

It started with a 79-cent steam engine when David Rose was 7 years old and turned into a lifetime hobby into which the composer has poured thousands of dollars.

"Now I have a collection of miniature locomotives and passenger trains of different scales," said Rose. "I've had them shipped from all over the world."

Rose became a serious collector of large miniatures in the early 1950s. He admitted that he tore out the tennis court in his spacious Sherman Oaks home to accommodate his hobby.

A railway track circles the grounds of his estate and two small separate buildings adjacent to the house are used to store his locomotives and passenger cars. One building is filled with miniatures used only for display and the other contains larger 1-inch and 1-1/2-inch-scale miniatures that run on the track around his house and are large enough to carry adults.

"When my hands get good and dirty, I say, 'It must be 5 o'clock,' " said Rose. "Sometimes I put water in the boiler and coal in the firebox.

"Many of the children in the neighborhood know about the trains," he said. "When they hear the whistle, some of them usually come over for a ride."

But they never know in which one of Rose's 23 cars they'll travel and they never know which of his eight locomotives will pull them. It could be a green-colored Great Western engine that weighs 250 pounds or a Burgundy-colored Royal Scot that weighs 700 pounds.

"Before I got married, I told my future wife that I came as a set - me and the trains," said Rose. "I've been married to Betty for 39 years."

But trains are still only a hobby. Rose is best known as an Emmy Award-winning composer for the musical scores of television series including "Bonanza" and "Little House on the Prairie." He currently composes the music for "Highway To Heaven," starring actor Michael Landon.

When an episode of the series is completed, he is provided with a videotape and a list of places where background music is required. Timing each musical passage with a large clock in the music room of his house, he is given three days to score each episode.

"I've always worked out of my home," he said. "That way I can even come down in my pajamas."

But once a week, Rose has to drive to Lorimar Telepictures in Culver City to record the music he has composed. "Working with the same people for years under good conditions makes it easy to live with hard work," he said.

Born in London, and raised in Chicago, Rose moved to Sherman Oaks in the 1940s to compose for motion pictures.

"I started taking piano lessons when I was 7 years old and started composing when I was 19," he said. "I hated to practice piano. I was more interested in composing. That came easy to me."

Upon arriving in the Los Angeles area, Rose and his orchestra performed at the famous Coconut Grove in the Ambassador Hotel and then for many years on The Red Skelton Show. He has conducted and arranged music for many well-known entertainers, including Bob Hope, Jack Benny, Dean Martin and Fred Astaire.