

WHY CO-WRITING SONGS CAN BE VERY HELPFUL

(by Bronson Herrmuth)

If you look at the current issue of Billboard magazine and check out the radio play list charts closely, you will quickly notice that the vast majority of the songs you see charted there were cowritten by two, three or more writers. There are many reasons for this including the old saying, "two heads are better than one" being high up on the list. I have cowritten with songwriters who write 10-15 songs a week on a regular basis while cowriting with a half dozen (or more) different songwriters. They write with one songwriting partner in the morning, another one in the afternoon and a different one in the evening on a daily basis. They will actually go on the road with famous artists and write with them while they are on tour. It is normal for these writers to write hundreds of songs in any given year with most of those songs being cowritten.

My first cowriting session was inspired by a trip to Nashville in 1983 and a meeting with a publisher who had expressed interest in publishing one of my songs but only if it was rewritten. He loved the melody but was not sold on the lyrics so he left it up to me. Rewrite and get a publishing contract, no rewrite, a pass. I went back home and tried several times to rewrite my song but I just couldn't do it. I really did like it just the way it was and I couldn't come up with anything that I felt made it a better song. I was fortunate to know a very successful songwriter named Johnny McCollum who lived in my hometown in Iowa so I called him, explained the situation and he graciously agreed to cowrite with me. (Thank you Johnny)

I was still very apprehensive about the thought of changing what I had written in any way and Johnny realized this immediately. He gave me a wonderful lesson on how to cowrite that day and over the next few days as our cowriting relationship and friendship progressed. We both agreed to leave my song just like it was and actually wrote a whole new song. We just rearranged the chord structure, using the same chords that the publisher had shown an interest in. A different melody, brand new words but in the same key, style, tempo of my other song. The publisher loved it and his company did end up publishing that song, and still does. I have went on to write many songs with Johnny and one of our songs was recorded and released by the group Mason Dixon in 1985. That song was called "Christmas Memories" and was actually a 3 way write with hit songwriter Dan Mitchell. Johnny and I wrote the lyrics and Dan wrote the music and sang the demo. Another of our cowrites entitled "Outlaw On The Run" was recorded and released by Michael Mason in 1996 on his CD, Say You're Gonna Stay.

Here are some of my thoughts on the subject of cowriting:

1. When you write with other songwriters you open up the door to your finished songs being heard and pitched by more people. Your co-writer(s) and anyone working with them will now be pushing your finished cowrite too. It enables your song to be heard by a lot more people when you cowrite which of course increases your odds for success. This really comes into play if you are fortunate enough to write with already established successful songwriters who have publishing deals or just lots more connections in the business than you do.

2. When you write with other songwriters you have someone you can bounce ideas back and forth with. You get stumped and they get inspired which in turn helps you stay motivated. Your cowriter(s) can also give you ideas and help you think about things from a different perspective than your own. This aspect really comes into play if you write with someone of the opposite sex. As I am sure anyone reading this article can relate to, men and women tend to come at the same subject from completely different viewpoints.

3. I know songwriters who get very motivated creatively by knowing they have a cowriting session coming up. They find the meeting of the minds very inspiring and use this inspiration to fuel their solo writing. Cowriting keeps them focused and pushes them to keep writing, it gives them a reason to write. When you agree to cowrite with someone it is very important to always have something new to contribute to the relationship. If you don't, chances are your cowriter won't want to keep writing with you.

4. When you write with other songwriters you can explore musical styles, or genres that you would never approach yourself. It is very cool to listen to a song you wrote in a musical style you would never have been able to create writing alone. As a professional songwriter your value is determined by the size and commercial strength of your personal song catalog so the more great songs you have the better. Having songs you have written in many different styles and tempo's can again increase your odds of having success as a songwriter. If an Artist is looking for a blues song, you have one. Or a rock song, or a waltz, or a two step or a big ballad, you have one. You get the idea. Your odds for success go way up the more songs you have.

5. All of us are limited as songwriters by our ability to play our instrument, or our ability to sing, our range, our musically knowledge and training. When you write with other songwriters you can open up incredible paths for your music that you would never explore alone. I know a very successful songwriter that wrote for 10 years, writing with his guitar and writing alone, with no success. His publisher introduced him to a piano player who was also a better singer than he was and they started cowriting together. Hit after Hit soon followed and he attributes it to his being able to focus on the lyrics and not having to create the music too and of course his cowriters ability to play piano and sing so well.

