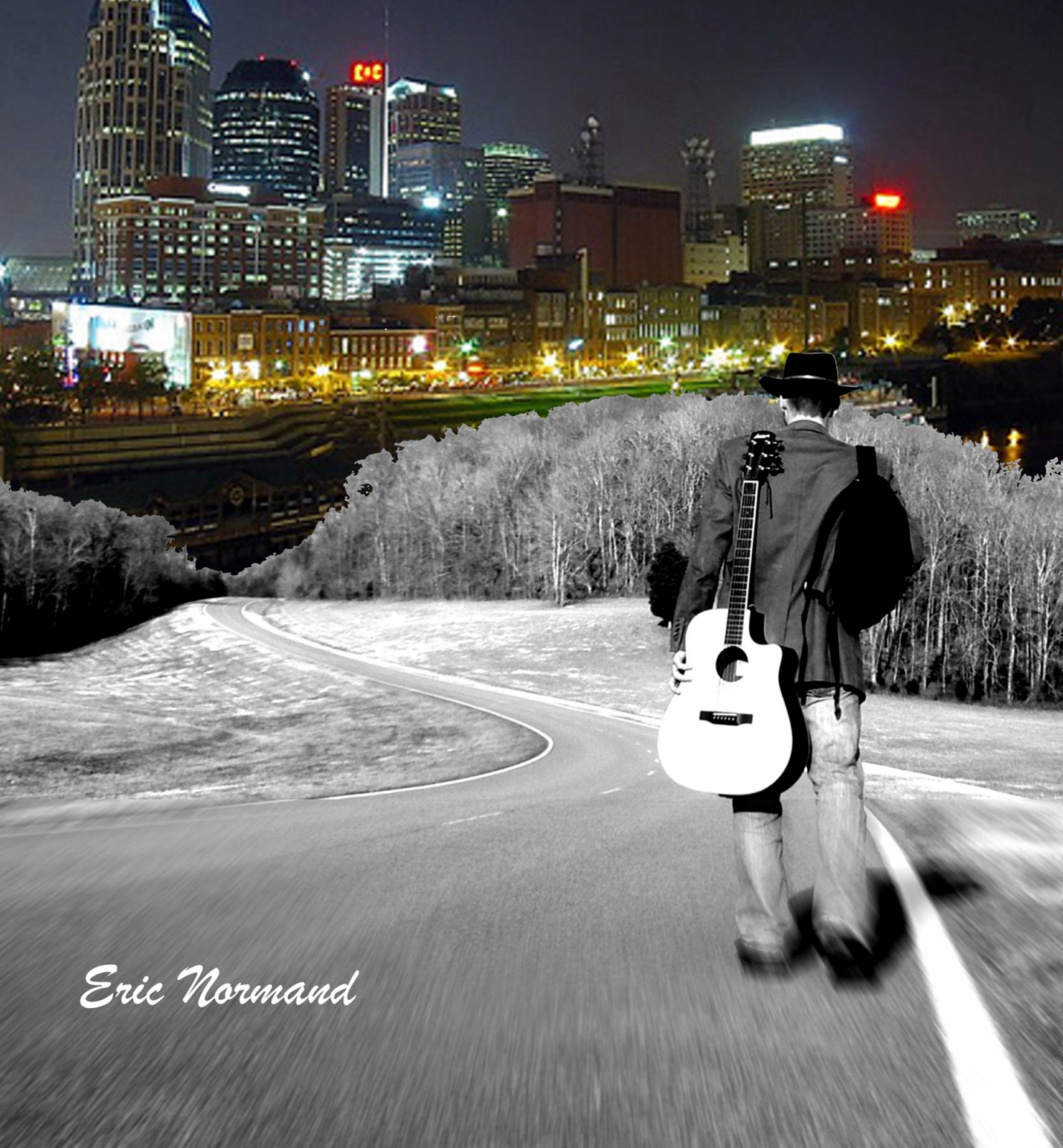


# The Nashville Musician's Survival Guide



*Eric Normand*

## The Nashville Musician's Survival Guide

by Eric Normand

Just Ducky Publishing  
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[www.SurviveNashville.com](http://www.SurviveNashville.com)

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In short - if you sell the farm and move to Nashville with your family and life savings to pursue your musical dreams, the author of this book bears no responsibility whatsoever if it doesn't work out.



