



KEY PLAYERS

IF HISTORY HAD GONE A BIT DIFFERENTLY, we might have had one more rodeo champ, but one less groundbreaking musician.

"I wanted to be a rodeo cowboy when I was growing up in Littleton, Colorado," says keyboardist Dave Grusin, one of the most influential arrangers, film composers, and producers of the last four decades. "I worked at a ranch when I was in high school, along with this ex-rodeo guy. It finally occurred to me that he wasn't the ideal role model, since he didn't have one internal organ properly connected to another anywhere in his entire body."

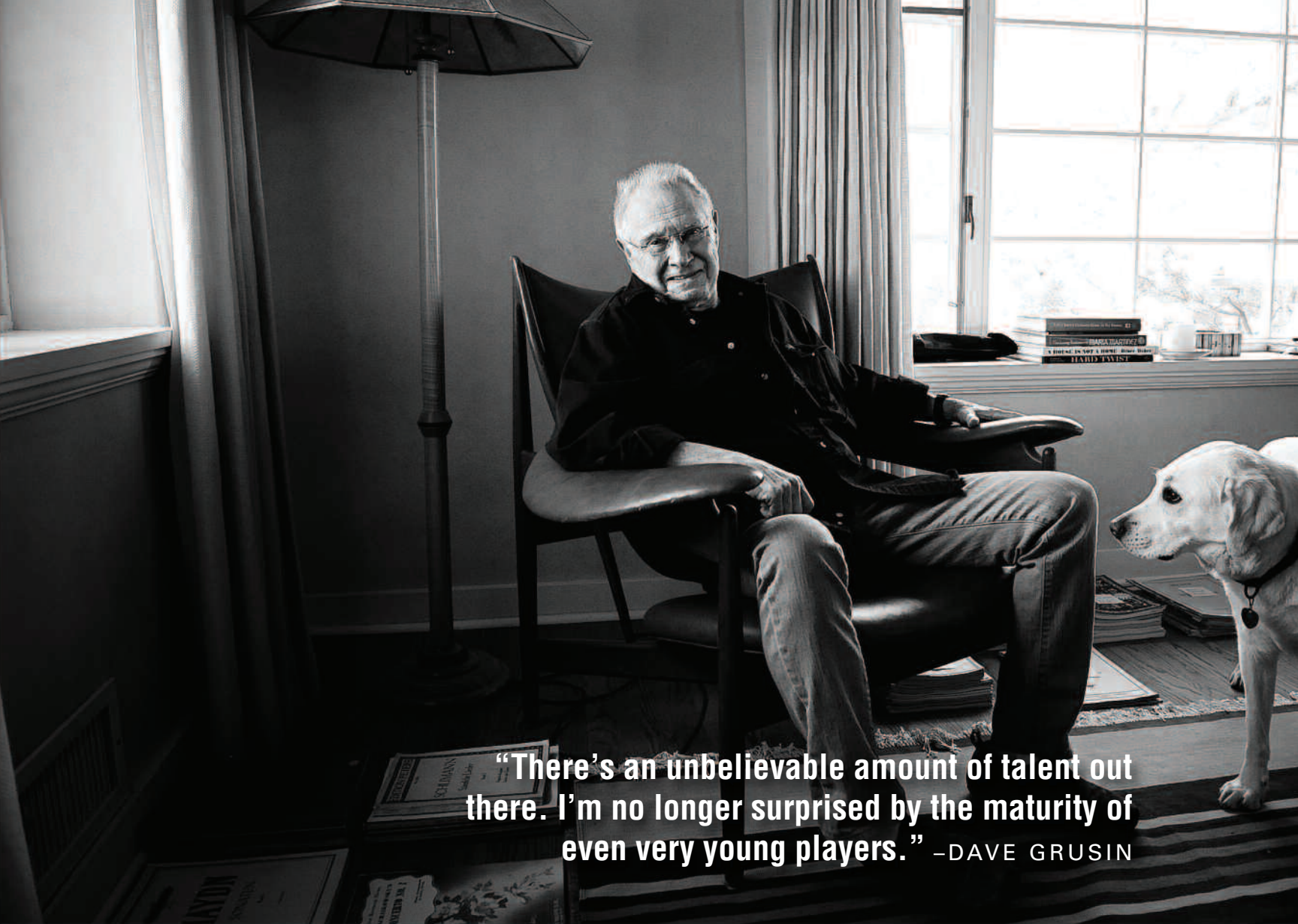
"Oh," says Dave's younger brother Don. "You mean that guy who could roll a cigarette with one hand on his horse while he was riding?"

