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Limerence Magazine



OBSESSIONS

MEET AWARD-WINNING MUSIC, TV & FILM COMPOSER DARIUS HOLBERT

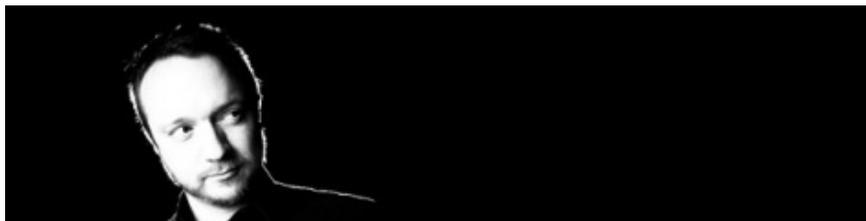
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Darius Holbert, successful LA composer has collaborated with big names like Wu- Tang Clan and Britney Spears, but found joy in the past few years working more independently scoring films and TV shows. He has composed for shows like *Grey's Anatomy* and the forthcoming *Quickdraw*. In our conversation, Darius tells us about his composition process, openly discusses the challenges of scoring and collaboration, and encourages up-and-comers to get out and listen.

There's a quote from the film *August Rush* that I love: "Music is all around us; all you have to do is listen." Are there certain places where you especially "find" or "hear" inspiration for music?

Darius: That's a great quote. I agree, music is everywhere, and I think depending on how you sneak up on it, that's how you find inspiration when you need it. Right now I've got all the French doors open in my studio and I'm looking at 78 degrees and sunny...and it's perfect. Absolutely it's super easy to find inspiration in a place like this.

You studied music at the University of North Texas and London's Royal Academy of Music. What is something you've learned about music through real world experience that you couldn't learn in a classroom?

Darius: I think the biggest thing is how to listen. I grew up playing music pretty much all my life. I went to high school and did the composition and piano performance track at Royal Academy and North Texas where I finished up. And also to understand that when you get together and you play with new people they're going to teach you other things by watching and feeling. That's something you definitely can't learn unless you're thrown into the mix of playing in a band, playing with a bunch of different people, and learning that way.

You've composed music individually and in collaborations with other artists. What's the biggest difference between working individually and working with others?

Darius: For the longest time, I didn't work very well with others. It was definitely something I had to learn. I think it took me a long time to get that because I'm kind of a control freak, and I've had to work on that not only to be a better musician and better collaborator, but to be a good husband to my wife. The problem I think I always had was that I thought that I knew better. But you have to learn to listen first and realize you don't have absolutely all the best ideas. Once you sit down in a collaborative effort

and shut your mouth for a while and understand that there are great things, even better things that other people can bring to the project.

Why do you think you knew better?

Darius: Because I was kind of an asshole. I started playing piano and writing music when I was really young and I did it for a really long time; and I was good at it. People kept telling me how good I was for so long, and if you only hear great things about your playing and writing, you'll think, "Wow, I'm the best there ever was at this." And you think other people believe it. You start working with people that are light years ahead of you, people that are much more talented and gifted, because it pushes you to make your own stuff better. In the long run, I realized I wasn't the best and that's what growing up is about.

You write, arrange, perform, produce...you basically do everything there is to do in music. Of those elements in creating music, is there one you enjoy more?

Darius: 99 out of 100 times I prefer to score for film. When I first moved to LA, I was playing in a band and doing a ton of professional work and artist development; I was producing records; I worked with a bunch of different artists from Wu- Tang Clan to Britney Spears, a bunch of struggling bands, up and coming singers. I really ran the gamut. About three or four years ago, I finally stopped doing production and touring. Now pretty much all I want to do is compose. It's coming full circle because that's what I grew up doing and what my degree is in.

Could you explain your process for composing scores for film and TV shows?

Darius: It depends on the project, production company, and creative team; it depends on where I get involved in the creative process. The interesting thing about scoring is that it's really a strict collaboration, because it's not my original idea; somebody writes a script, makes a movie, and then they come to me. Sometimes I get involved at the script stage: nothing's written, it hasn't been cast, production hasn't started. But usually I'll start after it's locked, where everything is shot and edited. Everything is done except for audio, color correction, and things like that. I'll get together with the production team, we'll talk through ideas, and we'll spot the film, which means we all sit in a studio and watch it and talk about where the music should come in and out. That's the core of the work.

Is there anything about creating music that you don't enjoy?

Darius: As far as scoring, I imagine the biggest issue is that you have to be able to do a wide genre of stylistic work, and be quick about it. The hardest thing is to maintain that quality that is your own, to put your own stamp on the piece, that you're not just reproducing what they think is best for the film; to make sure that you sound like you.

You say a challenge is keeping the “you” in music. How do you keep your mark on the final composition?

Darius: In commercial work, there’s not much of your own sound that you can put into it because it’s such a quick blip on the radar. In TV, the turnaround is really fast so it’s difficult to extricate your soul and bring all the stuff that’s inside you out and have it work for the picture. Film is the best because you can sit for a long time. Typically I ask for at least six weeks to work with a feature film from start to finish. I take all the influences from the director and producer, and make it my own.

What sort of challenges do you most frequently face in the music/entertainment business? And how do you overcome those challenges?

Darius: Many of the people that I’m collaborating with or that are involved in the creative process are not creative people. A lot of directors and producers have a background in creating content; they’re artists themselves. But one of the reasons I don’t do a lot of network or broadcast television or big studio pictures is that you’re beholden to a ton of people at that point. I did a show last year for a network that will remain nameless. The director and production company was great, but once you start getting into the network, there were six to ten people that had something to say about the work that I had done. And a lot of these people were business people. It was like they were justifying their salary or position by saying, “We have to change this music.” It’s tough to deal with that and say, “No it’s good, everybody else likes it.” That’s one of the biggest challenges I’ve had to face as far as the industry is concerned. There are people that are not necessarily creative that have the final say of what’s being done creatively. It’s a little backwards. Eventually you just have to realize that it’s part of the process, bite your tongue, and write something else.

To wrap it up, what advice do you have for people like you?

Darius: You need to get out. Listen to a ton of music and play a ton of music as soon as you can. Composition especially is a solitary pursuit, but it relies heavily on your own experience and journey –this sounds like a hippie thing –but it’s your own journey toward who you are as far as your music career is concerned. All the music that strikes you along the way, and stuff that you pick up from other people’s writing influences your own music. Get out and do as much as you possibly can.

For more information on Darius Holbert:

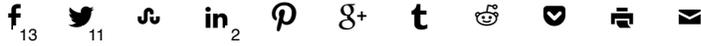
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