

Some musicians seem to have been born with Nashville style. Others have to cultivate one.

YOU CAN FILE KEYBOARDIST AND SONGWRITER EDDIE KILGALLON in the latter category. "I'm a native New Yorker who moved to Nashville in '93," he says. "I had to get accustomed to some things, like putting cornbread in your beans. But a songwriter friend had invited me down, and as soon as I put on headphones in the studio and started playing, it was a life-changing moment. I knew I was moving to Nashville."

Success came swiftly. Kilgallon became a key member of the country vocal group Ricochet, who went on to score three Top Ten hits (including the smash "Daddy's Money"). He's also written for many other artists, and was part of the team that wrote "One Night at a Time," one of George Strait's biggest hits. The tune hogged the #1 slot on the country charts for five weeks and was named ASCAP's Song of the Year for 1997.

to lay down whole tracks – drums, bass lines, keyboards. Or just put on the auto-accompaniment and get down the basics of a song with one finger."

Kilgallon says he gravitates toward two writing methods: "Sometimes I have a definite lyric, hook or melody in my head when I start, and I work it out on the PSR. Other times, I just turn it on and go fishing. I scroll through style after style, changing keys and chord patterns, just looking for a groove. Eventually I'll start singing things over the top of it all, and, when I start to get something, I record it. It's a great musical sketchpad, too — you can save everything to disc and never forget your ideas."

Kilgallon currently tours with hit country act Montgomery Gentry, playing keys and sax and contributing background vocals. His stage rig includes a Yamaha Motif 6 synthesizer. "I use it for a lot of the auxiliary sounds, like

From New York to NASCAR

One taste Kilgallon acquired in Nashville was a passion for NASCAR racing. He was on tour with Ricochet when he learned of the death of racing great Dale Earnhardt. "We were all big fans, because we'd traveled around the country singing our a cappella version of the national anthem at many, many NASCAR events. The news floored us, like it did everyone who was involved with the sport. So as soon as I got home, I wrote a song called 'It's Sunday Soon.' The song takes the voice of Dale talking to his son, Dale Jr., and telling him he's going to be strong. I recorded it on my Yamaha PSR keyboard, just a scaled-down version with harmonica, piano, and strings. I sent an mp3 of my track to a couple of people, just to share it, and the next thing I knew, they were playing it all over the country!"

It wasn't the only time Kilgallon captured sudden inspiration on his Yamaha keyboard. "I always use my PSR740 for writing sessions, both at home and on the road. First of all, it sounds great. Second, it's portable. And third, it has built-in speakers, unlike a lot of more 'pro' gear. All I have to do is press a button, and I have a symphony and a backing band at my fingertips. I can use the sequencer

strings, horns and, believe it or not, banjo. And at the end of every Montgomery Gentry show, there's an earth-shattering explosion I trigger with the Motif's 'storm' patch. It's incredible what that keyboard can do — the sampling, the grooves, the arpeggiation, and especially the sound quality."

When he's not on the road, Kilgallon produces other artists. "I just finished a record with a band from Topeka called Dixie Road. They're a great country band that's in it for the music. We made a great album, and I got to write half of it with them. I write all the time and try to bring people I meet on the road to Nashville. I try to help them get their feet wet in Nashville, the same way my friend helped me out the first time I came to town. Nashville can be tough. Like any other music town, it can eat you up and spit you out."

So what self-preservation advice does Eddie have for newcomers? "I always tell people to be ready for opportunity," he says. "Know your instrument. Know yourself. Know your goals. Eventually, opportunity will knock. And when it does, you can open the door — and be ready to entertain it!"

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