

Spot-On Music for TV

Rob Page Adds Indie Label to Repertoire

When you grow up in a musical family, it's next to impossible to not get sucked into that world. For composer Rob Page, picking up a "legit" instrument fell under his father's "my house, my rules." "So I was a reluctant oboe player right up until my dad gave me a beautiful Martin D-35 and I discovered James Taylor, Cat Stevens, and Crosby, Stills & Nash," he says. "Goodbye oboe, hello girls! I spent a decade or so writ-

ing songs without a lot of luck. One day, I submitted some of them to BMI and won a scholarship to the UCLA Extension Film Scoring program. I ate it up—actual musicians; no sequencers, just pencils, score paper, and click books. Then the best thing that could have possibly happened to me happened: I got laid off from my day job." Now, Page can be seen behind his Mac and PC scoring mostly for television spots under the guise of his Woolly Mammoth production company.

How does your attack to composing music change based on the media?

For me it's less about the media and more about the client. I had an instructor at UCLA who used to have each of us conduct our pieces while he played the role of "the idiot client"—his words, not mine. So after you'd run through it, he'd say, "Hmmm, I think it needs to be sadder. Or faster. Or murkier." Or whatever arbitrary adjective he could come up with. He literally said to me once, "It needs to be more yellow." He was teaching us to think on our feet and let go of our "precious darlings."

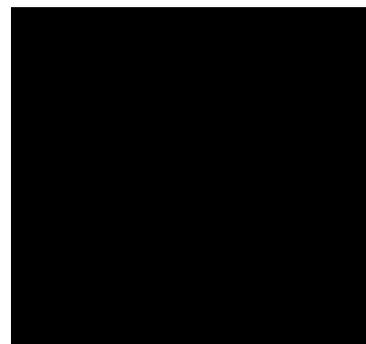
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Tell me about your studio.

I work out of a converted guest room in our home in Culver City [Calif.]. I never set out to have a formal recording studio per

se, but more a writing space. For years, we tracked most everything at either The Village or The Complex

Rob Page (left) and brother Richard Page recently started Little Dume Recordings, featuring *Peculiar Life*.



in West L.A., and I guess I just got kind of used to going to “the facility.” Of course, the economics of the industry have changed radically, and you simply can’t be in business as a composer without being able to crank out stellar-sounding tracks in your own room, and I can certainly do that here.

But what’s more interesting is the gear I’ve *been* through over the years. When I was a kid, I bought one of the first drum machines ever, an Oberheim DX, and tracked by bouncing back and forth between two ¼-inch reel-to-reels while playing another part in real time. I had an original Deltalab Effectron, tracked my guitars through a Rockman. I went through racks of gear: PortaStudios, DA-88s, Mackie 2408s, 1604s, 1202s. Countless Macs.

Today I have a G5 Mac, Digital Performer, a MOTU 828, a couple Cinema Displays, a Universal Audio UAD-1 card. I have a PC with Acid, Giga, and Kontakt, and the entire Native Instruments collection. I use the EastWest Gold bundle for orchestra and a few other libraries. Omnisphere is pretty great. Drums are either loops from Stylus RMX or BFD, or I track them myself at a buddy’s studio. I use BLUE mics and a matched pair of RODE NT5s for tracking my D-35. Something about those mics and that guitar just kills. I have a Line 6 Variax and PODxt Live, though sometimes I use a Strat and NI Guitar Rig. I don’t even use a board anymore.

You also provide music for stock library collections.

The library work started with my eighth-grader, Sam, who is in a band. I became friends with one of the other band dads, John DeFaria, who has friends at Megatrax and Scorekeepers Music. He recommended me to Scorekeepers, I sent some stuff, they liked it. I was in. Megatrax was completely different. I went to a mixer they were hosting. John introduced me to Ron Mendelsohn, and he graciously said to go ahead and send him a demo. I sent him some cues from a score I’d just done on spec and he liked a couple of them. Licensed them on the spot.

Let’s focus on a recent project. Take me through your creative process.

I just finished writing the theme for a television pilot called *Stars & Strikes*. It’s a campy celebrity bowling show. The producer used to hire me to fill in writing cues for *America’s Funniest Videos* when Dan Slider wasn’t available. It was fun because they wanted a big, bombastic, late-night thing. It’s just piles of horns, drums, rhythm guitars, B-3. It’s the opposite of the trailer I scored recently called *A Woman, a Gun and a Noodle Shop* for Sony Pictures Classics. The editor liked something from my library disk, but it didn’t fit her cut very well so her company paid me extra to pull up the session and modify it. They saved money not having to get a from-the-ground-up score, but it ultimately became exactly what they wanted. And because

of the expediency of FTP, I was able to work directly with the editor and provide a “stock” track that matched her cut better than she could have done within the audio limitations of her Avid.

But the most exciting thing I’ve got going right now has me doing almost everything *but* the music it seems. My brother, Richard, and I recently started a small indie label called Little Dume



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Recordings. Richard was the singer in a band called Mr. Mister. I’m really into the concept of direct-to-fan marketing, so he is giving me the opportunity to put it to the test. We’ve just released a previously unreleased fourth Mr. Mister album called *Pull* with Sony Music and a new solo album from Richard titled *Peculiar Life*. We just finished our first release, *5 Songs for Christmas* EP, that was, with one exception, performed entirely by Richard and produced and mixed in-house by us at Little Dume.

What is the most challenging aspect of your work?

Finding it. After that, figuring out what the client thinks he needs. I always say, John Williams has got it easy: He only has to please one guy, Spielberg, and *he’s* a visionary! Williams’ work is without peer, of course, but if he was a spot guy, the true genius would be keeping a straight face in the meeting when everyone has finally signed off on the track and that one junior producer down at the end of the table tells him his triple-forte Wagnerian horn section isn’t quite right. ✱