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Polly B: Artist, Musician

Brian Beihl: Nashville Touring/Session Drummer

EJ Bernas: Senior Director Southwest Region - Universal Music Group

Bob Bullock: Producer, Engineer — [www.bobbullock.net](http://www.bobbullock.net)

Bart Busch: Engineer — [www.stationwest.com](http://www.stationwest.com)

Mike Chapman: Bassist, Producer — [www.myspace.com/mikechapmanmusic](http://www.myspace.com/mikechapmanmusic)

Sonja Chapman: Production Editor — [www.heinemann.com](http://www.heinemann.com)

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Danny Milliner: Bassist, Band Leader

Logan Moore: Singer, Songwriter — [www.loganmooremusic.com](http://www.loganmooremusic.com)

Ronan Chris Murphy: Producer, Mixer, Artist — [www.venetowest.com](http://www.venetowest.com)

Kevin Neal: President BLA Nashville — [www.buddyleeattractions.com](http://www.buddyleeattractions.com)

Steve Pope: Bus Driver, Shift Supervisor, Mechanic

Rich Redmond: Drummer, Producer, Speaker, Author — [www.richredmond.com](http://www.richredmond.com)

Judy Rodman: Vocal Coach, Recording Artist, Stage & Television Performer,  
Hit Songwriter, Session Singer, Producer & Vocal Consultant — [www.judyrodman.com](http://www.judyrodman.com)

Derek Sivers: Founder of CD Baby, Entrepreneur, Advisor — [sivers.org](http://sivers.org)

Randy Smith: Nashville Touring/Session Bassist/Vocalist  
— [www.nashvillemusicpros.com/profile/RandySmith](http://www.nashvillemusicpros.com/profile/RandySmith)

Jason Somerville, Amy Woolf, Michelle Bernadsky: Roberts Brothers Coach Leasing  
— [www.robertsbrotherscoach.com](http://www.robertsbrotherscoach.com)

Tim Teague: Guitarist, Vocalist — [www.myspace.com/teagueguitar](http://www.myspace.com/teagueguitar)

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Luke Williams: Singer, Songwriter, Guitarist — [lukewilliams.net](http://lukewilliams.net)

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Writing this book has been a journey, a journey that began long before I ever set foot in Nashville. Throughout my life I have been fortunate to have had countless opportunities to learn from many great teachers. And in my mind, teaching does not always take place in a classroom. I dedicate this book to all the great teachers of the world.

To my wonderful wife, Kelly, you are my inspiration and guiding light. I could not have done this without you, thank you for your great patience and tireless work.

To my good friend and mentor “D”, thanks for helping to show me the way, it was your words that helped this book come to be.

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**Foreword: About This Book**

Nashville, or Music City, is a truly unique, always interesting, and often mysterious place. It is a place of yearning, a place for learning, and a place for craftsmen and dreamers alike. This place, that some also refer to as the country music capital of the world, is also the world’s second largest music production city, and a place where dreams can come true or be crushed. Every day, from all over the world, aspiring musicians, artists, songwriters, engineers, producers, and music enthusiasts move to Nashville to pursue their lifelong ambitions and dreams of making it in the music biz. Once they get here, some of them become successful, but many find out that the music industry of Nashville is not what they thought and are unable to achieve their dreams and aspirations, often resulting in a premature and hasty exit.

Before my arrival to Music City in 2002, I had already spent 15 years working as a professional musician and guitar instructor in New England. During those formative years most of my musical activity was spent in working bands - rock bands, top 40 bands, blues bands, original projects, basically a little bit of everything. While I did get by, I earned as much of my living from teaching as I did from playing and never really achieved the success I had envisioned as a performer. By the time I got to Nashville, my attitude was “I’m going to do whatever it takes to make a living from playing music.” I didn’t care about becoming a star; I just wanted to earn a living solely from music, something I wasn’t able to do in New England. My approach to working in Nashville was that of a “hired gun” - “I don’t care about being your business partner, I’m here to play guitar for you!”

