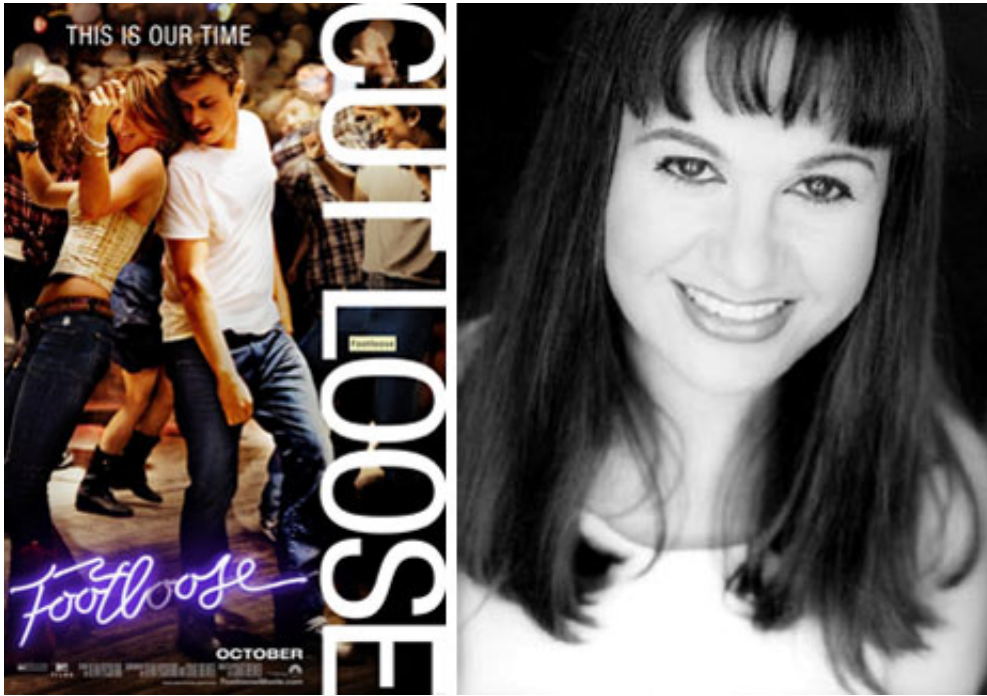


Scoring Loose, *Footloose*

Deborah Lurie kicks off her Sunday shoes with the remake of the 1984 dance film.

Interview by Kevin Thomas Costigan



Deborah Lurie is a musical chameleon. Originating from a background in musical theater, she has collaborated with some of the biggest names in the music industry, serving as string arranger for over 20 pop artists including Kelly Clarkson and Adam Lambert to orchestrating and providing additional music for scores composed by John Ottman and Danny Elfman.

With nearly 30 film and television projects to her credit, Lurie's latest project is the remake of the 1984 classic *Footloose*, directed by Craig Brewer, of 2005's *Hustle & Flow* (which earned a controversial Oscar for the song "It's Hard Out Here for a Pimp"). Lurie's dramatic score for string ensemble and rock band weaves throughout the newly recorded songs to steer the film's propulsive theme of free expression through music and dance.

Kevin Costigan: Had you seen the original film version of *Footloose*?

Deborah Lurie: Have I seen it? That would be a big yes! *Footloose* was a defining part of my childhood.

KC: Did the original influence your contribution to the remake?

DL: Thankfully, I didn't remember the score much, and I didn't review the original

too much while I worked on the new one. I just had the impression that it made on me and of course the songs are impossible to forget. I think that the director Craig Brewer absolutely nailed it as far as how much to honor the original and how much to make it his own, and his guidance as I wrote the score made that a pretty clear path to navigate.

KC: What were the circumstances that led up to you getting the job?

DL: I guess you can say that the journey started sometime around 2002 or so when I first met Randy Spendlove, who at the time was president of music at Miramax. I had arranged and produced the music for the Pussycat Dolls show that was playing live at the Roxy, and Randy happened to attend. For many years following, I did basically odd jobs on many Miramax films, including partial rescues and short pieces here and there in the strangest genres you can think of. Those jobs pretty much whipped me into shape as a composer and a professional in the biz, and I'm forever grateful for all those chances to write and produce tracks for such a prestigious company. Anyway, now that Randy is at Paramount, he continues to believe in me and my abilities and I credit him for giving me the chance to demo for Craig and meet with him to be considered for the composing job on *Footloose*. If anyone is wondering if there are any good, kind, and fiercely loyal people in positions of power in this town, I can tell you firsthand that the answer is yes.

KC: What was your relationship with director Craig Brewer like?

DL: To begin with, Craig is the only director I ever sent a fan letter to—or email anyway. After watching *Hustle & Flow*, I found some sort of very unreliable email address for Craig and told him I thought he was a genius. I don't think he got the email—which is probably for the best.



Fancy Free: Director Craig Brewer.