After opting for music over the rodeo ring, Dave scored dozens of classic films and TV shows, from *The Graduate* to *On Golden Pond*. He also co-founded GRP records with engineer Larry Rosen. The label discovered such important jazz figures as bassist Marcus Miller and guitarist Earl Klugh, re-released neglected jazz classics, and issued many great albums featuring one or both Grusin brothers.

After graduating from the University of Colorado's music department, young Dave landed a gig as music director for Andy Williams, who hosted a popular TV variety show throughout the '60s. "It was an amazing workshop, doing a show every week, 39 weeks a year," recalls Dave. "It sounds scary, but there was so much work to do, you didn't have time to get scared. And there was such a variety of music! I got to meet Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Louie Bellson, Kate Smith, and so many others."



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Meanwhile, Don studied economics and became an econ professor. But by the mid-’70s he’d left academia, moved to LA, and started playing with the likes of Quincy Jones, Joe Pass, and Lee Ritenour. By that time, Dave was one of Hollywood’s most in-demand composers, particularly admired for his collaborations with the legendary director Sydney Pollack.

But by the end of the decade, Dave was seeking new outlets for his music. In 1982 he founded GRP, which became a creative haven for both brothers—not to mention many significant jazz and fusion artists who couldn’t get much traction with the era’s rock- and pop-oriented major labels.

GRP’s penchant for debuting young artists was partly a matter of necessity. “The terrible truth,” says Dave, “is that we couldn’t afford to sign anybody who really needed to make money, so we ended up with a lot of first-timers. I think we met most of our artists just by networking with the last kid we’d signed. ‘You ought to hear this guy I know play bass,’ someone would say. ‘His name’s Marcus Miller.’”

Around the same time, the Grusin brothers began an enduring connection with Yamaha. “In 1983 I picked up my first DX-7 from the Yamaha store in Tokyo,” recalls Don. “The girl that sold it to me insisted that she carry it back to my hotel and set it up for me. Since then, Yamaha has been like family to us. We do a lot of work in Japan, and the Yamaha people have become some of our closest friends. They’re the best!”



As Yamaha’s products evolve, the Grusins keep finding new inspirations in the instruments. When Dave and Don toured Europe last year with old pal Lee Ritenour, they took along a pair of Motif XS6 keyboards. “I fell in love with the XS6,” says Don. “It was really the star of the show, particularly when it came to solo sounds. We were able to give Lee a little competition with a great, screaming guitar patch. There’s such breadth and width to the string patches, too.”

“It’s an incredibly deep machine,” says Dave. “Far deeper than I’ve even had the time to get into. But sonically speaking, it has a lot of the Yamaha stuff that I always love.”

Now that they’re off the road, Don says he uses the XS6 in a class he teaches at the University of Colorado. “It’s called World Music Video Projects as Catalyst for Social Change. It’s a multi-disciplinary course made up of economists, musicians, filmmakers, and environmental architects. We’ve been using the Motif as an underscoring tool, and letting the kids play with it.”

Don’s teaching experiences make him optimistic about the future of music. “When I returned to teaching in 2008 after many years, I was surprised by the incredible sophistication of the students,” he says. “The Internet and the technological changes it brought have encouraged people to do all this stuff in their bedrooms. There’s good stuff and there’s atrocious stuff, but the spirit of doing it has increased a hundredfold. It’s really been a revolution.”

Dave echoes the sentiment: “There’s an unbelievable amount of talent out there. I’m no longer surprised by the maturity of even very young players. Now, when it comes time to pay a mortgage as a musician, I don’t know where they’re going to be, but they don’t seem to worry about it. And anyway, when all else fails the music is still there.” He chuckles. “That’s always the antidepressant for me.”