

Though originally from Texas, keyboardist Dean Sams of platinum-selling country band Lonestar feels right at home in Nashville. "It's an inspiration having so many great songwriters in the area," he says. "The culture of collaboration and co-writing here is unlike anywhere else. Co-writing is really what makes Nashville a great songwriting community."

Dean Sams of Lonestar: Songs for the Homeland

LONESTAR'S HITS INCLUDE THE CROSSOVER LOVE SONG "Amazed" and the sentimental, family-oriented "I'm Already There," which became immensely popular among American military men and women departing on active duty. "[Lonestar vocalist] Richie McDonald wrote that one," says Sams. "That song sent us down a different path as far as what this band sings about. It's inspiring to me as a songwriter to know there are other things you can write about, outside of love and loss of love. You can write about your family and your kids, and still be accepted."

"I'm Already There" elicited an overwhelming emotional response from the American public. "I remember one moment in particular, when we were performing that song on the USS Harry S. Truman for a TV special," Sams recalls. "We were singing that song, and they were showing all these images on giant video screens behind us, of military men and women saying goodbye to their families. A military person holding his newborn baby just before they shipped him out, things like that. It was pretty powerful. And I remember looking out over the audience, at these thousands of military men and women, and there wasn't a dry eye in the house. People were singing the words, and holding up their lighters. Seeing how the song affected these people

in a positive way was probably the most emotional and inspiring night I've had as an artist."

Sams and his bandmates frequently write together, as well as with other collaborators. "Having a co-writer helps me be objective," says Dean. "Sometimes you can get so wrapped up in something. But when you're inside a tornado you really don't know what it looks like on the outside. I may not see something that will make the song better until they point it out, and then I go, 'Oh, wow, why didn't I think of that?'"

Before going into a songwriting session Sams likes to do his homework. "I generally come in with the hook and melody already in my head, if not the chorus written already," he says.

But sometimes, Sams notes, inspiration runs on its own schedule. "The first cut I ever had as a songwriter was a song on Joe Diffie's *Life's So Funny* called 'I'm Willing to Try.' I was writing with two legendary writers, Wendell Mobley and the late John Jarrard, and I was pretty intimidated to go in there with them, so I stayed up late the night before trying to come up with something, but I just couldn't find anything I liked. I went to bed, but I woke up from a deep sleep at 2:30 AM with the entire music part of the song in my head. I ran downstairs as fast as I

could and got it on tape. The next day, when I went into the songwriting session, John and Wendell said, 'I hope you got something, because we really don't have anything today.' I played it for them, and John just rolled out the lyrics for the first verse as matter of factly as I'm talking to you. For me, that was the first time music and lyrics just exploded together to make something powerful and new."

Sams describes his Yamaha PSR keyboard as the perfect songwriting tool. "I really wanted a keyboard for my writing appointments that had great sounds and recording capabilities, but that was easy to tote around. As a keyboard player, I always found myself wishing that I'd started out as a harmonica player because of how much easier it'd be to carry around! When I hooked up with the PSR, it was the first time I'd heard a keyboard that small that sounded that good and had so many different features. I started using it for every writing appointment. It has all those rhythm sounds and other features, which can help inspire song ideas a lot of the time. I can't think of a time I've played one of those rhythms and something hasn't come from it. This keyboard has been instrumental in helping me write some great songs."

Lonestar just finished a greatest hits record, which includes three new tracks plus a special remix of "I'm Already There." After touring this summer, the band returns to the studio. "That, and writing new songs, and trying to be a good dad and husband—that's pretty much my world," concludes Sams.



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