



# IT'S ABOUT COMMUNITY

Vaughn Welches, a leading member of the SWS for several years, once told the workshop a little story he had heard about a shop that sells jewelry made from polished stones. A customer asked the owner, "Where do you find all these beautiful stones?"

The owner replied, "I don't find beautiful stones. I find very rough stones, but then I put them into this machine. They tumble against each other in an acid solution and wear off each other's rough exterior until their beauty is exposed."

## Working Together

That story is a metaphor for how our songwriting workshop works. Each songwriter has a gift, the full potential of which is not even known to the writer.

It is popularly assumed that artists best develop their gifts in seclusion, often through suffering - but quite the opposite proves true.

**Our vision is to develop a local community of songwriters which will become a recognized creative epicenter for great songwriting.**

Great art is the product not of sheer talent, but of consummate craft. Craftsmen learn best how to use their tools by studying the work and learning from the experience of other craftsmen. Quite simply, how can an artist know he or she is producing the best without first becoming aware of what is already considered to be the best?

Were we all located in Nashville or some other music capital, we would have plenty of opportunity to study the craft of other songwriters. Several of our workshop members have, in fact, moved to Nashville with our workshop's support and encouragement.

Why is Nashville so attractive to the best songwriters? What makes Nashville "tick"?

## Nashville as Community

The first answer most Nashville residents will give is that Nashville thrives on relationships. What makes it so exciting to live there is that one can run into major writers

**T**he Songwriters Workshop at SouthBrook is a community of songwriters throughout the Dayton and Cincinnati areas who study and work together to improve their songwriting craft to their highest potential. Our vision is to develop a local community of songwriters which will become a recognized creative epicenter for great songwriting.

## What Is the Workshop All About?

The ability to write songs is a gift. When people come together who share that gift, they can build upon a common bond to create close and mutually supportive relationships while developing the gift to its highest possible level.

- **It's about community (page 1)...**
- **It's about learning (page 2)...**
- **It's about caring and connecting (page 3)...**
- **It's about studying the best (page 3)...**
- **It's about performing (page 4)...**
- **...and it's about a song (page 5).**

## Workshop Benefits

- (1) A community of songwriters who support and encourage others sharing the same gift
- (2) Introductory and advanced lessons based on achievable objectives
- (3) Thorough critiques
- (4) An ongoing e-mail discussion list and sponsored web-based systems for file exchange and song postings
- (5) A website and on-line calendar of events
- (6) Performance showcases throughout the Dayton and Cincinnati areas
- (7) Local programs featuring professional songwriters and other music professionals
- (8) Guest industry speakers and special event workshops

We believe that songwriters can communicate emotions through messages that speak for each and every one of us. Songwriting success is not measured by how many people hear our songs or how much money we make, but by the people we touch. Songs take on a life of their own, and it is the songwriter's responsibility to write the best songs possible.

To be the best songwriters requires that we compete with the best. When you write a song, you are competing with both the current greats and the classics – Tin Pan Alley, Lennon/McCartney, or the writers of your own favorite songs. Whether your goal is com-

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# WHERE IS "SOUTHBROOK"?

The Dayton/Cincinnati chapter of the Nashville Songwriters Association International (NSAI) began in the spring of 1993 in Gosiger Hall at the University of Dayton. From there it moved to the former Eisner Studios in Middletown, and then to the nearby Living Word Church's chapel basement. In September 1997, we moved to Centerville's SouthBrook Christian Church (which moved to Miami Township in 2008) as part of its "front porch" ministry. Pastor Charlie McMahan wrote a message for our original vision statement:

"We are all looking for a place where "everybody knows your name" (the theme of the TV sitcom *Cheers*). Home can be considered the first place, work is the second place, but we all need a third place. The 90's brought into existence coffee bars which have become a central component of the American social scene - in part because they fulfilled the need for a nonthreatening gathering spot. The vision of SouthBrook is to be a front porch, a gathering spot - that third place.... The Songwriters Workshop at SouthBrook provides not only that common gathering place, but a unique gathering of people who all share the same gift: the gift of song. Together you can share your experiences, your dreams, your frustrations and your fears, and work together to realize the true potential of that special gift."

