

Mollie Busta Lange writes:

Since the release of the movie, "The Mule" it seems many of you have questions about my/our experiences with the movie and Clint Eastwood.

Here is the short & condensed version:

Clint Eastwood directed and co-starred in "The Mule." Clint Eastwood watches the "Mollie B Polka Party" and according to the folks at Warner Brothers studios, "He is a Mollie B fan." Mr. Eastwood wanted to know if I would be in his upcoming movie as "Mollie B" along with "my band."

The scene was a grand re-opening of a veteran from a foreign war with Clint Eastwood's character. Not only would I get to sing and play in this scene, Ted Lange and I had the opportunity to submit original songs for the polka band to play in this movie scene.

The scene was shot in Atlanta with several polka people on set including the band SqueezeBox, several Mollie B fans, including my parents, and a few extras. While on set, my personal role was extended from playing and singing to also dancing with Clint Eastwood.

Ted and I attended the premiere in Westwood, California. The movie was released on December 14. Our one-minute, 40-seconds scene, which includes the song that Ted and I co-wrote, "A Day to Say Thank You," is about 40 minutes into the movie.

And my opinion about Clint Eastwood?

He was great to work with. I found him to be very kind, knowledgeable, gentle, and had no airs about him.

Now... if you want to know more... here it is...

On March 26, 2018, I was in the Twin Cities, visiting my brother (Jason Busta) and his wife (Jenni Busta). I was in the back seat of their car, working from my phone, which has become a normal practice for me, when I came across a voicemail left on my work-line from 4 days ago that was unchecked, and another message that came in that day with the same number, a California number.

The messages were from the Warner Brothers Studios producer Tim Moore. He was calling me on behalf of the director of their upcoming film. In the first message he said the director is a big fan, he watches the "Mollie B Polka Party," and requested that I and "my band" would consider being in his upcoming film.

Then in his second message, he said the movie is directed by Clint Eastwood. Moore had been checking out my schedule on MollieB.com and was already looking at when they could get us down to Atlanta to potentially film this scene. I called back the producer that night.... and everything started moving forward.

After about a week or two after the initial contact, I knew I would not be able to handle all the legalities and logistics of the movie with my crazy schedule and invited Ted Lange to handle several aspects. And things started moving forward even faster. New decisions

were made: I would have SqueezeBox with Ted, Joe Poper and Dana Lindblad be “my band” and additionally, Warner Brothers gave Ted and I the opportunity to submit songs for our scene in the movie.

Unfortunately, our life of performing and traveling was not allowed to pause during our preparation days for the movie. In just a few days, Ted and I were leaving for a European trip with Alfred Vrazel & Bernice Vrazel. Therefore, if these songs were going to get written and submitted, we would need to do it before we left.

So, on a SqueezeBox road trip to South Dakota, I wrote four songs and Ted wrote two – while traveling down the road and late at night at the hotel. A few days later, Squeezebox (Ted, Joe, Chris Doszak, and I) rehearsed while Ted recorded our newly composed songs in Onalaska, Wisconsin in my parent's garage. The song, “A Day to Say Thank you,” was strengthened at the last-minute by an addition of a verse, written by Ted. Ted submitted the songs to Warner Brothers for Clint Eastwood to review.

While on our last day of our European trip, Ted and I learned that Warner Brothers wanted legit “Mollie B fans” to be the dancers in the scene. While sitting in the London airport, my wheels started turning and fingers were tapping out emails and notes on my cell phone to get the casting into action. Within a week, I believe WB had received several applications and by the end of May, dancers were receiving confirmation e-mails giving them details about the filming in the Atlanta area. It was exciting to know we get to share this experience with so many “Mollie B” fans and friends, as well as the band SqueezeBox.

Looking ahead, Ted and I were to be performing on a Hawaiian cruise with the Jimmy Sturr Orchestra – a 12-day trip. When we return, we would have less than 24 hours to reshuffle and head to Atlanta for the filming. Therefore, before we left for Hawaii, SqueezeBox had a practice session while on tour, at the Dean & Theresa Christiansen ranch in Nebraska.

We tried arrangement ideas for all five of our songs and by the end of practice knew what we wanted the songs to sound like. And yes, at this time, we still didn't know which song(s) would be chosen for the movie. We just knew Clint Eastwood liked our songs.

While in Hawaii, important calls were made to get some things finalized before our June 13th shoot in Atlanta.

And then came the rush. We left Hawaii. The plane landed in Minneapolis, Minnesota. We stopped in Onalaska, Wisconsin for less than 24 hours. We drove to Atlanta in Ted's Sprinter. I practiced trumpet when I could during the drive. Once we picked up the band members in Atlanta and checked into our hotel, we headed to the location of the shoot and set up like we would for any SqueezeBox dance. The location was a legit and active VFW on the south side of Atlanta.

That afternoon and night, I had a bad headache and felt worn down. After supper, I should have studied the lyrics or music, but I read my bible devos and fell asleep. I woke up less than 2 hours later with a horrible sore throat. I prayed and told God I expected the unexpected: I needed to get through the next day.

