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INTRODUCTION

“How do I get my songs heard?”

It’s like a mantra chanted ad nauseum by some shadowy cult. Nearly every day, a member of that secret society approaches me and asks that same question, word for word. I may be at church, conducting a workshop, at a birthday party, or winging on an airplane at 30,000 feet; it doesn’t matter. After it becomes known that I’ve had some songwriting success through the years, someone with similar ambitions invariably wants to know, “How do I get my songs heard?”

Sometimes I can see ’em coming from way across the room. You know, those “creative” types, clad in thrift-store chic, a “slept-in” T-shirt, or retro-hippie garb; either young, with a yellow brick road laid out ahead of them and stars twinkling in their eyes, or seasoned, with the bitter, defeated glower that comes from weathering heart-crushing disappointment after soul-withering disillusionment. Then again, sometimes it turns out to be the most unlikely person in the room.

There I was, attending a networking luncheon in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. The facilitator kicked off the mixer in traditional fashion, by asking everyone to introduce himself or herself, with a brief explanation as to why each of us had chosen to spend a long lunch hour in that room. I stood up and said simply, “I’m Rand Bishop. I’m a songwriter, a music producer, and an author. I’m here because I’m interested in Ken’s coaching program.” Then I sat back down.

Our friendly host, Ken Murray, who had gathered this group together to promote his coaching business, urged me to elaborate. “Rand’s had songs recorded by a whole bunch of big stars. Could you tell the group who all has recorded your songs, Rand?”

His question provided permission to talk about my favorite subject: me. So I willingly boasted my nutshell discography, listing some career highlights: recording artist for Elektra, A&M, MCA, and Epic through the 1970s and early ’80s; cuts by Heart, Cheap Trick, Beach Boys, Tim McGraw, Indigo Girls, Vanilla Fudge; Grammy nomination, BMI Awards. “My List,” a five-week Number One for Toby Keith, country radio’s most played song of 2002. I mentioned the book I’d just published, *Makin’ Stuff Up, secrets of song-craft and survival in the music-biz* (Nashville: Weightless Cargo Press, 2008), and my song-craft coaching Website, MakinStuffUp.net.

I assumed I was setting myself up for that question I hear everywhere I go, especially in the greater Nashville area. But, as the rest of the group rose one by one to introduce *themselves*, I began to realize that I had little in common with any of these folks. Officers from three banks each claimed their outfit was the best in Rutherford County. Real Estate brokers touted their personal touch and creative approach. Network marketers did their 30-second pitches. A cherubic chiropractor offered a free session. No one,

CHAPTER 4

Some History

“**T**he first professional songwriter was Stephen Foster,” Bart Herbison often commences his talk, whether he is speaking to a room filled with music business professionals or to a group of legislators. As the Executive Director of NSAI, Herbison is one of the fiercest and most effective advocates on behalf of songwriters. Herbison also feels it’s important that songwriters learn a little about the stepping stones that led tunesmiths to an era when a hit song is capable of making millions. Knowing where we came from gives us perspective, helps us appreciate what we’ve gained so far, and motivates us to continue to fight for our rights to retain control and equity in our own work. Before Stephen Foster, Herbison explains, songwriters were never paid for their creations.

Talk about copyrights! Stephen Foster cranked ’em out, way back in the middle of the nineteenth century: “Beautiful Dreamer,” “Swanee River,” “Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair,” “Camptown Races,” and many, many more. This cat was a virtual hit machine. However, in those long-ago good old days of the mid 1800s, there was no way of recording music. Even if there had been, there would have been no machine that could play it back. The only way songs could generate income was through the sale of sheet music. Pianos were beginning to become more commonplace in the living rooms of America. So, entrepreneurial music publishers took advantage of this growing trend by mass-producing sheet music of current popular songs. Ah, the free market! Retailers who sold sheet music would often hire a piano player to play requests. If a customer were to be interested in a particular title, he or she would pull it from the rack, take the manuscript to the pianist, and ask to hear the arrangement in a spontaneous, live performance. That tune and its written rendition would be exposed to everybody in the store. And that, my friends, was how the hits of the day were made and how those hits made money.

Voila! A new industry was born, founded on popular songs and the sale of sheet music (pianos and player-piano rolls, too, for that matter). This new industry also opened up opportunities to a good number of burgeoning performers: the music business’s first “demo singers,” who tickled the ivories and warbled for rapt, captive audiences in those stores. Somehow, however, the songwriters who had crafted the very songs that were the foundation this new “music business” had been left out of the mix. They had not been invited to share in this booming commerce. Stephen Foster was the first hit songwriter to negotiate single song agreements with music publishers, culling cash for his original compositions. He received a whopping \$100 for “Oh, Susanna.” “Old Folks at Home,” his biggest hit, gained him a grand total of 15 smackers. Soon thereafter, two separate

CHAPTER 6

How Do Copyrights Make Money?