SouthBrook provided a generous annual budget to the SWS for community-building activity, as well as leadership training and mentoring for the newly formed SWS leadership team. Without SouthBrook's support, our extensive organization would never have flourished as it has. When space restrictions forced us to move in 2005 and we could stand on our own financially, the leadership team debated changing the name but decided instead to honor permanently the sponsor who helped us build the our great songwriting community.

- Jim Melko, founder, SWS

## The Songwriters Workshop at SouthBrook

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mercial or personal, the Songwriters Workshop at SouthBrook will evaluate your work using the highest of industry standards.

The Songwriters Workshop at SouthBrook includes the Dayton and Cincinnati chapters of the Nashville Songwriters Association International (NSAI). The primary focus of the SWS is to build community; the primary focus of the chapters is to educate the songwriter in the craft and profession of songwriting. We enjoy many benefits through our affiliation with NSAI and are proud to be an extension of such an outstanding organization.

The SWS wants to accomplish through community what the songwriter is unlikely to do alone: to realize his or her full potential, overcome rejection and achieve success with the support and encouragement of others sharing the same amazing gift: the ability to create a song.

- Judy Carnes

## IT'S ABOUT LEARNING

"How do you teach *songwriting*? Can something like that really be taught?" Since 1993 when Jim Melko first began offering the Dayton/Cincinnati NSAI Workshop, that has been one of the first questions asked by people who hear about it for the first time.

The fact is that no one can teach anyone what it takes to create a work of *art*, but *craft* itself can be taught. It is through craftsmanship that art is achieved.

### Art vs. Craft

Art represents a standard of universality and quality in which a creatively conceived work - a painting, a sculpture, a performance, a song, etc. - effectively communicates a perspective on some aspect of what it means to be human. Some works speak as art to a few people while other audiences are unable to see its merits; other works, however, achieve a quality at which nearly anyone who understands its language can appreciate its artistry. For example, an American who hears Japanese music may not understand its appeal, whereas a Japanese citizen may be deeply moved by its composition. In contrast, the

*Mona Lisa* can intrigue someone from any culture or background.

Craft, on the other hand, is the means by which art is achieved - and it *is* teachable. The songwriting palette is more vast than even many songwriters realize. Mastering the language of words requires studying not only rhyme and cadence, but also phrasing, contrast, irony, plot development, and structure, etc. Mastering the language of music, requires studying its three parts - melody, harmonics, and groove or rhythm - and learning to create contrast, use intervals, master dynamics, and achieve prosody.

### Lessons

Advanced lessons are provided during odd-numbered months at the central setting of Dorothy Lane Market in Springboro; follow-up exercises or other mini-lessons are offered monthly at the Dayton and Cincinnati locations. In a typical lesson, we focus on one element of the craft and study all the ways in which it can be employed, as well as hit songs that serve as an example of that element. We also frequently divide into small

groups to experiment with a technique, come back together in the large group to share and compare what we achieved.

Regular lessons provided by your local coordinators will help you learn how to get started with a song, what elements are important to include, and how they should be incorporated into the structure of your song. The more advanced lessons provided by guest speakers or by Jim Melko, our original SWS teacher, will provide instruction in elements and techniques that you are unlikely to learn in any other venue.

### Critique Sessions

On a different night once per month - again in both Dayton and in Cincinnati - we host critique sessions for you to get feedback on your own work as well as to participate in critiquing the work of others. If you want a critique of your own song, come prepared to play it on a recording or on either guitar or piano. Bring at least twenty copies of the lyric so that your fellow songwriters can follow along and write comments. If you have written a lyric

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# IT'S ABOUT CARING AND CONNECTING

It has been said that the three “R’s” of community are Readin’, wRitin’ and Relatin’. While it may be clear that most songwriters are active in Readin’ and wRitin’, the third “R” may not always be so visible. It is this Relatin’ that we want to develop in our community of songwriters.

Any issue of *Billboard Magazine* provides a clear picture of the significant role the relational dimension has played in the writing of great songs. A compilation of three top 40 lists, including Country, R&B/Hip-Hop and the *Billboard* HOT 100, usually shows that over 75% of the songs have more than one writer - some having as many as nine contributing songwriters! So, if the most successful songs require the combined talents of two or more songwriters, then it follows that Relatin’ is not only important - it is a dominant part of the music industry today.

