

Custom Scores

A luxury or a necessity?

Today's composers bring considerable creative muscle to TV, spots and films.

By David John Farinella

THE SOUND OF FUNNY

Before composers Dan Stein and Joel Goodman of Los Angeles-based MusicBox (www.musicboxmx.com) started to work on the HBO show special *Making the Cut* with producer Mike Tolajian, the two had provided music for an ESPN show of Tolajian's via their catalog of original music CDs.

Original music, obviously, is the bread and butter of composers, yet the MusicBox team has found that offering a catalog of original music has been beneficial. "What sets us apart is that we'll do a package deal where we'll give a client full use of all the music in our catalog and we'll also do some custom scoring for them as well, so they'll get the best of both worlds," Goodman explains.

The choice between using stock over custom music comes down to two and a half things, Goodman reports with a laugh. "One is the money and one is time. I don't have time to have a meeting with a composer to give him direction or wait for him to write the 40 minutes of music for a show that's going on the air in six days. I think, at that point, they are going to end up with better quality of music going with stock music over a composer," he says. "The 'half' part is that certain producers don't want to deal with composers."

When it came to working on *Making the Cut*, which starred comedians Ray Romano

and Kevin James, the MusicBox team came up against time constraints as well. "[Tolajian] had been considering the original score concept for quite awhile, but he wouldn't pull the trigger until there was two weeks left in the production schedule," recalls Goodman. "He called me up and started talking to me about possibly custom scoring the show. It was great, because here was a guy who was using our stock music and now he was calling us, asking us to completely score the show."

The score combined a variety of guitar sounds, from Dobro to slide to 12-string, exotic flute and percussion. "It was a combination of a lot of different instruments," he explains. "We pulled it off by using real musicians. We're a big advocate of using live musicians." To write and record the tracks MusicBox turns to MOTU Digital Performer and Digidesign's Pro Tools.



MusicBox founders Joel Goodman and Dan Stein (L-R) provided a score that combined guitar sounds, exotic flute and percussion for HBO's *Making the Cut*, with Kevin James and Ray Romano.

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