



Nashville's Best-Kept Songwriting Secret

Music Row tunesmiths have recently been sharing a hot tip: any writer who publishes with BMI can book free time at the company's Nashville songwriting studios.

"Songwriters are always looking for someplace to write," says BMI Nashville Vice

President Roger Sovine. "A lot of these people have their own songwriting setups at home, but they like collaborating here because it's such an in-between, neutral spot. Our two songwriting rooms are booked solid."

Each room features a Yamaha PSR8000 portable keyboard. "The 8000 is so writer-friendly, it's unbelievable," says Sovine. "It's like having your own little studio in the shape of a keyboard. Writers love using them, because they get all sorts of ideas from the 8000's different rhythm feels. And afterwards it's easy to save everything to a floppy disc, which the writers can take to another studio to overdub guitars and all that stuff. It's an incredible piece of equipment."

The BMI office also loans out several smaller PSR740 keyboards. "Songwriters sign up to borrow them like library books," says Sovine. "We loan them out for two weeks at a time. We've got one guy, Chris Lindsay, who wrote this huge song, 'Amazed,' on his. It was the #1 Country and Adult Contemporary record for weeks. Chris has kept that damn keyboard for seven months now!"

Sovine has seen the same writers return day after day hoping to finish a single song and lucky stiffs who have knocked off three good tunes in a single afternoon. "Some days you have a great idea, and some days you just make the coffee," he laughs. "These guys and girls just go in there and see what they can come up with."

And what might you see if you peek behind a studio door? "Not much," says Sovine. "Just the keyboard, a couple of stools, a coffee table, blank yellow legal pads, and sharp pencils. That's how songs start after all: with a blank sheet of paper."

When we met with Roger after the Yamaha PSR keyboards had been at BMI for a short while, he told a story that we would hear repeated several times that week while visiting Nashville. He said that a couple of well-known songwriters had written a tune and created the demo almost entirely on the PSR8000. When they took the resulting DAT to a major producer, he said he liked the tune. He also asked for the name and number of the guitar player they used. Roger went on to say that the writers were afraid that this producer would be embarrassed if they told him the guitar player came from one of the patterns in what many have thought of as a silly polka machine. They wanted to get their tune pro-

duced, after all. They made up a face-saving fib on the spot and said that this particular guitar player had a drinking problem and had left town with no forwarding address.

Later that week we heard the story again and again, with different writers and, each time, a different instrument. This Yamaha PSR keyboard had developed its own mythology in this songwriter's town.

The PSR9000 (replacement for the 8000) can produce tracks so authentic, so efficiently, that it becomes a songwriter/arranger/producer's demo factory. The quality and realism is startling. It definitely ain't no polka machine!



Marvin Hammett a.k.a. Slam-G's

Finds Beauty in Bubble Gum

He chews bubble gum onstage. He sings the theme from "The Flintstones" during his drum solo. A box of crayons inspired the colors of his Yamaha Beech Custom kit. But Slam-G's says that being Britney Spears' touring drummer isn't kid stuff.

In fact, the 37-year-old fusion and gospel veteran insists that the enforced simplicity of the gig has improved his musicianship. "I'd always focused on my chops," he explains. "I could play really fast, but my groove was suffering. But

when you can only play 2 and 4 on the snare, you have to learn how to make 2 and 4 as funky as it can be. Now I've got my pocket right where I want it."

Slam-G's (a.k.a. Marvin Hammett) has played on a Yamaha set before much of his current audience was born. "On the first Yamaha kit I picked out," he recalls, "I just kicked the bass drum, and I'd never heard anything so warm and round in my life. I didn't even have to hear the rest of the set - I knew I was going to buy it."

Aside from each drum being a different color, Slam-G's' current Yamaha kit isn't all that different from the one he used during his stint with the Providence, Rhode Island, fusion outfit T.O.J. He opts for compact drums, tuned relatively tightly. "Smaller toms 'sing' a little more," he says. "I go for 8", 10", and 12" on the top, 14" and 16" on the floor and a 22" bass drum." The only recent change is the snare: "Coming from the fusion school,

I was really into super-tight piccolo snares. With machine-gun, single-stroke rolls, you want that definition. But that sound just doesn't work in big venues. It's loud and sharp, but the tone is too short. Now I've really grown to like that warmer sound of my Yamaha Maple Absolute snare."

Slam-G's says he doesn't worry that some of his jazz peers may not take his current gig seriously: "There will always be people who don't see pop as an honorable sort of music and I'm not going to try to change their opinions. But now I wonder if I took the wrong way around by learning to solo before I had my pocket down. All the chops won't get you gigs. You've got to be able to just lay it down."



Slam-G's with Britney Spears



Just added to his touring arsenal, Slam-G's is now incorporating Yamaha electronic drums. Utilizing the DTX2.0 brain and pads he will be triggering loops, special effects and acoustic sounds to reinforce his set.

Yamaha