While co-writing is not required for membership in the Songwriters Workshop at Southbrook (SWS), it helps to foster the collaborative spirit that brings gifted writers together, forming the kind of supportive community where creativity can be nurtured and can mature to touch the lives of others.

We have tried in the past to develop a

formal mentoring system for our membership, but as our community has grown in both quantity and quality, our deliberate efforts to mentor one another have actually evolved into a mentoring culture. Many songwriters are fully capable of and active in serving each other as:

- ◆ a resource for information, advice, encouragement, or as just a good listener...
- ◆ a connection of relationship to the songwriter “family” for mutual support and creative ideas...

**The mentoring culture in our community of songwriters is like an ecosystem. We give to and draw from each other those intangible resources that encourage and inspire us to find new ways of expressing the deepest feelings of what it means to be human.**

- ◆ a reference for resources such as books, periodicals, seminars, equipment and other tools of the trade...
- ◆ a reciprocator, willing to pass on to others some of the ideas and tools that contributed to his or her own growth as a songwriter.

There is a very real sense in which we feel a genuine responsibility for the growth of one another. Veteran members are becoming more intuitive about the needs and interests of even the newest songwriters attending a workshop session. Beginning writers are given feedback that takes them to the next level without being overwhelming, while more advanced writers receive more extensive feedback.

At one workshop, twelve songwriters attended an all-critique night. The writers ranged from those only just beginning to write to others who already earning Nashville attention. One had been a staff writer with a Nashville publisher, while another admitted, “This is about ten more people than I have ever performed for.” This group did not hesitate to challenge the experienced

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# IT'S ABOUT STUDYING THE BEST

My dad is the greatest “tin man” (aluminum siding hanger) who ever lived. He has long since retired, but people still seek him out because they recognize the quality of his workmanship. As a teen, I would help him in the summers, and he would show me some of his little “tricks” that gave the job a more finished and refined look than the average house. He is a true craftsman. Even though I didn’t follow in his career path, I gained a great appreciation for the artistry of his work.

As songwriter craftsmen, we get the chance for similar experiences when we...

- ◆ bring professional writers, publishers and songwriting teachers to the Dayton/Cincinnati area for special workshops;
- ◆ get the chance to interact with our Adopt-a-Shop professional writer;
- ◆ and attend symposiums and workshops offered by the Nashville

Songwriters Association International (NSAI) and other organizations.

## Guest Speakers

I’ll never forget when Steve Seskin (“Grown Men Don’t Cry,” “Don’t Laugh at Me,” “I Think About You,” “Daddy’s Money”) taught us his “rule of two’s” - the principle of repeating melody lines with slight variations. As I listened to songs during the next few weeks, I found that every single hit song did this effectively, and every song that didn’t do this had little chance of ever becoming a hit. It’s clearly one of those little “tricks of the trade” that the professional craftsmen are willing to share with us developing writers.

The Leadership Team provides many opportunities to learn tricks and lessons like that one from guest speakers who are professional writers (Jeffrey Steele, Kerry Kurt

Phillips, Jerry Vandiver, Don Henry, Marc Alan Barnette, etc.), songwriting teachers/authors (Jai Josefs, Pat Pattison, etc.), industry professionals, or successful Nashville publishers and pluggers.

Don’t miss these special educational opportunities - we know you’ll enjoy them!

## Adopt-A-Shop Professional

We also have regular interaction with our NSAI “Adopt-a-Shop” professional writers. Adopt-a-Shop Pros are hit songwriters who are willing to travel to regional workshops to provide mentoring, feedback, performances.

Our Adopt-a-Shop Pros will often correspond with us through email, visit us on occasion to provide workshops and lessons, and help us out in many other ways. The Adopt-a-Shop Program provides the chance for members to develop personal relation-

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## It's About Community

(Continued from page 1)

or even artists at the local grocery store or restaurant. What makes it special to live there is that one is rarely rebuffed in approaching that person in those venues. To be successful in Nashville - even if you are *already* successful - you must develop friendships and avoid any reputation for unfriendliness. Nashville is still one of the few places where major deals can begin with a handshake rather than a legally wrangled contract.

