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Q&A: Darius Holbert Tells Us How To Get Into The Movies (Kinda)

By Melissa Crowe in [Q&A](#)

Friday, Jul. 17 2009 @ 2:36PM

Who needs a corner, window office? Former Dallas resident and musician Darius Holbert proves you don't need a 9-to-5 to keep up with the mortgage. Just a little creativity is all.



Darius Holbert

That's how Holbert says two of his tracks ended up in the upcoming films *World's Greatest Dad* (starring Robin Williams) and *The Shrink* (starring Kevin Spacey). We recently caught up with Holbert to talk about these upcoming placements--and a few other things, too.

How's life in LA?

It's great. It's fantastic. I was convinced I was going to hate it when I first moved out here. You know how it is. I was trying to live the life of a musician in North Texas, doing a lot of session and studio work. After a while, there are only so many social dates you can do at Avanti's, doing straight up jazz for no money.

How did you figure out how make a living?

Mainly film scores these days. When I first moved to town, I was playing in 14 bands or something, trying to hustle and make rent. Slowly but surely I've been kind of more focused on film scoring. One of the main reasons is I'm getting kind of old. I'm an old-ass man. I'll be 35 this year. The rock 'n' roll lifestyle has taken a toll. Plus, I got married, and I'm not touring as much as I used to--only if it's cool music or a cool place. I just went to Iraq last week with that guy [Everlast](#).

Whoa, Iraq. Really?

Yeah, Kuwait and Iraq last week, doing a USO tour. It was outstanding--freakishly hot, but you know, I had a genetic leg up being born in Dallas. We played to the troops on four or five different bases and flew in Black Hawk

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PERSONAL OF THE DAY



helicopters. I was disappointed they didn't give us any guns but it was probably for the best... We played a show on one base where the tank division parked their tanks all around the stage. I essentially had an M1 tank pointed at me the whole time while I was playing.

Military Tanks? That's not intimidating..

It was definitely a pretty tactile critical device. Better play well, or uh.... Or else!

And now you've come from 14 bands to movie scores?

Yeah, I still do some session work and studio work.

How did you get involved with film?

I played in bands in Dallas since I was 16, then I fronted a rock band out of Denton called Dr. Teeth for five or six years. When I moved to L.A., it was a natural progression of playing in more bands. I worked with the Wu-Tang Clan and toured with Sophie B. Hawkins and some session work with Bobby Brown. I just decided I wanted to focus on getting back to my composition roots. Started talking to people and put myself out there. I got in with some of the right folks, I guess. It's turned into a pretty good career shift.

Are the directors calling you up saying, "Hey, I'm making a movie...?"

I'm not getting calls from Spielberg yet, but I have been working on a couple of cool things. I had a tune in Bobcat Goldthwait's (*Police Academy*) new movie that's coming out in August called *World's Greatest Dad*, starring Robin Williams. It was a really funny session. I got called in to do it through a friend of mine, Jerry Brunskill, who did the score. I came in and Bobcat Goldthwait wanted a song that sounded like a 1920's crooner-style about smoking weed. The guy who came in to do the vocals was Tom Kinny who does the voice of SpongeBob. So it was a totally surreal session being directed by Bobcat Goldthwait, the comedian from *Police Academy*, and then having SpongeBob singing about smoking weed. I also have a couple of tunes in the new Kevin Spacey movie that's out in August and a couple of shorts I scored are on the festival circuit.

What are you looking forward to next?

I'm in negotiations right now for this feature--nothing particularly interesting about famous people or famous directors--by these young guys. They're talking about festival stuff too. I haven't signed papers yet, so I'm not totally sure if I'm going to do it. Indie features typically don't pay a whole hell of a lot. But with all the stuff that I do, it affords me the time to devote to up-and-coming production companies and young directors, which is where my real passion lies: Working with really excited people who aren't jaded by Hollywood yet and have really cool independent things. It affords us the most creative control. You can go out on a limb and not have to answer to a lot of studio heads.

How do you stay fresh?

Stay focused on the creative pursuit. It may not always pay your mortgage but it affords you the chance to participate in really cool, interesting things. I think there's always the danger of being jaded by Hollywood and by LA, but it's a game of attrition: Who can last the longest without cracking up?

Anyone you want to work with?

I just got hooked up with a short film, *Treevenge*, that won honorable mention in the short film category at Sundance. It was with these young dudes, about 22 to 25 out of Nova Scotia or Halifax, who have made movies together since they were 10 or 11. They're so full of energy and have such great ideas. It's people like that that I'm most excited to work with. They're not bound by these certain constrictions:

Atomic Frolic Burlesque Revue at the Lakewood Theater



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If I could be anywhere at the moment: "The Cliffs at Muir Beach, La Rambla in Barcelona."

