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INTERVIEW WITH DARIUS HOLBERT

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July 15th, 2010 Kristin Houser Category: Interview 1 Comment

While I could happily live out the rest of my days without ever hearing another laugh track, I don't think I could ever enjoy a movie or TV show that was missing its score. Great music can do just as much for a movie as a stellar cast, and some of the best movies in cinema are intrinsically linked to the songs playing behind them. Would *Chariots of Fire* have felt as epic without Vangelis' iconic theme song and score compelling the racers? Would *Jaws* have come across as menacingly without those two notes by John Williams driving the shark through the water? I say nay.

Luckily for the future of film and television, talented young musicians such as Darius Holbert are happy to give up the stage for the composition room. A classically trained multi-instrumentalist from the Lonestar State, Holbert has created music for numerous international features, award-winning shorts, and hit TV shows such as *Lost* and *Grey's Anatomy* in addition to lending his talents to producing, touring, and writing for artists such as The Wu-Tang Clan, Everlast, and Sophie B. Hawkins. Now based in LA, Holbert spends what time he can between projects working on his solo effort, Dariusx, creating the music he'd like to hear when flipping through the radio dials.



LA Music Blog recently caught up with Holbert to talk about how he got his start in the industry, his varied musical influences, and his recent *SpongeBob* connection.

What initially drew you to music?

I started taking piano lessons when I was three, so obviously I didn't have a whole hell of a lot of say in the matter. [LAUGHS] Both my parents are musicians in Texas, so they kind of fomented my early childhood learning. Then I figured out pretty quickly that the best way to attract girls



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was to play piano, so I stuck with it, and here I am.

Do you remember the first album that was either bought for you or that you bought?

I remember the first tape. I think I was in Phoenix, and my grandmother bought me *Shout at the Devil*, the Mötley Crüe seminal work. She wasn't completely pleased with the title, but she knew it was what I wanted, so I got it. I wore it out. I think I wore it out to the point where it would stop playing, so I had to buy another one.

Most of your work is done for film and television. What attracted you to this world of writing for film and television?

I started music at Royal Academy of Music in London and then the University of North Texas, where I graduated from. My primary emphasis was in composition, and then I got commissioned to write a bunch of stuff, like operas and things like that, but I was also at the same time playing with a bunch of rock bands and touring. I knew that I needed to move either to New York or to LA to actually make a living. You can't quite do it to the level that I wanted to do it in Texas. So I moved to LA and started playing, doing a lot of session work, doing some touring—actually a lot of touring—and stuff like that.

As I got a little older and a little more savvy, I realized that my real passion lies in the composition world, sort of a return to where I come from originally as far as being a composition major so it was a natural fit. I wanted to stick around in town more and quit all my touring acts, and then I just focused strictly on film and television scoring, industrials, commercials, and all that other stuff too. I got really fortunate straight off the bat as soon as I set up my little rig, and now I've got a great studio. It's sort of like coming home in many respects, to move from that session player world into the scoring world.



Is there any one thing that you've worked on that is your prize work as far as film and TV goes?

Let's see. I've worked on a lot of really cool things. I've been fortunate enough to be a part of some cool projects. Last year I worked on the Bobcat Goldthwait film, *World's Greatest Dad*. Just a little cue for that, but it was really an interesting time and made for a great story.

Bobcat Goldthwait from the *Police Academy* movies directed it. He's a fantastic dark comic writer and director these days. He wanted a 1920s crooner style song about smoking weed. He had a vision for this scene where Robin Williams was smoking some weed in the film, and he wanted to come up with a brand new thing that sounded like it was 1920s.

He's friends with Tom Kenny, who does the voice of SpongeBob. We hired some session players, and the session was essentially being directed by Bobcat Goldthwait while Tom Kenny sang this croonerish style song about smoking weed, meant to sound like it's from the '20s. It was a completely surreal moment in my career, but, you know, one that I'll definitely tell the grandkids.

[LAUGHS]



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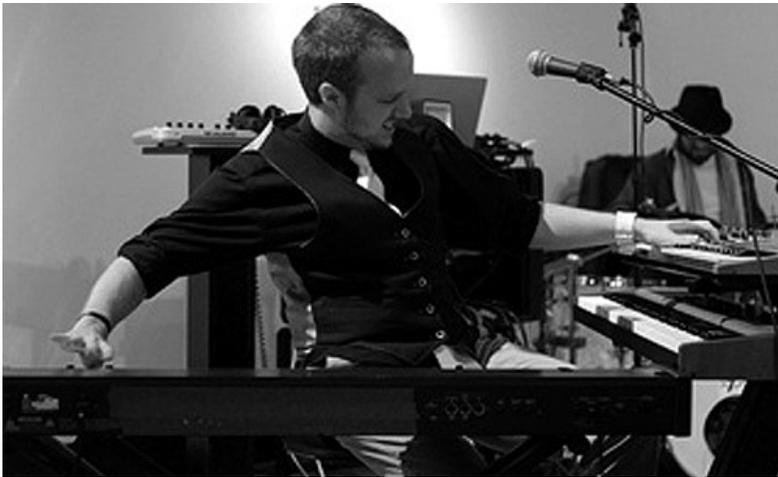
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What would you consider to be your dream gig?