6. Preparation for a cowriting session is very important as is punctuality. Don't be late and show up prepared. Have several of your in progress, or unfinished song ideas ready and with you to bring to the table as a starting point. When cowriting you start by bouncing your ideas back and forth with your co-writer and then both agree on the song you want to work on. Be prepared also to change what you have written. It does you no good to write with someone if you intend to ignore their ideas and input. It can take some getting used to when someone starts rewriting your "baby" but keep an open mind and be ready for it because it will happen. Probably a lot when you first start out, especially if you are cowriting with someone with more experience at songwriting and cowriting than you have.

7. Cowriting is a great way to learn how to write songs professionally if you are a new songwriter. Writing with more experienced songwriters teaches you quickly some of the do's and don'ts that exist in the world of pro songwriting. My first gig on Music

Row in Nashville I was fortunate to be put right in the middle of a staff of five very good songwriters, all of whom had previous commercial success with their songs. Cowriting with them one by one I learned a lot about songwriting quickly, the first thing being most pro songwriters do not like to write with new songwriters. Pretty much the only way they will do it is if you can show them you have really good song ideas, that you can write and that you are willing to defer to their expertise when necessary.

8. Sometimes cowriting doesn't work. You just don't relate to the person you are attempting to write with and nothing you can say or do will change that. If you find yourself in this situation my advise is that you should gracefully and politely find a way to call it a day, even if you just started. Cowriting tends to be a very intimate relationship and for it to work there has to be communication. If you don't like your cowriter personally it is not easy to write with them and pretty much defeats the purpose of cowriting together. If you cowrite with very many people this will happen to you so don't be surprised when it does, just find a way to make a quick exit and don't pursue the relationship again.

9. Never hesitate to discuss writer share percentages with a cowriter. Have a clear cut agreement when you cowrite with someone relating to how you are going to divide the rights to the song you are writing together. Industry standard is if you sit down with someone to create something brand new, no matter who had the original song idea, the split would be 50/50. If there are 3 writers, you split 3 ways, 4 writers, 4 ways, and so on. Depending on the situation, the amount of contribution by each cowriter to the song it might be 60/40 or 40/20/40 or 90/10. Whatever you decide with your cowriter(s) that the percentages of writer share should be, you have to discuss and agree on this before you start writing together. The same thing applies to the publishing percentage shares of your cowritten song, if you don't have a publisher.

10. Be sure and bring a pad or two of paper and plenty of pencils or pens to any cowriting session. Have the song ideas you are bringing typed out and have several copies of each idea with you. Never forget to show respect to your cowriter(s). If you don't have respect for what they have to say, don't write with them. Listen to their ideas with an open mind. If you don't like the direction your song is taking as you work on it with your cowriter, tell them so and maybe even move on to another song and leave that one the way it is. Communication is essential so say whats on your mind. Bring plenty of ideas and be ready to switch gears often with a good attitude. It can be a lot of fun and very productive when you find the right cowriting partners. Successfully cowriting with someone is a very rewarding experience and usually leads to long lasting creative and personal relationships. Just like the one I have with my long time amigo and cowriting partner, Johnny McCollum. Cowriting, I recommend it highly.

Article Source: <http://www.songrepair.com/onthesubjectofcowriting.htm>

Learn by working with experienced writers, says Jake Bugg (July 2013)

Co-writing and building relationships with more experienced writers is one of the best ways to grow as a songwriter, says British singer-songwriter Jake Bugg.

He topped the UK album chart in 2012 with his platinum-selling debut album, *Jake Bugg*, which was largely co-written with established songwriters Iain Archer, Matt Prime and Crispin Hunt.

Bugg has recently been working on tracks for his second studio album with legendary producer Rick Rubin. The new album will again involve collaborations with seasoned songwriters, including some of the top writers in Nashville.

Bugg, 19, recently told the UK's *Daily Star* newspaper: "I'm still very young, and I believe I should soak up what I can learn from people with more experience. I'm taking it all on board, so I can step into writing on my own eventually."

There is no doubt that collaborations can help you to learn how to write better songs much faster. Working with a co-writer with talents that complement your own can help to take you and your songs to a much higher level. As Brian Eno once put it: "Every collaboration helps you grow".

An experienced songwriting partner can also help to keep you focused. He or she may question your lyrics when you're under-achieving, and introduce fresh ideas and new chords that may take your songs to new places.

And if you've got a great idea for a song but you just can't seem to finish it, an accomplished co-writer may be able to listen objectively to what you've got and come up with the missing link. He or she may introduce lyrical or melodic ideas that would never have occurred to you while you're still honing your own skills.

As Robbie Shakespeare of long-time reggae duo Sly and Robbie recently remarked: "If you have two sets of ears, you can hear more."