

IndieWire

‘High Fidelity’ Soundtrack: The Story Behind Songs from Season 1 of the Hulu TV Show

A team of music supervisors (including Questlove) worked to find songs from every continent to soundtrack the show's romantic travails.

By Steve Greene

It would have been very easy for the Hulu adaptation of “High Fidelity” to stick to a narrow set of musical ideas to help tell its story. But at the end of the show’s opening season, not only did series co-creators Veronica West and Sarah Kucserka look back on a show that had stretched its musical taste in a number of different directions, it had done so on a global scale.

“These people sit in a record store all day every day. They’re listening to everything. To make it feel like there’s one genre of music or, or one time period of music that is all that we’ve listened to, would feel inauthentic,” Kucserka told IndieWire. “It was very cool that at the end of the season, we had a song from every single continent.”

The search for far-reaching songs spanning time zones around the world — “except Antarctica,” Kucserka jokingly pointed out — was the result of a collaborative process headed by a whole team of music supervisors, including Alison Rosenfeld, Manish Raval, and Tom Wolfe. Zoë Kravitz, who stars as the “High Fidelity” romantic rememberer-in-chief Rob, also worked to help secure the rights to certain songs, along with executive music supervisor Questlove.

Not only are some of those songs referenced directly within the dialogue on the show, many of them originated as part of a key step in the show’s writing

process. And while some songs were key component parts from the outset, some additions came much later in the process. Such was the case for Silk Rhode's "Pains," the backing track for Rob's rooftop birthday encounter with Mac, one that makes up a sizable part of the season's last two chapters.

"It was a selection that our editor Kate Hickey had found and really loved and felt like was a great template for the scene. She put it in and said, 'Maybe it's just a starting point for conversation.' When we heard it and saw the way that she cut it with the scene, we were like, 'We can't change this.' It drove the way that we edited the scene and helped us build the emotion in what was one of our biggest emotional peaks of the entire season," Kucserka said.

One of the key strengths of "High Fidelity" is its ability to find a balance in the songs it uses. There are tracks that feel like they've been waiting patiently on a vinyl-laden shelf to be the perfect scene accompaniment. Some are overlooked jams from some of the most iconic musicians of the past half-century. Others still are karaoke staples, reworked in a different context to be one of the show's main engines.

Maybe the best example of that last category is Dexys Midnight Runners' "Come on Eileen," which Cherise (Da'Vine Joy Randolph) belts out in the middle of Championship Vinyl halfway through the pilot.

"That was one of the suggestions from Alison Rosenfeld. For us we had to find something that grabs everybody's attention with that exuberance and that joy that that song has. It's not just our character singing along to it, but everybody in the audience," Kucserka said. "I think what Da'Vine brought to that moment was the ability to take a song that you know could become an earworm that you can't get rid of and just make it the song you're happily humming all day."

Of all the artists on the "High Fidelity" soundtrack, the one with the biggest presence might well be David Bowie. Not only is one of his albums a key plot point in an episode, three of his songs (from different points in his career) help to anchor the first half of the season. West and Kucserka didn't just see "Modern Love," the show's initial taste of Bowie, as a bolt of energy. They saw it as a way to help understand Rob's state of mind.

"That song was a suggestion from Jenny Eliscu, who was helping us just try to get inside Rob's head, what her musical tastes would be," West said. "It was in the script from the first draft and I absolutely fell in love with it. It just made you feel

her pain in a weird way, but also the pleasure that comes with diving into those memories that can sometimes be hurtful and sometimes be romantic.”

As a way to bookend this opening set of episodes with nods to its “High Fidelity” predecessor, the show prominently features the Stevie Wonder song “I Believe (When I Fall in Love It Will Be Forever)” in the Season 1 finale. In one of the tiny, authentic moments that helps wrap up the various journeys its characters have taken over the course of the season, Cherise learns to play the song on the new guitar that Rob bought for her.

“I think Da’Vine learned to play that song on the guitar maybe 12 hours before we shot that scene,” Kucserka said. As Cherise continues to find her voice, strumming along with her new prized possession, the audience sees she hasn’t quite mastered the chords yet. Even so, it’s a hopeful moment for her to end on. “It was a song that we always wanted to use. It was definitely a call back to the DNA of the movie and the book and everything. And we wanted to find the way to use it that wasn’t the way that they used it in those places.”

“High Fidelity” Season 1 is now available to stream on Hulu.