Anyway, my working relationship with Craig on *Footloose* was short but really great. He's incredibly articulate about what works and doesn't work for him from a dramatic standpoint, as is the editor Billy Fox. One thing that was pretty consistent throughout the dramatic cues was that, though he didn't say this literally, he knew that his performances on screen were really strong so there was no need for the music to fix or compensate for anything. I learned how when you have a particularly good film on your hands, you can really let a scene breathe and let minimal motion and instrumentation say everything the music needs to say.

KC: How much creative freedom did you have on the project?

DL: I feel like I had plenty of room to express my musical ideas. The good ones stayed, and I think that the changes that were made during the process with the director made it better. Writing music for talented filmmakers is more interesting to me than just expressing myself musically on my own. That process honestly makes the music better when the circumstances are right.

KC: What was the particular sound you created for *Footloose*?

DL: I had a lot of the same musical intentions as the creators of the song soundtrack had. As a composer, especially on a primarily song-based film, I try to make the score pretty similar in feel and style to the songs. When I wrote this score, there were plenty of question marks in the song choices, but I knew it would all gel together pretty well because we were all after the same basic feel and musical aesthetic. Of course I had the pleasure of having a string orchestra on my instrumental palette for that extra sense of drama, but my score was largely guitar-based—band-based, in fact. As for describing the sound, I'd say distinctly American, somewhat Southern, and based on contemporary yet "timeless" rock, pop, blues, and folk music.

KC: Could you give me a detailed layout of what instruments you used in the score, particularly in the cue titled "New Laws"? I noticed layers of textural sounds that are both atmospheric and haunting. I'm curious to know what you used to get those sounds.

DL: The opening cue, titled "New Laws," is primarily a combination of electric guitars and synthesizers. The guitars are using a sound that sounds vaguely like an organ. Though it needed to be very subtle, I wanted to evoke the underlying feeling that everything in the small town of Bomont was governed according to their religious, specifically Christian, beliefs. So no matter where they were—whether in court, the city council, or church—it was always that same feeling that religion was the basis of all values there. A dulcimer plays a small thematic melody that comes back several times in the film, following the psychological and emotional journey of

Reverend Moore, played by Dennis Quaid. It's such a treat to be able to use synthesizers and atmospheric electronics in general to fill up a movie theater when it was clearly an aesthetic and dramatic choice rather than a budget-based decision. It's a little scarier as a composer to leave synths on their own like that with no strings, no typical movie instruments, especially under the first scene in the film in which the score is very exposed. You can hear a pin drop in the theater at that point...or at least that's what it feels like if I did my job well.



KC: I noticed two cuts that incorporate material from the original film soundtrack: “Hero” and “Almost Paradise.” How did you come to using those pieces?

DL: The use of the song “Hero” in the bus race and “Almost Paradise” for the kiss was the two times I used song material from the original *Footloose*. The score cues that quoted songs were written early in the process with the creative guidance of Randy Spendlove, the Paramount Music President. He was very creatively involved with the music of this film, and I think the soundtracks reflect how much love was put into it. Anyone that knows me would know that weaving my score for this film in and out of those classic songs and their new renditions with all those big current recording artists was basically the epitome of Deb Lurie fun.

One of the more unique things about this score as far as stylistic diversity and the scoring process is the bus race. In the movie, hopefully it gives off the impression of being essentially just a loud, rowdy piece of rock music. In fact, they were definitely considering making this scene a song thing rather than score, so it was definitely my job to give it that general song vibe. However, if you listen more closely it's a bit more unique. First of all, the featured solo instruments are banjo and a very southern-sounding slide guitar, instruments that you don't often hear ripping crazy solos over such hard rock. The music is very multi-metered, as after all, it is written

as action score, and it was a challenge to do that without calling attention to that characteristic, as it's pretty much the opposite of typical rock music.

The kookiest thing about this cue was that in the studio, it was sight read by the musicians, film score style. If you plan your session right (i.e., in the evening, like we did in this case), you can get all the tip-top players in town after their day gig with John Williams or James Newton Howard or whatever. You don't usually see music stands in front of guys playing this kind of music, and here they were rockin' it out, synced to picture, with no rehearsal or prior knowledge of the music. It was kind of a trip to watch them play it down.



KC: I really like the cues “Ren’s Story” and “Ren’s Speech.” I’m drawn to the melody. How did those cues come about?

DL: Well, admittedly, my first versions of these cues were a bit faster and developed a little further harmonically, as you might expect a pretty traditional musical cue to do under speeches like that. With the guidance of Craig and Billy, the music was revised to be slower, sparser, and harmonically more stagnant. In the end, to me, the music seems to feel a bit like a breathing pattern under the scene, if that makes any sense. I’m proud of the way that it comments and reacts to Ren’s words but doesn’t take it over the top or spoon feed the emotions. However, at the same time, I was able to use a somewhat traditional string section, so there was a bit of fearlessness on the filmmakers’ part to allow me to use a texture that can often be considered to schmalzy. I think we found the right balance. That’s the great George Doering playing guitars, dulcimers, and such, and Charlie Bisherat on fiddle. They’re like superheroes to me. I know I’m not alone on that one! In addition to George and Charlie, the score also features an amazing guitarist named

Sean Woolstenhulme.

