

COOL AND COMPOSED

SCHWARTZ:

DAVID



"One of the great things about the 02R96 is the amount of other gear I've been able to get rid of."

Composer David Schwartz has written music for many successful television shows, from *Arrested Development* to *The Two Of Us*. The theme for his first network production, the hit series *Northern Exposure*, earned him a GRAMMY nomination for Best Instrumental Composition, and he scored the show throughout its seven-year run.

Schwartz, a Berklee-trained bassist, is currently working on the new FOX comedy *Arrested Development*. He filled us in recently on the nonstop lifestyle of a television composer—and the tools of the trade that make it all possible.

How does writing music for television differ from film composing?

The differences in the music reflect the differences between the two mediums. TV is a smaller medium, and TV shows usually have smaller instrumentations. There are exceptions—for example, *Star Trek* and *The Simpsons* are done with an orchestra. Time is a big factor, too. For *Arrested Development*, I'm doing upwards of 12 minutes of finished music every week for a show that's only 21 minutes long. Most shows average considerably less music.

What sort of back and forth do you have with the rest of the creative team?

At the spotting session, we go through an episode scene by scene and discuss what music should go where. If there's temp music, we discuss why it does or doesn't work. I try to use the elements that work, like pace or percussion, in the original score I write. If it doesn't work—for example, it distracts from the dialog—then obviously we don't use those elements.

I have an incredible amount of autonomy on *Arrested Development*, and a great creative relationship with Mitchell Hurwitz, the show's creator, who has an amazing musical memory. The first time the producers hear anything is on the dub stage, which is fantastic for me, because I'm not showing them a half-done piece of work. I've worked on many shows where the producers want to hear what you've got two days after they've given you the assignment, that all goes with the territory.

Do you use MIDI to compose music, or do you go straight to audio?

I usually begin using MIDI. I want to hear it fleshed-out right from the start. If it's rhythm section stuff, I often play the instruments myself, then add studio players. I feel it's my responsibility to be prepared with something that works (on paper). Then time permitting, working with great players and seeing what they can add. This step is often the difference between good and great. All the tracking happens in my studio, unless I go to a full orchestra. I record drums here, and I have a beautiful Yamaha Disklavier piano, which is invaluable for this kind of work.

For this show, I'm writing songs with vocals and lyrics as well as instrumental music, replacing records from the temp score. It's really fun, and a lot of work. That's another difference between television and film—in film they'll use the big songs because they have the budget for licensing. In TV they often have to find creative ways around that.

You use a Yamaha 02R96 mixing console. How does it figure into your workflow?

It's the absolute center. When I got my first 02R, I thought, "Yeah, I'll play around with this, but it's not going to replace my big English board." But a month later I realized, "Wow, this is the answer to everything!" The scene memories are great, and the boards have a very neutral sound I can do anything with. And the 02R96 sounds even better. I recently replaced my four original 02Rs with two 02R96s. In fact, one of the great things about the 02R96 is the amount of other gear I've been able to get rid of: two digital patch bays, an analog master section for the original 02Rs, reducing my studio patch bay from seven rack spaces to two. The dynamics and EQ processing on the 02R96 are great, too. I use some Pro Tools plug-ins for vintage-sounding effects, but for straight, clean EQ and compression, the Yamahas are my answer.

Any advice for aspiring TV composers?

I think the people who are going to do it, don't need advice, because they don't have a choice—they just have to make music. Composing is a great outlet for someone who likes all kinds of music. Having a good visual sense really helps, too. It's a great privilege to be able to write music for a living, even with the constant pressure that goes with the job. It'd be easy to find things to complain about, but I really do enjoy it!

