

TONY HASELDEN DOESN'T BELIEVE IN WRITER'S BLOCK.

"THERE'S AN OLD SAYING," SAYS THE AUTHOR OF SUCH country smashes as Michelle Wright's "Take It Like a Man" and Keith Whitley's "It Ain't Nothing." "Writers write.' If you write something bad, you file it away so no one sees it. But you need to keep writing till you find the magic. You won't find it by not writing!"

For Haselden, that means 10:00 am songwriting sessions at least four mornings a week. "That way," he says, "you have a simple choice. You can coast and go to lunch, or write a song. I wish there was a mountain I could go to every day to find inspiration. But you never know where the inspiration is going to be."

Haselden divides his time between Nashville and his native Louisiana, where he first achieved success in the late '70s as guitarist for the Southern funk band Le Roux. The group still gigs several times a year. "It's really just an excuse to stand in front of big amps and have fun," he chuckles.

Le Roux's music is an unpredictable gumbo of many styles, yet Haselden says he had no trouble adapting to the conventions of Nashville songwriting. "The songs I wrote for Le Roux always leaned more toward country than funk," he recalls. "When I got to Nashville, I learned I was actually closer to country than I realized. It was a very natural transition."

Yet Le Roux's eclecticism echoes in Haselden's music. "The hits I've written have been in a wide variety of styles," he notes. "They were all country songs, but they also had elements of pop, Texas swing, traditional country and rhythm-and-blues. I don't have one obvious style, and I have a low tolerance for boredom. Sometimes that's a blessing. Sometimes it's a curse. But overall, I'm happy about it." With good reason—besides the aforementioned tunes, Tony has written hits for Shania Twain, George Strait, Shenandoah, Colin Raye, and many others.

Tony says he keeps up with the marketplace by listening to the radio, but never attempts to copy what he hears. "I just listen for things that make me turn the radio up. But I've never been much of an 'assignment' writer. If someone says, 'Tim McGraw is looking for



a hit,' my reaction is usually, Well, aren't we all? So I like to be aware of the market and try to write songs I like that might fit into it, but I rarely aim songs directly at the market or a particular artist."

Often the songs closest to Haselden's heart are not the hits. "Don't get me wrong," he says. "I love the popular ones to death! They gave me my house and cars, and they put my daughter through college. But the ones I enjoy the most step outside the mainstream by being musically challenging or lyrically intriguing." He cites as examples "Who-Da Baby Daddy," a song about Christ's birth, and "She's Still Here," a tale of a nerdy guy who gets picked up by a female serial killer. "I'm not holding my breath for George Jones to cut that one," deadpans Tony.

Haselden likes to capture his ideas on a Yamaha digital workstation. He's a longtime fan of the AW4416, and he recently checked out the new AW16G. "They're powerful and portable, and they make things simple for me. I wasn't real computer savvy, but it didn't take me long to learn—You just hit a couple of buttons and go. It saves so much time, you might get four songs out of a writing session instead of just three. It's hard to imagine going without one now."

Tony says the Yamaha recorder is also helpful for times when inspiration doesn't come knocking. "Instead of throwing up my hands and watching TV, I can at least stay in the medium by working on arrangements or instrumental parts. I have a whole catalog of instrumental tracks waiting for the right lyric. Sometimes I listen back to them, and the right lyric idea comes to me."

But Tony hastens to point out that his most important tools aren't high-tech. "I call what I do 'wits and wood.' There's a pencil, a piece of paper, and a guitar. I just sit down with them and think something up."

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Tony Haselden: Writing, Not Waiting