



# DIGITAL DOWNBEATS AND BUDGET BLUES

Even the tone-deaf of the television industry know this refrain: smaller budgets, fewer jobs and sophisticated new tools that replace people. TV musicians know the tune by heart, but the best of them have plenty of other material in their repertoires. This Hit Parade includes eleven of television's top music makers, who offer keys to surviving and thriving in their pressurized calling.

By **Libby Slate**

**W**hen it comes to television music these days, work is down and anxiety is up. Even veteran musicians — who not many years ago played two scoring sessions a day, four or five days a week — say their TV work is down by at least 25 percent.

The reasons? A bottom-line mentality, for one thing. In light of burgeoning star salaries and other financial demands, executives are looking for corners to cut. "Music is one of the last things in a production," says composer Bruce Broughton. "If they're going to take it from anything, they will take it from music. The head of postproduction at one studio said to me, 'They've raped the music budget.'"

Also, the sound of television music has changed. Many composers now have home-studio synthesizer setups, making it easier and cheaper to score projects. Less muss, less fuss — and fewer musicians.

"I'd hate to be starting out right now," says longtime pianist and synthesist Ralph Grierson. "It has to be tough for young players. It used to be that studios would see talent and nurture it. Contractors would see new players and start them out in a way that they would get limited exposure next to seasoned players, like on a farm team. The head of the music department at a studio would help young composers get established. Nobody does that now."

Despite the problems, none of the television music figures you'll meet on the following pages voiced any desire to change careers. Many, in fact, believe that before long, living, breathing music will again fill the scoring stages and airwaves.

Read on for more of what's on the minds of TV music notables.

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*LIBBY SLATE is a Los Angeles journalist who has written extensively for emmy on music.*

Photographs by **Brian Winckler**





## PAMELA GATES

In a dream sequence on *Gideon's Crossing*, a young woman with tuberculosis was seen rising from her hospital bed to play Beethoven on the violin. Standing off-camera was violinist Pamela Gates, playing silently for the actress, who imitated her fingering and bowing movements.

It was Gates' first coaching job. The bulk of her television career has been spent on scoring stages, recording music for series, telefilms and commercial jingles. She has also played for the Emmys, Oscars, Golden Globes and Grammys, including one memorable stint at the latter playing a neon-lit violin.

Gates' current television work includes *JAG* and *The Simpsons*. It's a far cry, though, from the heyday of the 1980s and early 1990s, when, she says, "there was motion picture work, television and records, and you could sustain yourself with one of those facets. Television was huge — variety and prime-time serial shows were flourishing. I was playing for *China Beach*, *Cagney & Lacey*, several *Hallmark Hall of Fame* films and a lot of others. It started phasing out because of synths and the profit margin."

The greatest challenge in being a television violinist is "getting the work," says Gates, who performed on camera for Joanie and Chachi's wedding in the final episode of *Happy Days* and last summer led a string quartet at the wedding of Jennifer Aniston and Brad Pitt.

"Because of low-budget contracts negotiated by the Musicians' Union and Recording Musicians Association," she says, "there are a growing number of players doing television, so even this is becoming competitive. The positive aspect is, this is work that is staying in Los Angeles that would otherwise have gone to non-union cities."

Gates is active in the Recording Musicians Association, which allied with Musicians' Union Local 47 to help ensure that players get a fair shake in contract negotiations and other matters. "I help with their fund-raising activities and also try to connect them with the Society of Composers and Lyricists," she says. "The two groups need to be in communication for all of our benefit."

Gates also plays on feature scores and in concert. She is a longtime member of the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra and Pasadena Symphony, and in 1998 performed at Carnegie Hall in a concert she helped organize, featuring the music of Jerry Goldsmith. She has also held solo and chamber recitals throughout southern California and played for the opening and closing ceremonies of the 1984 Summer Olympics in L.A.

"I want to think that even though there is so much concern about the lack of work going on right now, things go in trends," she says. "I don't believe acoustic recording is becoming a dinosaur, that it's going to disappear. I think L.A. recording musicians are here to stay."