KC: What time frame did you have to complete the project from first being hired to final mix and what did the process entail?

DL: I think I had about three or four weeks in total. The score was finished and dubbed quite awhile ago, which is somewhat unusual. However, I had written some of the music before the film was even shot, believe it or not. I wrote a version of the bus race cue based on the script pages. I didn't have the composer job but I did have the privilege of reading the script, so I made the most of it. I still can't believe it worked out. I composed about 20 minutes of music for the film, and thankfully it's all in the film with the exception of one cue. It was one of those optional cues for a scene that ended up playing without score. No huge casualties on this one!
(Laughs)

KC: Who are the key players on your music scoring team and how did their individual efforts contribute to the process from first note to final mix?

DL: Casey Stone has been my scoring mixer ever since I graduated from USC. My music editor Kevin McKeever and I have been working together for almost as long, though his role on the music team has changed somewhat over the years. Kevin can do pretty much anything and everything, so his title is relatively arbitrary. Peter Rotter is my contractor who always puts his heart and soul into getting me the best players and recording resources on every movie I score. I tend to know pretty much every musician in the orchestra, so every one of them is very much part of the team in my mind. I know I'm getting cheesy here, but I just want to emphasize the camaraderie that goes on when you get to record in LA with your home team.



KC: Were there any special influences or personal inspirations that you employed in composing the score for *Footloose*?

DL: I was both ecstatic and scared to work on a new version of what to me was a classic film. I mean, to me *Footloose* was sacred stuff. So for that reason, it wasn't so much my own life that I drew from as it was these characters I had basically known my whole life. Usually you're getting to know the film gradually as the rough cuts become honed into a final film and you sort of watch it develop as the film gets tweaked and shaped over a period of a couple of months. On this film, I had that intense understanding and compassion for every character from the get-go. That wasn't just because it was *Footloose*. Of course a lot of that is due to the quality of the new film. By the way, this is the first film I've scored in many years that used the term "picture lock" basically before I even scored the film. These guys were drinking tequila shots to celebrate their locked picture the day we spotted the film. I thought it was an extinct term due to the way people typically change picture until the eleventh hour nowadays. Working on such a stable, unchanging picture was a treat that I will never forget.

KC: Are there any plans to release an album of your contribution to the film?

DL: No, not at this point, but I'd love to put the tracks online or give away some CDs to anyone who wants them as long as it's okay with the bosses.

KC: Can you talk about a bit about your collaborative relationship with Danny Elfman and how you came to be working together?

DL: I was introduced to Danny Elfman through our mutual agents Richard Kraft

and Laura Engel. I think historically, it's been a challenge for them to set Danny up with help from other composers because he has such a unique musical voice and he cares so much about every note of a score and finds it disconcerting to delegate any piece of the musical process to anyone else. Somehow I managed to earn his trust when he needed some last minute help on *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, so that led to many more collaborations of various kinds—not that he doesn't still scrutinize every last sixteenth note. Eventually it led to the film *9*, for which I had the “music by” title card followed by “themes by Danny Elfman.” If anyone is imagining how surreal or exciting that was for me, your assumption is correct. (Laughs)

KC: Did you collaborate with Elfman on *Real Steel*?

DL: No, but I hear it was amazing. I gotta get to the theater and catch that one. Wait, come to think of it, I recorded a couple of demo vocals for a theme on that film. It makes me happy to pitch in with random help here and there even if I'm really not involved in the project. Yeah, things can become a bit of a blur when it gets busy around here.

KC: What scoring projects do have lined up for the near future?

DL: I'm working on an animated film called *Dorothy of Oz*, starring Lea Michele and Patrick Stewart among a rather star-studded cast. In addition to writing the score, I'll be arranging songs for the film written by Tift Merrit and one of my childhood heroes, Bryan Adams. I also have some work coming up with Danny Elfman and a few other things on the horizon. There's a lot to be excited about.

KC: What is your dream project? The sky's the limit, so what would that be?

DL: My mind always goes back to what Hans Zimmer did on *The Lion King*. My ultimate dream project would include some sort of combination of songs by amazing artists, dancing, singing, and a million different performers and musical elements that need to be done over a long period of time, ranging from the beginning of pre-production to the end of post. When they say, “Now, who do we get to produce this thing, tie it all into one unified whole, and to finish it off by composing the score...” —I want that person to be me! That's my dream gig. Another thing I'd really like to do is to collaborate with a recording artist or DJ type of musician on a score—someone who is a hero in their musical world but new to composing for film. No matter what the circumstance, it will always be a dream job of mine to score any great film, regardless of what that entails musically. At the end of the day, I'm really a film nut with a love of collaboration.

—FSMO