SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA SONGWRITERS ASSOCIATION

# SVSA music news

JAN 2009

FEATURE ARTICLE:

## The Reality Check

*by James Reilley*

I'm a new member of Nashville's music community. Since moving here, I've been writing with some hit writers, I've become acquainted with 50 or 60 publishers in town, and I'm about to sign my first Nashville staff deal.

From my perspective, I've noticed that the very attitude that brings so many aspiring songwriters to Music City each year ("I can write songs as good as the ones I hear on the radio, so I'm going to Nashville to get myself a publishing deal") is the very reason most of them end up leaving so soon.

Publishers here are constantly being bombarded by amateur songwriters who believe they've written Reba's next # 1 song (many times it's the only song they've written) and think they'll soon be lighting cigars with hundred-dollar bills. Although this kind of fluke success may have happened somewhere, it isn't going to happen to you — so deal with it.

Okay, I know that's harsh, but I think it's better to be startled into a reality check before you come to town rather than after you get here and realize that maybe you weren't quite ready for what you've gotten into. A songwriting career will not happen overnight.

In my case, before I made my first trip to Nashville in April 1997, I had been writing songs for 12 years, released two albums on a major "indie" label (with my band, the New Dylans), toured the United States for five years, been on MTV and several nationally syndicated radio shows and had been favorably reviewed in every major music magazine from Rolling Stone on down. Even after all that, I was still considered a "newcomer" here in Nashville, and it took me two more years of steady, yet relentless, effort to get to this point.

### Ask yourself why

Because breaking through most likely will take you years of hard work, you won't want to invest that kind of time chasing a casual commitment. So, before you take any further action, question your motivation. Why are you writing songs anyway? Is it a compulsion? Is it to say something truly unique with your music? Or is it the seductive dream of making less money than most pizza delivery persons? Yeah, I

### *Next SVSA meeting*

The next meeting of the SVSA will be held

**Wednesday, January 28**

at Third Street Coffeehouse in Roanoke, VA. Doors will open at 7 p.m.; meeting begins promptly at 7:30 and will last until the last song critique is finished, or 10:30 p.m., whichever comes first. Members may submit one song for critique (on cassette or CD) and should provide at least 12 copies of the lyrics. Critiques are limited to members only but non-members and guests are encouraged to sit in on the discussions and exercises.

### *Dues are due*

SVSA dues are $20 per year (January through December) and will be pro- rated for new members. Pay in person at the January meeting or send a check or money order to:

Greg Trafidlo
4050 Bluebird Lane
Salem, VA 24153-8011

know this sounds like some bad 12-step programming, but your success is going to depend on your own motivation, attitude and, of course, talent.

## Pick up a few resources

Once you've decided that you really want to write songs for a living, you'll find that you'll probably want to go to Nashville. (Whether you decide to visit often or go ahead and move there is your call.) The best way to begin is by purchasing a few resource guides. They may be a bit steep, but as my well-worn copies will attest, they are invaluable. The first is a basic guide to Music Row. The next thing I would have is a directory such as Music Row Magazine's IN CHARGE issue. This will give you publishers' names and faces to identify (very important), as well as contact numbers. I would also recommend a business and legal guide to know how publishers work.

## Develop your plan

Next, figure out a plan of attack. Are you coming here strictly to write songs or are you hoping to get an artist deal as well? Your first few trips will be tremendous learning experiences, so don't come to Nashville trying to impress everyone, or I guarantee you won't. Just be yourself and accept any criticism graciously.

Also, are you affiliated with a performing rights organization (PROs) -- ASCAP, BMI or SESAC? If you are, this is the first place I would go. Many times, the people at the PROs can guide you to specific publishers and help you make appointments. Call your PRO a few months before your trip to make them aware of you and your situation. Call The Tennessean (local daily newspaper) and the NashvilleScene (local weekly tabloid) for a sample copy, so you can see which venues in town have Open Mic nights. When I made my trips, I would always play at least one show in the two-week period I was there so that any interested publishers could come and see me (not that they ever do).

## Make appointments before arrival

Another thing is to is to read your favorite CDs or radio trade publications (such as Billboard, GAVIN or R&R) to see who publishes the songs you like. Call these publishers to see if they accept unsolicited material. This is where you use your directories, and ALWAYS ask for someone by name. DO NOT call and say, "I'm a songwriter, and I'd like to drop off a tape" or "Could I speak to someone in creative..?" Be specific and considerate enough to find out about the company before you call.

DO NOT send unsolicited material in the mail! It is an utter and absolute waste of time. I have personally watched publishers throw out boxes of unopened demo tapes. In fact, the majority of publishers don't accept unsolicited material because of frivolous lawsuits from amateur

## Announcements

There's a new **Open Mic** at Buddy's in Salem, Virginia at 928 S. Colorado Ave. It's held every Thursday from 9 p.m. to midnight. They also have great food, beverages, pool tables, and dart boards.