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The rules and regulations of working beneath the confines of the studio or a private investor; they have unlimited creative control.

Sounds like you've got it figured out.

I don't know about that, but it's great right now. I haven't worked a real job since I was bartending at Dan's Bar--Dan Mojica's *original* bar--in '97. I keep pinching myself that I haven't had to get any real gigs. I have a solo career too and a new record coming out in August called *Dariustx*. I typically put out a solo album about once every year or two and I do some touring. We're trying to get to Asia this year because I've been selling records in Hong Kong and Tokyo for some reason. So imagine we'll release the album in August and will be back with my trio in the fall. We always hit Dan's Silverleaf at least once.

What lessons have stuck with you?

People in music school have a tendency to get really excited about the fact that they're in music school. I was totally sucked in. I was a big fan of 12-tone serialism, the really avant-garde, classical composition. When I came in one of my first seminars with Dr. Martin Mailman at UNT, he asked me to compose a flute piece and I said I'm really into this 12-tone, this is what I'm thinking about, this is what I'm working on. He said, "Darius, you need to make it sound good. Don't worry about all that stuff; you need to make it sound good." You can make it as interesting to yourself as much as possible, but first and foremost you have to remember your audience. I had a great teacher at Arts Magnet, Celia Bennett. She used to define music as organized sound and silence. A lot of time you want to go overboard and score wall-to-wall music but a lot of the subtly of film is in the silence.

What are you listening to lately? Still into 12-tone serialism?

No. It's funny when you get out of music school and all of a sudden it sounds like shit. These days all I'm really listening to is 1970s super-country hits: George Jones and Tammy Wynette. I'm crazy for '70s country right now. If I'm not listening to that, it's '60s and '70s kind of muzak stuff: One Hundred and One Strings. I don't know why I'm going through this weird phase but that's all I want to hear.

How about your opera?

Oh, I wrote an opera! My dad did the libretto. He's a professor at Perkins School of Theology at SMU. It's based on the book of Job in the Bible. The libretto is from his translation and reading of the Book of Job. Finally we put together a recording of it in L.A. with some of the L.A. opera singers.

So you're writing classical operas, making music with Wu-Tang, writing film scores. Is there anything you won't do?

If it's cool, no, I'm down for anything. I have a piece of music they're playing at Bristol Motor Speedway and I'm in negotiations to have another played every time the Green Bay Packers defense takes the field at Lambeau. I never would have dreamed that I'd do stuff like that. It's been a wild ride so far, I'm just hoping that I can keep it up.

Ever wonder where else you could be?

I really have no idea. I don't think there's one job for everybody, no romantic finding-the-right-position or whatever. I found something that suits me that I'm incredibly passionate about and I think I'm pretty good at. It's the only marketable skill I have. It's not that there's nothing I'd rather do, it's that there's nothing else I can do.



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Bartending?

Oh yes, I can sling a mean drink. One of these days I may be calling up Dan Mojica and begging him for my old job back. I have a lot of creative pursuits. I've written a few screen plays and I'm halfway through a novel I'm writing. If I didn't do something creative, I really have no idea of what I'd do. Well, that's not true. I want to be a professional baseball player but I think I may be a little old. I'm not totally sure, but I think 34 may be a little old to get a tryout for the Rangers...

You never know...

The problem is I have very little talent when it comes to baseball. So, I'm 34 and I have almost zero talent. I think Nolan Ryan will probably pass on me.

Here's what you need to do: Write the Ranger's theme song and guilt them into letting you play.

Exactly! No, no, John Daniels. I don't want any money from you. All I want is to be your starting shortstop.

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- Robert Anderson says:

Right on Darius!

Posted On: **Friday, Jul. 17 2009 @ 2:46PM**

- Liles says:

Darius is badass. Great guy.

Posted On: **Friday, Jul. 17 2009 @ 3:19PM**

- Aimee says:

Sweet! You rock, Darius.

Posted On: **Monday, Jul. 20 2009 @ 2:53PM**

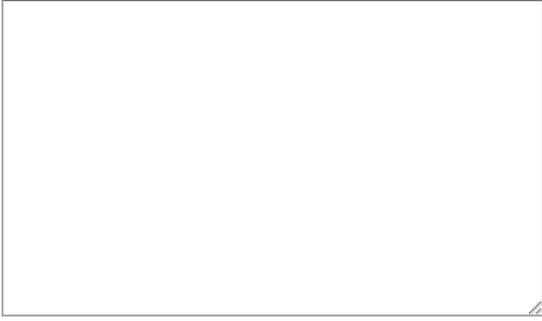
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