

## **I've Written A Song! Now What?**

**by Lynn DeShazo**

As a songwriter, I can tell you that there is nothing quite like those moments when the Spirit of God drops a new song into your heart. Some days you sit at your desk with an idea and just struggle trying to put words to the stirrings of your heart. You know what you want to say, but you just can't seem to make the words and music come together in your mind quite the way your heart senses it. You are very thankful when eventually you find your way through the creative maze and you're able to finish what you started. Then there are those days when it all seems to come together much more easily. You almost feel like you're just taking down heavenly dictation. Those are great moments, aren't they? You really feel like the song you've written was a gift to you, especially if you've never written a song before. It is only natural, then, to want to share that gift with others. You may ask yourself, "what should I do with my song?" I hear that very question on a regular basis, so I'd like to address it in this article.

### **Which Way Did Elvis Go?**

First of all, you need to recognize that your song may be the Lord's voice of encouragement specifically to you. The song you hear is His expression of love for you and meant uniquely for you. Or you may find that the song is really the cry of your own spirit to love and worship God. It was never intended for the public to hear. It is your own unique song to the Lord. It's not important that such a song hold up to the rigors of music publishing standards. The Lord delights to hear you sing it to Him, and that's all that matters!

Perhaps, though, you've felt the urge to share your song with others and have done so. You've found that it was truly appreciated by them and received as a blessing. You may have even been encouraged by your Christian brothers and sisters to "do something with that song!" You begin to feel the weight of responsibility. Sigh...you want to do the right thing, but what? Should you make a recording of it? Send it to a music publisher? Try and put a demo in the hands of Joe Worship Leader's road manager? I believe that the phrase "do something with that song" loosely translates into "You need to get Elvis (or current equivalent) to record your song!" Well, not necessarily. Our friends tend to love our songs because they love us. They are wonderfully encouraging about our efforts, but are not always knowledgeable about songwriting. My mother, for example, used to display all my school artwork on the refrigerator because she

loved me, not because it was great art! Listen, if you are stepping out to share God's love with people through your songs by simply singing them as you have opportunity, then *you are doing something!* Sharing your songs with those in your circle of friends and contacts was the right thing to do! Be at rest, for God promises that He will direct your steps as you trust in Him with all your heart. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

### **Bloom Where You're Planted**

My first piece of advice to aspiring writers is simply to “bloom where you're planted.” In other words, be a blessing in the place God put you. Your sphere of influence may be a handful of friends that gather weekly for prayer and bible study. It may be a ministry outreach to the local nursing home. It may be as large as your entire church, if you happen to be the worship leader. However large or small it is, remember that it is the sphere God has given you, so do everything you know to do *in that place*. God may have bigger plans for you in the future, but don't be overly concerned with them now. You are not responsible for areas of influence that surpass the boundaries God has set for you at present. Relax! You can trust Him to lead you into your future. There's a wonderful sequence of scenes from the movie *Coal Miner's Daughter*, where you see a young Loretta Lynn practicing her guitar and playing her early songs for an audience made up of her own children. Those simple beginnings are where she honed the skills that became the foundation for her legendary artistry. I think that's a great visual for the principle “bloom where you're planted”.

### **Minister With What You Have**

You don't need a professionally done recording to begin to minister with your songs. I wrote my first Christian song at age 18. It was the only original song in my repertoire for an entire year, but I played it everywhere - youth meetings, summer camps, college dorms - and I actually had a lot of requests for it. Three years later, I had written perhaps nine original songs, but I continued to play them wherever I had an opportunity. I eventually began to write songs that were suitable for congregational worship. After college, I served on a worship team in my church and our leader was open to learning several of them. My sphere of influence began to widen a bit, as these songs were added to our praise and worship repertoire. I eventually made a simple home recording of my songs on a cassette tape and made copies available to friends. Visitors to our church learned some of my songs when we used them in our worship services (most notably, “More Precious Than Silver”) and carried them to their churches, widening my

sphere yet again. I think it's noteworthy to mention here that my door of opportunity with Integrity Music did not open because I made a professional recording and got it into the right person's hands. It came, I believe, as a result of being faithful to minister with what God gave me in the places He planted me.