I do it, I think. I think I'm a part of it. I figured out a while ago that I really wanted to focus mainly on independent features just because of the amount of creative control that you get. It lends itself more to being more experimental, and there's a lot of creative freedom involved, rather than doing studio pictures, so I do as many indie films as I can. I can't imagine doing anything else, really. I can't imagine wanting to do anything else. Even if it's an incredibly low budget, I'm fortunate enough to be able to make money in so many different arenas that I'm not really that concerned with whether or not I'm getting the \$50,000 creative fee or anything like that. I honestly feel like I'm totally fortunate that I can do what my passion is every single day.

Who are some of your influences in composition?

Just strictly in composition I would say going all the way back to J.S. Bach and Brahms. I lean heavily on some of the 20th century American composers, like Aaron Copland. As far as up into film composers, Thomas Newman is a big influence and even Randy Newman. Some of the more Americana style, that's more my wheelhouse really. The sweeping, kind of epic but minimalist instrumentation, that's really where my strengths are. I have to do a gang of different things all the time, as far as stylistically, but if I were to cite the people that I listen to most closely, then it's folks like that.

**You've been a touring musician with Sophie B. Hawkins and several other musicians, and you're getting ready to go out with Everlast now. Do you prefer to be out on tour or is the studio your environment now?**

I definitely prefer being in my studio. Like I said, it's kind of hard these days to go out anymore just because I'm an old ass man, number one. [LAUGHS] I got married, and I'm trying to stick around more. I quit pretty much all of my touring acts within the past couple of years, except for this Everlast gig, just because it's a really fun gig, just to play in the band and to hear the music. Overall, I'm busy enough to keep me in my studio pretty much 365 days a year, just with the various projects that I do. I'd really much rather not be on the road, but I'll make an exception for this one project. Other than that, I'd much rather just be focused on scoring films.

You do have your Dariustx project. Could you tell us a bit more about that?

Yeah. That started off when I was living in Texas, I was living in vans, and I was playing in this band called Dr. Teeth. We had some regional successes, and we toured a lot based out of North Texas. I got sick of pandering to club audiences, I guess. I don't know if it's pandering, but, you know, writing stuff based on what's gonna get people up and moving that ass around. [LAUGHS] After I kind of pulled the plug on that thing, I was like, "You know, I really just want to do stuff with me," and so it's been kind of a constant through line.

My first album didn't sell very many units, but I do have this cadre of really fiercely loyal fans that have been sticking with me since 2001 when the first record came out. I've had four solo albums, and it's just something that I do as I'm working on other things. I don't do it to make any money. I don't do it to really do any touring or even try to get signed to a major label deal or anything like

that. It's never been about that. It's been more like, if I'm working on a song, or if I'm working on something that doesn't lead to other facets of what I like to do creatively, then it's another outlet. Essentially that's a long and kind of highfalutin way of saying when I'm fucking around, that's what I do. I work on these albums.

I just had another one come out. I'll put it out mainly digitally, and I do really random sales, like for some reason this last record sold really well in Hong Kong and Tokyo. I don't do any promotion with it. It just kind of gets out. I'm not making millions of dollars here, but it's a fun thing for me to do, another way to express myself and have a good time.



On the other side of music in general and with your solo project, who are some of your influences there?

I draw a lot from the 20th century jazz pianists, especially the more southern ones. I get a lot of stuff from Allen Toussaint and some of the more New Orleans or Louisiana style artists. I grew up with a lot of various types of music. Aaron Copland influences me no matter what, but then I also I listened to a gang of classic rock growing up. Definitely Led Zeppelin, and then Jeff Buckley is a big influence. Art Tatum and Professor Longhair are big influences too. George Jones, I'm a big fan of. I like pretty much all kinds of music. I used to say that I hated mid-90s slow jams. That was the only thing that I hated, but I actually even kind of like those now. [LAUGHS]

Do you have a different writing process for your compositions as opposed to your solo project or is the way you write music fairly similar?

It's different, mainly because whenever I'm composing, it's to picture. It's more of a collaboration, too, with either producers or directors or editors or whoever I happen to be working with. When I'm scoring stuff, it's always the picture, so that kind of dictates pace. The vision of the director also will play a heavy role in how I approach scoring of the scene. With Dariustx, I start from nothing. I just want to make it much more like pop writing at that point, when you're writing just a self-contained three to four minute song that exists on its own.

What else do you have happening in 2010?

It's been really good so far. I'm attached for three features. They're all shooting either this summer or the fall, so that'll keep me busy. I'm out in Europe and Asia for the next six weeks, which I guess it'd beat digging ditches. Although I've never really dug a ditch, so I'm not sure if I

can. I've dug post holes before though, and I know that those are not fun. [LAUGHS] So I've got that, and then as soon as I get back, hopefully we'll be in pre-production on these three different films. I've got a big music library that was just commissioned, so I'll be working on that some. There's always tons of stuff that comes my way. I keep being really lucky, and so far, so good.



For more info on Darius Holbert or Dariustx, check out:

<http://dariusholbert.com/>

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