



Richard WOLF'S

Sonic Chemistry

by Dan Kijmpel

Richard Wolf floats a nautical metaphor to illustrate his ever-shifting career. "You catch a wave if your surfboard is in good shape, but you can't plan." Songwriter, producer, composer, entrepreneur—it would seem the tides of the music industry continue to transport Wolf to unexpected destinations.

This year, the SESAC composer won a Daytime Emmy Award for Outstanding Achievement in Music Composition & Direction for the animated WB series *Static Shock*. His involvement in the project was a segue from creating music for *Scooby Doo and the CyberChase* (Warner Bros.) Explains Wolf, "I wrote songs that were featured montages in the movie. I was writing to storyboards, which I'd never done before."

At seventeen, the native New Yorker was signed to his first record deal while attending college in Washington D.C. He gravitated to the west coast and was a member of the Capitol Records rock band, Crimson Tide, but the growing sameness of the genre sent him searching for something else. "Rock seemed like the same five pieces, not going anywhere." He divined his missing inspiration from the street-savvy beats and deft wordplay that heralded the first generation of rap. "Doug E. Fresh, KRS-1, EPMD, they were the best; witty, clever, talking about serious issues. It had a real sense of adventure and experimentalism and it still has."

In Los Angeles, Wolf was employed by a post house to edit music for television, including *The Tonight Show*. In 1986, he wrote the theme song for the Rodney Dangerfield film, *Back to*

School and began contributing to a roster of big screen projects, notably producing Southside Johnny & The Asbury Jukes for the #1 box office *Karate Kid II* sequel, and penning a song for the Madonna vehicle, *Who's that Girl?* As an arranger, songwriter and producer, he developed extensive credits in R&B and pop with artists including New Kids on the Block, Nona Gaye, Bell Biv Devoe and female rapper, MC Lyte, and he pumped up remixes for Seal and Prince. Wolf was well ahead of the curve when he produced the artist Laquan rapping over an instrumental track for the compilation *The Rebirth of Cool Vol. I*, acknowledged as the first project of the budding Acid Jazz genre.

Despite his admiration for the potency of rap, Wolf drew the line with inflammatory messages. "I turned down Eazy-E when he was knocking on our door for music. I said, 'If you promise not to write misogynistic, homophobic, violent lyrics we'll give it to you.' He laughed, we became friends, he hung at the studio, but I wouldn't give him tracks. You have

With his Studio City, CA-based company, The Producers Lab, Wolf continues to respond to the needs of an ever-evolving media. With a multi-room, full production studio facility at the heart of the operation, the company develops artists and writers, and licenses music for film and television. The company's recorded music division, Tone Poet Records, is a rising label, but Wolf explains it's simply one facet of his multi-tiered enterprise. "People talk about the music business as records, but it encompasses everything from cell phones to downloads to TV soundtracks. Wherever music is used in a serious way, it's an avenue for artist exposure." One of Tone Poet's newest ventures bridges two mediums with a simultaneous CD release and download launch with I-Tunes for rapper, MC Lyte.

The Producers Lab is an incubator for other creative collaborators as well. SESAC affiliate Jervae Johnson is a rising talent who came up through the ranks. Says Wolf, "He came to me as an intern seven years ago from the Los Angeles Recording Workshop. He wanted to go into A&R or be a manager. I encouraged him to stick around the studio and learn the elements of making music and records, how to lay down tracks, program, edit, sequence and mix. He's able to do a lot creatively." Another SESAC writer, Mike Consantini, is also making his mark. "He's been with me five years. He's a great guitar player and a rock guy, but he's gotten into electronics and scored the first Flash Movie ever made."

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Since 1999, Fox Sports has utilized Wolf's prize-winning themes for almost two dozen network sports programs. Wolf understands how to pump the necessary drama into his presentations. "People expect those big, victorious horns that hark back to ancient times," he notes. "My frame of reference is more Richard Wagner than Alexander the Great, or Hannibal, marshaling his elephant army."

Wolf invariably returns to what he likes doing best: writing music. "Scoring is, relatively speaking and depending on the project, totally creative. You're the artist. Of course you're working within a framework that's imposed on you, but within that framework there's freedom—it's like marriage. When you produce a record, and start fine tuning and fixing, it's drudgery, but I love the creative part, working with artists and writing songs." ★

"YOU HAVE TO WATCH WHO IS USING YOUR MUSIC AND SET ETHICAL AND MORAL BOUNDARIES."