### **Practical Considerations**

Keep a personal file of all the songs you've written, either on a home recording or create lead sheets. If you only have the words and chords written down, you may not be able to remember the melody as time goes on. Also, make sure that you establish copyright for your song by writing your name and the copyright symbol on all your chord charts and demo recordings. For example:

“Song Title”  
© 2004 Jane Doe

Or:

“Song Title”  
Words and music by Jane Doe and Jim Smith  
© 2004 Our Music Company

This is especially important if you are going to give away copies of your song demos, or if they are currently being sung in worship services. This is actually a form of publishing and you want to be sure to connect your name to your work.

A simple, cleanly recorded demo with a chord chart and/or a lead sheet is certainly helpful to have should someone request a copy of your songs. Most people prefer to listen to new songs, rather than sight read them, I think. Remember to put your address and phone number on any copies you distribute so that people know how to contact you about them.

### **Do I Need to Copyright My Song?**

You do not have to register your song with the Library of Congress in order to establish a copyright. You own the copyright to your song by virtue of the fact that you have created it and

that it exists in a tangible medium. A recording (even rough) or printed music is what I mean by “tangible medium”. In other words, it can’t just exist in your head. The song title, your name, the year, and the international copyright symbol must be affixed to the medium, as shown in the examples above. If you desire to register your copyright, however, the U.S. Copyright Office will supply you with application forms upon request. Order the forms through their web site ([www.copyright.gov](http://www.copyright.gov)). A lot of helpful information on copyright is also available there. If you are a citizen of another country, your national laws will apply to copyright registration.

### **Making a Recording May Be the Next Step**

You may be at a point in your ministry where making a recording is appropriate. Perhaps your church is already singing some of your songs and people have responded to them enthusiastically. They’ve been “field tested” and proven effective in your church’s worship services. People have told you, perhaps, that your songs are anointed and they wished they could have a copy of them on a recording. You may have a deep desire to create such a project. You could certainly record your own CD, or your church may want to produce a praise and worship recording, and feature the songs written by members. A lot of churches now produce their own worship recordings and use them to give to visitors, as well as making them available to their own members. The congregation shares in the fundraising needed to pay for production and manufacturing costs for the CD. Many of my own independent recordings were paid for with the help of love gifts from my church. If the family of God around you recognizes your musical gift, I bet they would be willing to help you, too.

A lot of home studio recording software is now available to anyone with a computer. If you have skill on an instrument and a bit of a knack for the technical side of things, you could create a recording on your own, perhaps aided by knowledgeable friends. Not everyone is comfortable with tackling the technology, of course. You may decide it’s better to hire the expertise you need. This will involve finding someone to produce your recording and provide you with a finished master ready for duplication. I do advise you to pay cash for a recording, and not to take out a loan. Keep your recording budget within your financial means and do the best you can with the money available to you. I would never advise anyone to get a second mortgage on their house or tap into their retirement account just to make “the recording I’ve always dreamed about.” Having 948 copies of your new CD stacked in the closet along with a big debt hanging over your head will soon turn your dream into a nightmare! Start putting money aside for your project, and ask God to provide all you need.

Another good piece of advice is to NEVER pay all the production fees up front to a studio or a producer, especially if you don't know them well. Agree on your budget and make sure you can pay in three or four installments, as various phases are completed. It is reasonable to be asked for a deposit before work begins. A producer will need funds to pay the hired musicians right after the recording sessions, for example. If you pay the full amount, however, you are at risk of losing your money or never seeing your project completed. Some folks are unscrupulous and some are just disorganized - and, yes, I'm talking about people who call themselves *Christians!* Holding back a percentage of the balance due until completion gives you some leverage and the producer some incentive to finish the job. If you can't come to an agreement before you hand over the first check, WALK AWAY!

I hope this article has helped you. If you have more interest on this subject. God bless you as you "sing to the Lord a new song"!

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