SETH:** Wow, squirrels have a long life span. It's only six....

**SHANE:** They live a long time!

**ALDEN:** Wow.

**BRENDAN:** So then we're into season five.

**ALDEN:** Yeah.

**BRENDAN:** And for season five, having had two versions with the orchestra, I feel like I had matured enough to not go quite as overboard with my orchestrations as I did in season four. Season four, if I showed you the score sheets, every string section is playing in divisi with one another. Instead of being divided into, y'know, four lines, it's divided into like, I don't know, eight, sometimes like 12. It is a crazy number of voices that does not really translate to the listener at all. And that was something I actually learned from Stravinsky's scores. Like, there are things in his scores that no one hears because there's so much else going on. Fifth and final season, I finally really go and study John Williams' score. The score sheets. And obviously, he's a virtuoso and everything like that. But what I really appreciate about him is just the economy of his work. Like, he can translate something into music in such an economic way without having to resort to putting the string section into 12 different voices and all these different doublings and things like that. And so for the fifth and final season, I feel like I finally felt fully-- with the main blackout theme, I felt so pleased and just like, this is it. This is it. I got the heavy, big brass going on. And then my fast string run at the end, the diggity, doo doo doo doo doo, like, comes through. It's like-- it was very

cathartic. Yes, every season I have provided a new theme. And that's obviously to the benefit of the show. But it's also so that I could fix my work.

**EVERYONE:** [laughter]

**BRENDAN:** And it's been a really wonderful experience. Hopefully, it's interesting for listeners to also experience how the show has grown, how the composer has grown.

**ALDEN:** Yeah, Brendan, this was super, super illuminating. And so glad that you were able to come tell us about how some of this stuff came together. Honestly, I think music is such a backbone of this show. And it's so good. So thanks for coming on the show.

**SETH:** Thank you so much for the music.

**ALDEN:** Yeah.

**BRENDAN:** Thank you.

**SHANE:** Is there one piece that you think we should-- like, if you had to choose which piece to play in its entirety at the end of this episode?

**BRENDAN:** Oh, boy.

**SHANE:** Which one would it be?

**BRENDAN:** Well, oh, gosh. That's hard to-- the 502 crawl has always been my favorite.

**SHANE:** I love that one, yeah.

**BRENDAN:** Yeah.

**SHANE:** Yeah, that one's so good.

**ALDEN:** Yeah, that is a really good one.

**HRISHIKESH:** And now, here's Mission to Zyxx, episode 502 crawl, by Brendan Ryan in its entirety.

[MTZ 502 crawl music plays]

**HRISHIKESH:** To learn more, visit [BrendanButlerRyan.com](http://BrendanButlerRyan.com).

[end]

**JAY:** Most game shows quiz contestants about topics they don't even care about.

**HELEN:** But for 100 episodes, the Go Fact Yourself podcast has asked celebrity guests trivia about topics they choose for themselves.

**JAY:** And introduced them to some of their personal heroes along the way.

**GUEST:** Oh, my gosh.

**GUEST:** Shut up.

**GUEST:** I feel like I'm going to cry.

**GUEST:** Oh, my stars. It's so, so exciting to meet you.

**JAY:** Join me, Jay Keith Van Straten.

**HELEN:** And me, Helen Hong, along with special guests DJ Jazzy Jeff and Faith Saley, plus some amazing surprise experts on the 100th episode of Go Fact Yourself.

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**JAMES:** Hi, Maximum Fun. It's me, James Arthur M. from Minority Korner. OK, I got some good news, and I got some bad news. Bad news, Minority Korner, after seven years and 340 episodes, we are wrapping up our show. I know, I know, but hey, good news, good news is that means we must have solved racism and homophobia and sexism and equality and equity for all. Yay! No, no, we didn't. Well, I'd like to think at least that we are better off than when we started seven years ago. Some. Don't worry. We might be saying goodbye, but our episodes will live on in the podcast airwaves. FOREVER. Or until the internet crashes and burn, whatever comes first. Minority Korner, the final episodes right here on Maximum Fun or wherever you get your podcasts. Minority Korner, because together we're the majority.

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**ALDEN:** I played trumpet for 13 years in high school and college. And I know how to read music and know how to read notation and stuff, but--

**SETH:** You went to high school and college for 13 years?

**ALDEN:** What?

**SETH:** You went to high school and college for 13 years?

**ALDEN:** Well, I went to college for four years, and I went to high school for seven years. I mean, I went to a middle school and high school. It was a combined-- never mind. Fuck you guys. I grew up in Alaska. They have different names for stu-

**SETH:** Oh, that's all you had to say. That's all you had to say.