



CONAN'S KEYS

FOR SIXTEEN YEARS SCOTT HEALY HAS EXCELLED at one of the most challenging gigs in music: As keyboardist for Conan on *Late Night*, *The Tonight Show*, and now in the "Legally Prohibited" band, Healy has mastered literally thousands of tunes with minimal rehearsal, then performed them perfectly for an audience of millions.

"On any given day," says Scott, "you don't know what you're going to be playing until the guys upstairs have figured out the day's show. There might be as many as five new pieces per day. The best part of the job is, you never really know what you'll have to do from day to day. You have to be ready for anything."

In addition to performing new music each day with the house band, Healy has had the privilege of performing with many leading lights of rock, pop, jazz, and R&B, including Bruce Springsteen, Bonnie Raitt, Jackson Browne, and Tony Bennett. His personal highlights include banging out boogie-woogie piano for roots-rock legend Sleep LaBeef, performing "Let's Stay Together" with Al Green, and reproducing the iconic electric piano part from "The Thrill is Gone" with blues titan B.B. King. "I remember thinking, 'Wow,'" says Scott. "Forty years after the record comes out, and here's the same dude, right here!"

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Healy’s multifaceted training made him uniquely qualified for the demanding gig. “I played only classical music ‘til I was 14,” he says, “but I was aware of all the rock and roll coming through Cleveland, Ohio, where I grew up. Then I got into jazz and started buying records.” Scott went on to earn a degree in classical composition from the prestigious Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York. After relocating to New York City, he worked as a session player and arranger in a variety of styles until he landed the Conan job.

Last year, in a much-publicized move, Conan and his entire crew relocated to California to commandeer *The Tonight Show* in the wake of Jay Leno’s departure. NBC’s Burbank facility includes not only the soundstage where the show is taped, but also a separate recording studio, where the band often tracked music to accompany the show’s pre-taped video segments. “You’d walk in the door, say ‘hi’ to the security guard, and then all of a sudden you were in a recording session,” recalls Scott.

But early this year, in an equally dramatic move, O’Brien and NBC parted ways after the network announced a plan to reinstate Leno’s late night slot and air Conan’s show after midnight. The Conan connection isn’t over, though; when we spoke with Scott, he was on the road with the old gang as part of O’Brien’s “Legally Prohibited from Being Funny on Television” tour.

Onstage, Healy plays a new Yamaha CP1 Stage Piano. “The CP1 differs from any digital piano I’ve ever played,” he says. “It sounds so clear—it doesn’t get cloudier the more notes you play. It has the most amazing stereo image. It just feels right. Every day when I come to soundcheck, I find our monitor engineer playing it—he’s a piano player too. He says, ‘This is the first time I’ve ever played a digital piano that makes me want to continue to play, that invites me to play.’ And that’s exactly how I feel about the CP1 too.”

While Healy prepares for the Conan gig to shift to another new network and time slot, this time on TBS at 11 p.m. EST, he’s excited about his extracurricular pursuits. He’s been busy with keyboard and accordion session dates, and now he’s planning to revisit his original career goal. “I started out wanting to be a composer and conductor,” he says, “and now I’m going to be doing some film scoring projects. I like the kind of film composing where you actually have an organic relationship with a director, where you craft a piece of music around the film and get involved with the script. Unfortunately, a lot of productions only pay the composers enough to sit in their living rooms recreating tracks from the temp score. But when you copy a temp score, you’re not contributing anything except your expertise as a studio technician. That’s an important skill, and it might feed you financially, but not spiritually and artistically.”

Yet Scott insists that musical creativity can still flourish. “It may be a bad time for the music business, but there are still lots of people doing interesting projects, and there’s definitely a need for people who play real instruments. There are thousands of young composers coming out of school with great home studios and incredible expertise, and they’ve got electronica and generic production music really well covered, but people still need real bands—especially in live TV.”