Morning came, and my throat and body were aching. But away we went and I did everything I could to mask my pain all day, with the help of advil and tylenol.

On location, which was under tight security, we had our dressing rooms in trailers - every

band member had their own. Food was catered in from California. Make-up and hair were touched up by the professionals. Our costumes were chosen and approved by their head costume designer.

About 2 hours after we arrived, the Mollie B fans/polka dancers started arriving on set and things started feeling like a normal polka dance. The dancers were (this list is not complete)....

Randy & Ashley Thull, Wisconsin
Al & Sue Hembel, Wisconsin (Ashley Thull's parents)
Brian & Cherie Hafeman, Wisconsin (Gary Brueggen's in-laws)
Louis & Pat Vrazel, Texas
Jim & Mary Lou Busta, Wisconsin
Mary L Freehling, Pennsylvania
Rex Collins, South Dakota
Elaine Rosquist, Colorado
Louis Stewart, Texas
Valina Polka & Ross Polka, Texas
Barbara Kennedy Peiser & Hugh Peiser, Texas
Junior & Helen Wurzbach Skolaut
Bruce & Peggy King, Wisconsin
Stanley & Betty Nemec, Texas
Doris & Chris Benson
James "Doc" & Agnes Darilek, Texas
Albert Lepovsky, Pennsylvania
Cynthia Hedrich Loring, Michigan
Tim and Kim Stahl, Texas
Potsie and Nancy, Ohio
Patsy & Steve Linehan, Wisconsin
David Armbruster, New York
Mary Ellen Williams, New York
Jani and Norbert, Oregon
Monica and Jeff Dowd, Florida
Don Lilly, Georgia
Dave & Mary Fevold, Iowa
Mike & Connie Ledvina, Iowa
Arthur Andy French

Additionally, on set were local veterans and Ted's parents, Don (an army veteran) and Betty Lange. We were scheduled to start shooting at 1:00. We knew we would perform "A Day to Say Thank You" and before we started shooting, they approved a second song called "It's Party Time."

Oh, we had fun! We played the two songs multiple times. The band played and sang. The dancers danced. The actors delivered their lines. And we all smiled and laughed.

Our "lunch break" was nice. I was escorted to dinner by some of the Warner Brothers staff and was invited to have a seat next to Clint. Ted and Dana were at our table for most of the meal and my parents came over as we were eating dessert. We had a "normal" conversation about jazz artists, tenor sax players, and music, in general. I have stated this in a past post, but Clint knows his music. He is a composer and instrumentalists, with music that has made it into his films. Not-to-mention, Eastwood studios is the name of the music building at Warner Brothers studios.

Once we returned to the filming, Director Clint Eastwood changed the scene slightly. I now came down off stage near the end of the song, "A Day to Say Thank You," with my saxophone around my neck and microphone in hand to dance with "Earl Stone," the character played by Clint Eastwood. This new placement in the scene (accidentally) gave me a line in the movie in addition to singing and playing instruments.

By the end of the day, the crew had on Mollie B shirts and were enjoying the party like the rest of us. Once the cameras were put away, we decided to keep the party going. SqueezeBox continued the music while Clint Eastwood and Tim Moore, along with a few others sat back and enjoyed the performance and a few dancers danced. It was great!! And I heard nothing but wonderful comments from the crew about the day, the shoot, the dancers, the band, and Clint.

Once we finished playing our extra music at the end, we visited. I wish I could have sat for hours visiting with Clint Eastwood and the others, but after about 20-30 minutes, I knew I had to go. My time of holding back pain was about up. I needed to revisit my dressing room, put away instruments, and leave.

By time I got in the car, the pain was so very present. My friends, Mary and Rex, along with my parents did what they could do to find an urgent care for me. About three hours passed before we found one and I got in to see a doctor. Sure enough, I had 103.1 temperature and strep throat. But I made it through the day (Thank you, God).

Now moving forward: We had very little contact with WB in the next few months, for it was not needed. In October, Ted recorded me saying a few lines for the scene and he worked with the music mix from our scene.

At the end of November, I received a call from Warner Brothers inviting Ted and me to attend the premiere on the ONLY day I had available in the first half of December. We accepted the invite.

A total surprise came on December 6th: I was made aware of the new Toby Keith music video, "Don't Let the Old Man In," with clips from the movie. Clint Eastwood, several dancers, and I made it into one of those clips in the music video.

On December 10th, Ted and I flew to LA. We went to the premiere and enjoyed it just seats away from Diane Wiest, Clint Eastwood, Tim Moore, Toby Keith, the Eastwood family, and several crew members. The theater was nice – similar to one you would find yourself sitting in to watch a Broadway musical.

Later that evening we were able to enjoy the post-premiere party with many celebrities from the film. We enjoyed conversation with Clint Eastwood, Kristina (Clint's girlfriend who is of 100% Czech decent), Tim Moore, Toby Keith and others.

I am not sure where this story will go from here. And maybe this is all. No matter what happens moving forward, I am thankful for all these "Mule" experiences.

And there you have it.... the facts, and a few inside thoughts, behind my/our journey with "The Mule."