Another answer that often surprises first-time visitors is that Nashville is also a place where the songwriter can literally go next door to borrow a cup of sugar and a line. Music Row, despite recent assaults by corporate architects, is still primarily a close network of streets and old family houses that now serve as publishing companies, record companies, and recording studios. It is a neighborhood, and residents can remain only if they get along well with their neighbors.

Strip away the glitter and trace Nashville's history, and what you have is a story of community. There is nothing espe-

cially important about Nashville itself that made it a music capital; it simply was a place where artists came together, formed bonds, and learned from each other.

### The Possibility Here

That, too, could happen in Dayton, in Cincinnati, or in the "Cin-Day Corridor." Given the always-limited 40 spaces on any

**Strip away the glitter and trace Nashville's history, and what you have is a story of community.**

hit chart, the tens of thousands of writers competing for those spaces - including the few who regularly appear on those same charts - and the importance of networking in remote music capitals, is it

likely that any of us will become commercially successful songwriters? While the odds are not insurmountable, they are formidable.

But if...*if*...writers work together in close community, critiquing each other's work, collaborating and sharing our talents, supporting each other, shaping a collective reputation for quality that attracts the attention of Nashville and other music capitals, developing a group identity that even those who

move away will not want to give up, giving the professionals reason to visit us here locally and to leave impressed - is there a better chance that some of us could be commercially successful in *that* environment?

Given that Nashville itself is based on such communal identity, growth and quality, that question has already been answered.

We are the stones in Vaughn's metaphor, and the Songwriters Workshop at SouthBrook is the machine. SouthBrook's own mission statement - which includes the commitment to becoming "an epicenter of creativity" - is the energy that runs the machine.

The fact that songwriting is, as the saying goes, 99% rejection - which includes the criticism we hate but need from our peers - means that our work will never be easy. Then again, that rejection - "No, that's not good enough" - is the acid solution that will combine with the communal rubbing together of the stones to produce the musical gems that people will want to buy and treasure.

The success of our workshop therefore depends on the strength of our community. Present your work to each other and provide constructive criticism, support each other when you encounter rejection, and rejoice at each other's successes. Who can predict what could come from that simple formula?

- Jim Melko, founder, SWS

# IT'S ABOUT PERFORMING

My favorite part about visiting Nashville is going to the clubs to hear the pro writers play their songs, many of which were big hits for major artists. It's neat to hear the songs played as they were when they were originally written. Just listening to those showcases has taught me a great deal about songwriting. NSAI's annual Tin Pan South week is the pinnacle of this tradition.

Songwriter-in-the-round shows are an integral part of the Nashville music community - opportunities for the writers to show off a little in a relaxed atmosphere and try out new material on an audience. Some find co-writers through these gigs; most just have fun and network in the process.

Members of our own workshop host showcases at restaurants and coffeehouses ranging from Cincinnati to Dayton and

Troy. In Batavia, songwriting performances led to the featuring of professional and local writers as the primary entertainment for the annual "Taste of Clermont" town event.

These events have accomplished all the same things as the Nashville in-the-round shows - well, except for the fact that none of us have had any hits...yet! We will continue this tradition because these shows...

- ◆ ...give us opportunities to get our songs heard by the public,
- ◆ ...let us hear an audience's reaction,
- ◆ ...provide practice for presenting our songs in Nashville,
- ◆ ...reinforce our lessons from our workshops,
- ◆ ...inspire other writers to join us,
- ◆ ...help us find good co-writers,

- ◆ ...build our confidence and self-esteem,
- ◆ ...begin to create a buzz around the area about the quality of our work,
- ◆ ...build community in our group, and
- ◆ ...give us a chance to have a lot of fun!

The audiences for these showcases are usually composed of family, friends of the performers, complete strangers who happen to be there, regulars, and fellow workshop members. The presence of fellow workshop members is especially valued because it implies respect for the work and talent of the performers, even though they have probably already heard the songs in the workshop. However, it is also a powerful testimony to the sense of community so central to this group of songwriting friends.

- Nick Cardilino

## It's About Caring and Connecting

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writer with detailed criticism of his song - but the same group gave encouragement and gentle guidance to the writer who had just performed for the first time to a "large" audience of twelve.

