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Songwriters on Songwriting: Collaborating Can Help Sow the Seeds of Success

Co-writing helps many top tunesmiths hone their skills.

By Kevin Zimmerman

Collaboration is a key aspect of the trade for many songwriters. The interplay with another writer can serve as a sounding board for ideas and help unlock new areas of inspiration.

"I actually prefer collaboration," says Dave Cobb, former member of the Tender Idols and now a songwriter/producer whose list of credits includes work with Shooter Jennings (Waylon's son) and The Strays, a new group formed by Small Faces founder Steve Marriott's son, Toby. "It's more fun, and it gets you more excited about the music. Writing by yourself can make it kind of hard to judge if what you're doing is crap or not."

Lauren Christy, a member of the highly regarded songwriting/production trio The Matrix (Christina Aguilera, Avril Lavigne, Liz Phair), agrees. "Each one of us comes up with ideas all the time," she says. "Maybe a line or a cool lyric, and we can always rely on our partners to make it better. I feel so confident in my partners, that you can put us into any situation — with Shakira in Spain or Ricky Martin or Avril or Mooney Suzuki or whoever — and we are up to the task. I like having my co-pilots with me. We each on our own have our strong points, but together it really just all comes together."

Songwriter/producer Pam Sheyne (Aguilera's "Genie in a Bottle," Jessica Simpson), who also prefers to work with others, says collaborations can come together in a variety of ways. "Often it's a publisher or a record company — or even just word of mouth — that gets people together," she says. "Sometimes one of us has a title and the other has a track — I do lyrics and melodies so I tend to work with musicians, who usually have a track prepared.

"Inspiration is something that can't just be turned on," she continues. "Some days I have no lyrics at all, just a melody. But quite often we'll have the song completed in a couple of days, and then fine-tune it afterwards."

Grammy-nominated songwriter and Songwriter101.com faculty member Shelly Peiken (Meredith Brooks, Brandy, The Pretenders) notes that the nature of the music business tends to change every six months or so, swinging back and forth between a focus on singer/songwriters and on bringing in outside writers to work with artists.

"When labels are looking to bring a lot of outside songs to artists, I tend to write more with other songwriters, not with the artist themselves — writers who have developed their craft," she says. "There's great joy in that; it's not as much of a difficult challenge because we both know what works.

"But there are other situations where they've never written a song before but their manager

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really know what you're capable of and what works for you? Anyone who says, 'You should work with so-and-so,' do it. As you discover your strengths you'll know with whom you're a better fit. But you must feel you can bring something to the party, even if you're working with someone who has a solid track record. Otherwise, what are you doing there?"

Songwriter101 exclusive by Kevin Zimmerman

Member Comments

How can a songwriter become a collaborator? This is Jamesdb@bellsouth.net

posted by: [James Nelson Bolds Jr.](#) on Nov 27, 04 | 2:55 am

This article was very informative. I personally think when involve in a craft like songwriting, especially for novice writers as myself, It's important to collaborate and work with others. I will help establish style and strengthen writing skills. And yes, it's less of a challenge. What stood out in this article in particular for me was the talk about Shayne joining songwriting clubs and just getting herself out there; and Peiken advice on write with anyone just to get the experience and to become savvy. Makes sense, inexperience can't be choosey.

posted by: [Shen](#) on Jun 27, 05 | 10:56 pm

I have always wanted to write songs but lately I have realized that instead of of relying too much on lyrics, would not get the song anywhere, if there is not a catchy melody... and I'm not a melody guy. Also,howcome is so hard to find song writers(or aficionados)?

posted by: [nesrock](#) on Aug 16, 05 | 1:47 am

Interesting to hear an established writer talk about the networking involved for them in the beginning. I noticed the comment about how a co-writer can make your idea better...ego checked at the door it seems. So many other great points, thanks for the post. Four stars!!

posted by: [Lazy Bee](#) on Sep 01, 05 | 11:19 pm

Nice article. It really brought out the basics of what you should be looking at... as in your own music and not the current most famous band. The keyword there is "current". This article emphasized the importance of realizing this. It is encouraging and informative at the same time. I just started up a new band as the guitarist and songwriter, so I need all the info i can get. Impressive!

posted by: [Danielle](#) on Jul 28, 06 | 7:52 am

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