



“There’s a rush you get from playing before thousands of people—you never get

 **YAMAHA**

Loren Gold

Making Pop Magic with Hilary Duff

Since the early 1990s, keyboardist Loren Gold has worked with one teen-pop phenomenon after another—initially as musical director for teenage sensation Tiffany, then as a session player on records by such artists as Mandy Moore and Mindi Abair. And for the past several years, he’s been music director for singer/actress Hilary Duff, currently touring the world in support of her *Still Most Wanted* album.

It’s a great gig, says Gold: “I’ve always loved pop. And I’ve always enjoyed playing live, and playing in front of large crowds. There’s a rush, an energy that you get from playing before thousands of people. You *never* get tired of that.”

Duff, 18, rocketed to fame after the 2001 debut of her Disney Channel/ABC Kids show, *Lizzie McGuire*. She’s released three albums since 2003, establishing herself as a pop artist in her own right. “Her audience is really starting to widen,” Loren notes. “On the very first tour, you’d get some pretty young kids—six-year-olds on up. These days we still have the young kids, but I definitely see people in their late teens and early 20s as well.”

Working with an artist whose audience is so young has a unique occupational hazard: the screaming. “It’s so high-pitched, I can’t begin to tell you!” laughs Gold. “There’s one point in the show where Hilary asks everybody to scream as loud as they can, and I literally have to cover my ears. It’s such a shriek, you can’t even imagine!”

As music director, Loren is responsible for everything from hiring musicians and coordinating with the crew on technical aspects of the show to working out arrangements with the band. “You definitely have to command respect, like anybody in charge,” he says. “But at the same time, you want to keep a sense of fun. We’re all doing music professionally because we enjoy playing. I think if you keep a fun environment, but don’t let things get out of control, then everything’s going to be good. My boss is happy, the band’s happy, and everyone’s having a great time.”

The gig demands some specialized skills, Gold says. “Obviously you need mastery of your instrument. I have a lot of theory behind me, having grown up playing classical and jazz music. But you also need to be a good listener. You

need to be able to make good decisions. And you need to know what the artist wants and be able to execute that, and get everyone else to follow your lead. I gather good players around me, and that makes it much easier as well.”

Onstage and in the studio, Loren uses a Yamaha Motif ES8. “It’s my main keyboard,” he says. “I use it in Hilary’s new video, too. In fact, the Motif is the go-to keyboard for my peers in this business—it’s really made everybody sound better! I even picked up a rackmount version as a backup—I have it on tour with us now. The strings sounds are just phenomenal. And of course the Motif is known for having some of the best piano sounds out there, and the feel and control you get on the 88-key model are really nice. It’s easy to edit on too, which is great, because I need to do a lot of preprogramming before the tour, keyboard splits and layers and stuff like that.”

Gold also uses the Motif extensively in his own compositions, particularly on his new solo record, *Keys*. “The Motif was the big keyboard on my record. It literally made this record happen. My string arrangements are pretty heavily featured on the record, and I did all of them with just the Motif.”

Loren describes his record as jazz-pop: “Jazz first, because there’s no lead vocalist. But the arrangements are like pop songs: an intro, a verse, a chorus. I love the structure of pop songs. Being around artists like Tiffany and Mandy and Hilary, I chose to do a record in the same way, only without that lead vocal. But the stuff I write shares that same pop sensibility.”

Once the current tour with Hilary is over, Gold plans to spend some time promoting his own project, as well as continuing with sessions on other artists’ records. “Actually I just finished another session on an upcoming Mandy Moore record, playing a Yamaha grand piano,” he says.

But even on the road, Loren keeps busy: “Last summer, for example, I spent the entire time working on edits for my record on my little portable studio. Everybody in the band is always doing something on their downtime—nobody’s just sitting around watching TV in their hotel rooms. Everybody’s got these portable studios, and everybody’s cutting tracks and sharing ideas. So I definitely make the most of my time when I’m out there.”