

Finding The Perfect Sound

Monster Tracks

Who would have believed that the musician who has cemented the lyrics “Robbins Rocks, Robbins Rocks!” for countless holiday seasons is the same person who has composed music for President George W. Bush, Mayor Michael Nutter, Jefferson Hospital, The National Constitution Center, Mattel, Hyundai, and others? Believe it or not, this is the diversity of composer Chuck Butler.



By: Steve Ziegler
Photos Courtesy of Kirk Butler

“When I was ten years old, I made it my career goal to become a musician,” says Butler, the co-founder, Music Director, and Principal Composer behind Monster Tracks. “I guess I’ve exceeded that goal.”

Butler, a 1987 Summa Cum Laude graduate of Berklee College of Music in Boston, has been solidifying his spot in the music world since his mother sat him at the piano at age 5. He played his first professional gig at age 13—a podiatrist’s convention in Atlantic City. Joining his high school band, Butler was ahead of everyone else.

A New Jersey native, he was first chair All-State French horn while at Highland High School. Butler is dedicated to playing at the highest level and inspiring others to do the same. He developed and teaches the course “Analysis and Composition of Commercial Music” at the University of the Arts. He also works to promote the creation of new music as Board President of the Philadelphia Chapter of the American Composers Forum, a non-profit organization that provides opportunities to local composers.

Although Butler is now well established, his father, a lifelong Philadelphia banker, was at first leery of his son’s musical pursuits. He did, however, recognize the success he was having, especially playing the French horn. While the father predicted a career in the Philadelphia Orchestra and as a music teacher, the son saw something different.

“Pursuing the French horn and becoming an orchestral player was too limiting for me. For one thing, I like playing the piano a lot more than playing the French horn,” Butler explains.

Entering Berklee as an Arranging major, Butler considers himself lucky to have roomed with



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Dave Way, now a successful mix engineer in Los Angeles.

“Berklee opened my eyes to a lot of other things that musicians can do...I didn’t really think of myself as a performance major. All I wanted to do was record, all Dave wanted to do was record, and I was the guy who could write music. I spent every day and night writing music just so we could record it,” Butler says.

Working first with “Portastudios” and recording to cassettes, Butler and Way eventually staked out one of the 24-track studios at Berklee and essentially took it over.

“In the same way The Beatles used the studio as an instrument, that’s what we tried to do,” Butler says.

While experimenting with sounds, Butler took a course in jingle writing as an elective and his professor could see that he had a knack for it.

“He said ‘You really have a feel

for this advertising thing. Your songwriting is a bit corny right now, so you might want to pursue this.”

After graduation, Way moved back to New York where he began interning at The Hit Factory. Butler had a decision to make.

“If I went to New York, that’s where all the big advertising agencies were, but that’s also where all the competition was,” Butler says. “And I didn’t know a single person in L.A.”

So, he returned to Philadelphia, where his father had a few advertising contacts, with the hope of getting steady work.

“The place where I knew people was here. Even if I didn’t get work from an ad agency, I’d play gigs in Atlantic City,” he says.

One of the phone numbers Butler obtained from his father

was that of Gene Shay, the folk radio personality who calls WXPN his home. The two arranged to meet at Baker Sound where Gene was doing production work. Shay wasn't the only person who heard Butler's work that day. Gary Moskowitz, the then-owner of Baker Sound, liked what he heard in Butler's repertoire.

"He asked me how I did it and I said 'Well, I have a Mac and a couple keyboards.'"

Moskowitz put the Baker mixing boards and tape machines at Butler's disposal and told him to bring in his equipment. Butler obliged and set up shop in a back room, making music with the door open while clients walked in and out each day. The set up, as Butler puts it, was "perfect." At the time, Baker was doing voiceover work but not offering a music service to their clients. Moskowitz knew that having them hear Chuck Butler's music live would leave them wanting more. That's exactly what happened.

Throughout the 1990s, while working at Baker, Butler was also playing many gigs with Aretha Franklin and other showroom acts in Atlantic City. This was the tail end of the era where traveling performers used local talent. He still plays shows as a member of the cover band, Kenny i Orchestras. Butler takes being a musician very seriously, practicing daily, honing his craft, and working to further the success he has already achieved.

"I get antsy if I don't get out there and play," he explains.

While the live shows serve as an outlet, Butler's work has him playing plenty and also gives him control from end-to-end on the music production. In the early stages of his career, he had the opportunity to move to Los Angeles and earn



a substantial upgrade in pay as a producer, but his love for what he does kept him in Philly. His work at Baker Sound Studios on Ranstead Street in Center City allows him to act as composer, producer, and engineer—tasks that he finds just as rewarding as he does challenging.

"I don't think of myself as an artist, I think of myself as a craftsman. I don't have time to ponder," Butler says. "It's a matter of being able to look at an ad and say 'Well what kind of music is going to work? What does that advertiser or product sound like and feel like?'"

Butler understands not only what an ad should feel like, but also how the feelings that the music in those

ads can elicit emotions from an audience.

Music of any kind can do this to anyone who finds the soul in it. His own musical influences speak to the diversity that he has come to embrace. Specifically, the soundtrack to *Jesus Christ Superstar* and the album *Destroyer* by KISS stick out in Butler's mind as some of the most influential sounds of his teenage years.

"What impressed me about [Superstar] is that on the one hand you've got a rock rhythm section, playing just like a rock band would, but then you've got a full orchestra... that album made a huge impression



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When it comes to Destroyer, Butler again respected how producer Bob Ezrin fleshed out the rock sound with orchestral arranging. However, it was the actual band KISS that had a greater impact than the music itself.

“I saw how unapologetic KISS was about approaching music as a commercial enterprise,” he says. “They saw themselves as not just creating music that people would enjoy, but as building and marketing a brand. I think that opened my eyes to the professional part of being a professional musician, and it gave me

a certain confidence to know that I didn’t have to follow in the footsteps of jazz heroes like Chick Corea. I realized that I could chart my own course, that my skills would allow me to create music that would please my clients.”

For any ad he creates, Butler likes to hear the background before he goes back into the studio.

“I get in here and I say, ‘Let’s the find the right music to support this spot.’ That’s the challenge I would never want to give up,” he explains. “To sit here and create something is like giving birth to a child. You actually create something that no one has heard before, feel proud when it gets a positive reaction, and then watch that ‘child’ goes out into the world and succeed.”

The year 2012 marks the 25th Anniversary of Monster Tracks. Visit their website at www.MonsterTracks.com Congratulations to Monster Tracks on this milestone and best wishes on many more from Pursuit Magazine.