**CDs back in next issue:** Starting with the Feb. 2009 issue of SVSA Music News, we will return to having the CD listing page with members' CDs and writeups. Only paid members of SVSA will have their CDs included in the listing, so if you haven't paid up for 2009 yet, see Greg Trafidlo at the meeting on January 28 or send your check or money order to:

Greg Trafidlo
4050 Bluebird Lane
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songwriters. (You know, "Songwriter X used 'I Love You' in a song, and I once sent you a song with 'I Love You' in it . . .")

Be understanding and polite, and if you have a track record in the music industry, use it. ("I know you aren't accepting unsolicited material right now, but I used to play in band Y, and we toured with Star Z . . .") Often, being understanding and polite will at least get you an opportunity to drop off tapes. It's all about relationships here, as it should be anywhere.

## See and be seen

Once you get to town, go to every Open Mic, Bluebird show, Douglas Corner show, or Writers Night that your budget will allow. You can't swing a cat in Nashville without hitting a writers night. When you're out, you will see people in the industry, and if you've read your directory, you may recognize them. Say a polite hello and introduce yourself. Often, big wheels don't spin so fast when they're not behind their desks. In an informal setting, you have a better opportunity to state your case and they, likewise, have the opportunity to bail on you quickly if they want. I have met so many people this way. You are also perceived as being part of the community, and this is very important. Be yourself, and DO NOT be pushy. DO NOT hand someone a demo at a show and expect them to hold on to it for the whole show. Put yourself in their shoes. Be considerate.

Also, be polite to everyone -- today's receptionist is tomorrow's creative director. I know people who were "gophers" when I started coming here in April of 1997 who are now decision-makers. The most important thing to do is enjoy yourself. You will see and hear things in Nashville that you will never see anywhere else. Don't be frustrated or discouraged if you don't accomplish everything you wanted to the first time. You can always make another trip.

## A word of warning . . .

Nashville publishers prefer to get to know you very well before they do ANY business with you, and are very big on establishing and nurturing relationships. This has always made perfect sense to me, but many people today want immediate gratification. Chances are, if someone is offering you something at your first meeting, you should run, not walk, the other way. NEVER sign anything without a lawyer's advice, and NEVER EVER pay any money to have someone publish your songs.

Breaking into the business won't happen overnight, but if you're committed, prepared, and patient, Nashville will welcome you with open arms -- eventually!

*(James Reilley is a songwriter, performer and co-founder of the band the New Dylans.) This article is reprinted courtesy of Nashville Songwriters Association International.*

SVSA DISCLAIMER: The ideas and opinions contained in this newsletter are intended to be helpful to songwriters. The companies and organizations mentioned are believed to be legitimate; however, SVSA does not endorse any products or services and offers no guaranteed success based on the content.

We are always looking for articles about SVSA members and articles of interest to the songwriting community. Send articles and information to the Editor, Kathy Acosta, at 125 Polk St., Radford, VA 24141, or svsa@davidsimpkins.com. SVSA is a non-profit organization.

SVSA Board Members:
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**SVSA**
**P.O. Box 698**
**Salem, VA 24153**

## About Classifieds:

SVSA Music News free classifieds may be submitted by members only. Non-members may submit classifieds at $10 per listing per month. All classifieds must be music-related. Members, e-mail your classifieds to Kathy Acosta by the second Tuesday of the month or mail them to Kathy Acosta, 125 Polk St., Radford VA 24141 by the second Tuesday of the month. Non-members send your classifieds (and your payment) by the second Tuesday of the month to Greg Trafidlo, 4050 Bluebird Lane, Salem, VA 24153-8011

## About Announcements:

SVSA members may list music-related announcements in the SVSA Music News. E-mail them to svsa@davidsimpkins.com by the second Tuesday of the month or mail them to Kathy Acosta, 125 Polk St., Radford, VA 24141 by the second Tuesday of the month. Announcements from members will be e-mailed to members as soon as they are received and, if still timely, published in an upcoming issue of the SVSA Music News. Announcements from non-members will be held for publication in an upcoming issue of the SVSA Music News.

## Message From The President

Howdy, fellow songwriters! I encourage you to read this and all issues of the SVSA Music News thoroughly. This is the best way, other than face-to-face opportunities at our monthly meetings, to communicate with members, non-members, and other interested parties. I'd like to see this monthly publication become a bit more lively and more inclusive in the months ahead. Your input is vital. If something of a musical nature that may be of interest to our readers comes up in your world, please let all of us in on it. Blow your own horn if you must -- here's a great place in which to do it! And, if you will, please take time to read and note the specifics for submitting material.

Let's all work to contribute to a timely, informative, and entertaining newsletter.