This kind of creative sensitivity and energy drives us to seek excellence no matter where we start in the craft. We try to be brutally honest when it is called for, and therefore our praise is even more valuable and appreciated when it is deserved.

The mentoring culture in our community of songwriters is like an ecosystem. We give to and draw from each other those intangible resources that encourage and inspire us to find new ways of expressing the deepest feelings of what it means to be human. We hope that you too will join with us so that we all can reach our highest potential as songwriters.

-Vaughn Welches and Alex Fekkos

## It's About Learning

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without music, be prepared to read it aloud to evoke its cadences.

Depending on what you need, your critique may point you towards the "one big thing" that, if improved, could take you to the next level - or if you have demonstrated some mastery already, you may find your song being picked apart in detail to ensure that it is as well-crafted as possible.

If you are tapped by a member of the leadership team to present your song at the centralized meetings at SouthBrook, you will have your song critiqued by a panel of our best writers. It is considered to be a minor honor to have your song selected for one of these critiques.

## Teaching for Growth

Over time, you may find yourself in a lesson you have heard before. Usually you will nevertheless find yourself gaining new perspectives simply because you are now advanced enough to understand concepts previously beyond your grasp. No matter how far you grow in the craft, you will always have more to learn.

## Talent vs. Skill

Many people believe that talent deter-

## It's About Studying the Best

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ships with successful professionals - without even leaving Ohio!

## Tin Pan South, the NSAI Symposium & Song Camps, and Tunesmith

Finally, we want to send as many of our members as possible to NSAI's Symposiums and Song Camps and to the Tunesmith Seminars. These events allow us to meet other writers at similar levels of craft from all over the world, allowing us to form networks that can lead to "insider" connections. We can also learn from more professionals, present our material to them and receive valuable feedback and suggestions.

We especially want our members to experience Tin Pan South, sponsored by NSAI in the spring. For one week each year, nu-

mines whether or not a songwriter can be successful. They fail to note that talent without skill is no more likely to lead to success than is art without craftsmanship.

How far can you go as a songwriter? In earlier years when Jim Melko talked with almost all new members before they came to their first workshop session, he used the following metaphor.

"Imagine the craft of songwriting as a road leading to a castle representing songwriting success. Because you are a songwriter, you are somewhere on that road. Those who begin at already high levels of craft start off much closer to the castle; others at a more basic level start further back. All of us, however, travel the same road, and all are capable of reaching the castle.

"Talent determines only where you start on that road and how high within the castle you can ascend. The gift of songwriting is what puts you on the road in the first place, and the study of craft is what moves you along it."

However you define success, you will find all of us willing to help you get to your "castle."

See you on the road!

- Judy Carnes & Vaughn Welches

merous clubs throughout Nashville feature performances by the hottest songwriters in the music industry. Tin Pan South is a transformational experience for any developing songwriter.

We will always be encouraging you to visit Nashville and learn from the greats - but when we can, we'll also try to bring some of Nashville to you right here in the Dayton/Cincinnati area!

- Nick Cardilino

# IT'S ABOUT A SONG

Why do people love a song? Does it feed them? Clothe them? Shelter them? No - unless, of course, you're its professional creator. Yet while most people wouldn't list music among their basic needs, few could easily envision a world without songs.

People love songs because the song speaks to them. It expresses something that needs to be expressed, something that reaches out and says, "I'm here! This is me!"

Someone who cries out those words alone in a desert is unheard and unfulfilled. But the beauty of a song is that it comes from the heart of the songwriter, connects with the passion of the artist, and bonds with the soul of the listener.

In essence, a song is an artifact of community, a social bond between souls. It can reach out to a solitary person, and suddenly that person no longer feels alone. It can lead

two strangers to share a moment of peace or joy and a knowing smile. It is born in the emotions and experiences of the writer, colored by the tones and expression of the singer, and fulfilled in the life of the listener.

Through our songs, our workshop community will forge bonds with people we will never even meet. So listen and learn from each other, because your art is in your ability to touch not only your own soul, but the souls of others.

- Jim Melko

**People love songs because the song speaks to them. It expresses something that needs to be expressed, something that reaches out and says, "I'm here! This is me!"**