For several years now, I've been speaking regularly to college classes on the topic of music publishing. I am constantly amazed that, even in the top music-business schools, very little emphasis is placed on the ABCs, the rudiments, the bottom-line nitty-gritty of music publishing: the various ways that songs create income. Sure, we all want to be involved with inspired songs, hang out with hip, creative people, get cuts with big stars, hear those tunes on the radio, and see those recordings bullet up the charts and sell millions of copies. That's all good stuff, for sure. However, if you're visualizing those kinds of experiences in your future, then it is of critical importance to have a basic knowledge of just who will be compensating you for your future successes and how.

Basically, copyrights make money through licensing. With very few exceptions (buy-outs, or works for hire), songwriters and publishers do not "sell" songs. Copyrights are capable of creating enormous residual income for generations to come—the key word here being "residual." Once a song has been recorded and released, placed in a film, or integrated into a theatrical production, the royalty and licensing money it brings in for the publishers and composers can pretty much be classified as "passive income." Now, just because the hard labor is over doesn't mean this money is undeserved. The writers certainly did their bit. They began by answering a creative urge. Then, they honed their craft and survived somehow in a very risky profession. They conceived of a concept, composed and refined the music and lyrics. More than likely, they invested time, effort, talent, and resources into producing a quality demo. In addition, assuming the writers are true pros, they played a part in exposing the song to decision makers and pulled whatever political strings they could, before crossing fingers and toes and moving on to the next inspiration, for which, like all the others, there was no guarantee of remuneration.

The publishing company did its part, too, providing the writers with a creative environment and sustenance enough so that they could spend adequate time being creative and getting the song right. Maybe the publisher also offered the constructive feedback that ultimately made all the difference to the final composition. Then, after approving and financing the demo, the publisher probably helped get the song out there and closed the deal. After that, the publisher's job is not over by a long shot, because, whether or not the song makes a dime or ten million bucks, books will need to be kept, registrations and licenses will have to be completed, and statements and checks sent out. That being said, what publishers and songwriters are striving for is residual/passive income. So, as I've already mentioned, selling its copyrights would deplete a publisher's inventory of

CHAPTER 26

Producing Your Great Demo, Part I

I hate nostalgia. Nothing turns my tummy quicker than folks looking back through rosy, retro goggles to some fabricated version of history, pining for a previous era they now see as “a simpler time.” Those Civil War re-enactors for instance. Have they not perused the blood-soaked, disease-ridden pages of *Red Badge of Courage*, seeing how 12-year-old boys were ripped from family farms to have their limbs blown off, while fighting against their own cousins, one “noble cause” against another? Or, worse yet, those cultural oddities who idealize the Middle Ages, clashing broad swords in city parks, chomping on fire-roasted turkey legs, spouting “thee’s” and “thou’s,” and treating their wenches like...well...you know, wenches. How about the plague, you guys? That was a barrel of fun, I’m sure. A simpler time? Thou must kiddeth me! I always found *Happy Days* and *Grease* comical and patently embarrassing. The ’50s? Sure, an exciting, inspired, rebel-without-a-cause brand of music was born, as country music and blues collided to form that tasty peanut butter and chocolate treat, called rock and roll. And, dag nab it, that decade *was* a simpler time. Those pesky colored folks stayed in their place back then, out of the voting booths, in the back of our buses, drinking from their own, separate fountains. Still, they sho-nuff cooperated in providing the world with the roots of great American music: jazz, R&B, and rock and roll. Ah, those were the good ol’ days: “Sunday, Monday, Happy Days...” Everybody sing along!

On the flip side, it’s equally as laughable to hear an old curmudgeon pontificating about how he had to walk ten miles through ten feet of snow every day to get to a one-room schoolhouse. “You kids are soft. You don’t know what hardship is!” Okay, Grandpa. We get it. Life was tough back then. Well, it ain’t all peaches and cream in this modern world, either. And, I kind of doubt we’ll ever look back at 2010, longing for “a simpler time.” There is no doubt about it, we are living in a very complex era, and we’re all coping with an enormous amount of stress. We are constantly being bombarded with input, noise, visuals, and constantly changing technology. Back in the Middle Ages, who could have imagined carrying around a hand-held device that, with a wave of a finger, mysteriously brings full-color images through the air and allows people to communicate instantly from half a world away? Back then, of course, they didn’t even know the Earth was round. Anybody who prophesized such blasphemy would surely have been burned at the stake. But, it is what it is, folks. We deal with the times we live in. Songwriters, this is a reality you are just going to have to accept: If you want your songs to achieve their highest potential, you will have to learn to produce great demos. This wasn’t always so; but it’s the way of this modern, shrinking, and very round world.