*— David Simpkins*

## About articles and other written contributions:

SVSA members write feature articles for the SVSA Music News throughout the year. Members can submit other articles and features at any time. Non-members may also submit articles and other written contributions but their inclusion will be subject to time and space constraints. All articles may be edited for space considerations and will be edited, as time allows, for spelling and grammar. Remember -- it'll have YOUR name on it, so do it up right before you submit it for publication. E-mail submissions by the second Tuesday of the month to svsa@davidsimpkins.com or mail to Kathy Acosta, 125 Polk St., Radford, VA 24141.

## About Members' Gig Listings:

SVSA members may submit their upcoming performance schedules for publication in the SVSA Music News. The submissions will be printed as submitted; the more information you provide, the more likely the response. Please follow this format:

**Date of Gig**
**Member's Name**
**Name of Venue, Time**
**Additional Information**

E-mail gig listings by the second Tuesday of the month to svsa@davidsimpkins.com, or mail to Kathy Acosta, 125 Polk St., Radford, VA 24141.

# SVSA Performing Member Gigs

## Barbara Martin

**Thursday, February 5:** 12-1 p.m., Barbara solo, "A Little Lunch Music," Staunton Public Library, 1 Churchville Ave., Staunton, Virginia. For information: (540) 332-3902.

**Friday, February 27:** 8 p.m., Barbara solo, Fredericksburg Songwriters Showcase, Pickers Supply Concert Hall, 902 Caroline St., Fredericksburg, Virginia. Barbara with three other songwriters in a round robin. Suggested Donation $10.00; kids & students $5.00. Call (540) 898-0611 for information.

**Saturday, March 21:** 8 p.m., Barbara Martin Quartet with Liz Barnes, piano; Bob Bowen, bass; Phil Riddle, drums; and classic blues and ragtime trio, Sheryl Warner and the Southside Homewreckers. Women in Blues and Jazz, Fine Arts Center, Blue Ridge Community College, Weyers Cave, Virginia. For information see www.brcc.edu/fac/performances.htm. Admission $15; $10 for students and seniors.

**Sunday, March 29:** 3-5 p.m., Barbara Martin and Mac Walter, Cokesbury Concert Series, Historic Cokesbury Church, Town Square, Onancock, Virginia. For more information: Carolyn Mayers, (757) 787-3885.

## Greg Trafidlo

**Friday, Jan. 30:** The Cabaret, Staunton, Virginia. Solo, sharing the show with the Boogie Kings and Hound Dog Hill.

## Frank Dieter

**Friday, January 30:** Fredericksburg Songwriter Showcase; 8:00 p.m. at Picker's Supply Music, downtown Fredericksburg, Virginia.

**Friday, February 6:** The Griffen Bookshop and Coffeebar; 7:30 p.m., 204 Caroline St., Fredericksburg, Virginia.

**Friday, March 17:** Third Street Coffeehouse (solo), Roanoke, Virginia.

## Marc Baskind

**Every Tuesday 7-10:30 (with exceptions):** J&J Social Hall, Burnt Chimney, Va.

**Every Wednesday 6-9 (with exceptions):** Del Sol, Main Street, Lewisburg, West Virginia.

Friday, Jan. 30: Annie Moore's, Roanoke, w/Caravan 8-11.

**Friday, Feb. 6 and Feb. 20:** Annie Moore's, Roanoke, w/The Source 8-11.

Friday, Feb. 27: Annie Moore's, Roanoke, w/Caravan 8-11.

## David Simpkins

**Friday, Jan. 30:** Third St Coffeehouse, Roanoke, Virginia. Solo show.

**Friday, May 1:** First Friday Coffeehouse, Martinsburg, West Virginia. With Greg Trafidlo, Mike Pearrell, and Kathy Acosta.

**Third Street Coffeehouse** is located in Trinity United Methodist Church at the corner of Third St. and Mountain Avenue in Old Southwest Roanoke. The coffeehouse is open 7:00-10:00 every Friday night, offering live music and socializing in a smoke-free, alcohol-free environment. Open Mic starts at 7:00; sign up at the door. Main act starts around 8:00 until 10:00 pm. No cover charge; we pass the hat for musicians. Supervised children are welcome. Drinks, snacks and desserts are sold. Established 1987.

### *Upcoming at Third Street Coffeehouse*

Jan 23 - Bill Payne

Jan 30 - David Simpkins

Feb 6 - Justin Duncan

Feb 13 - Grounded Granite

Feb 20 - Ron Bergeron

Feb 27 - Sherwood (Robyn Dobyns & Marian McConnell)

Mar 6 - John Powell

Mar 13 - The "How to Be" Band

Mar 20 - The Good Times Sound

Mar 27 - Clinton Collins & The Creek Boys

Apr 3 - Brooke Campbell

Apr 10 - Mark Spangler

Apr 17 - Frank Dieter

Apr 24 - David & Ann Ledgerwood

May 1 - LaLaLand (Steve Langston and Friends)