What is a hired gun? Hired guns make up the bulk of the professional music world. If you go to a concert and see your favorite artist or “band”, the players backing that artist are essentially hired guns. Even though they might *seem* like a band entity, most recording and touring artists are the sole proprietor of their businesses and their bands are comprised of hired guns. When you hear a song on the radio or that CD you just bought, 9 times out of 10 the music was recorded by professional studio musicians, also essentially hired guns.

Becoming a hired gun in Nashville is what I set out to do, and, as I have learned, working as a hired gun on the tours based out of Nashville is the most practical way to earn a living as a player in this town. This book provides all the pertinent info needed to succeed in Nashville in that regard. And, if you are interested in building your success as a songwriter or artist, you *will* need to understand this dynamic, as hired guns will be playing on your demos, albums, showcases, tours, and if you do well enough, award shows.

So by the time I pulled into town with my family in a rented Ryder truck full of everything we owned, I was hungry and eager to dig in to my new career as a freelance musician, but like every newcomer, I hadn’t a clue about where to begin digging. Unlike most musician immigrants to Nashville fresh off the boat, I was extremely fortunate to be armed with a

secret weapon, my good friend and mentor “D”. D is a guitar player friend of mine that I knew and jammed with back in New England, and in the early nineties he moved to Nashville and began his own journey into the big music industry centered here.

D became my Nashville mentor and guided me with some great direction that helped me to find my own path. I had an endless supply of questions and grilled him heavily during my Nashville infancy. He graciously took me under his wing, taking me to his hangouts, introducing me to his industry friends, teaching me some Nashville chops; he even gave me one of his guitars and helped me land one of my first road gigs. He taught me how to network and go about building the relationships I would need to survive. When he spoke, I hung on every word, and his advice proved invaluable.

Since those early days, my career has taken me down many roads, some good ones, and some bad ones too. All in all it has been a massive growth experience providing me with much insight into the world of big music business. Along the way I have met many great people - players, singers, writers, engineers, producers, all with their own story. Often these fellow journeymen have offered advice and insight, and sometimes they have asked for mine. At some point a while back it occurred to me that the Nashville music scene could benefit from a book designed to help musicians better understand how this scene is structured, and how to go about finding work. A book that would provide the details and insight that could help musicians and artists on a practical, day to day street level. I searched for books and articles and found many geared towards songwriters, but very few writings geared towards helping the musicians, technicians, and aspiring artists. Ultimately, it was my quest for this knowledge that led me to write this book.

The Nashville Musician’s Survival Guide is an outline of concepts, strategies, and tips that can help musicians find paying jobs that will allow them to earn a living from their craft in Nashville and beyond. The first section of this book, **Music Related Jobs within the Nashville Music Industry**, covers three separate, but often overlapping categories: the Nashville Nightclub Industry, the Nashville Touring Industry, and the Nashville Recording Industry. The details about job requirements, pay structures, and the networking required to land gigs will be outlined in great detail. Also explored are some of the other music related support roles and industries: techs, cartage, rehearsal studios, repair technicians, production companies, music retail, music teachers, administrative personnel and more.

The second part of the book, **Touring Life**, goes into great detail about the different aspects of touring: what it’s like to live with a band, to live and sleep on a bus, dealing with fans, fly dates, eating on the road, and the impact that long-term touring can have on relationships. Also within this part of the book is a section called tour diaries - personal accounts of interesting and often funny scenarios that can only happen on the road.

The third section, **Interviews**, features candid one-on-one interviews with Nashville music industry veterans from every corner of the community. Country artist and hit songwriter Rhett Akins, senior director of marketing Southwest region for UMG EJ Bernas, ace recording engineer Bob Bullock, A-list session bassist Mike Chapman, indie artist Colt Ford, and others provide deep perspective from their experiences in Nashville.

The fourth section, **Nashville Institutions**, explores some long-standing entities that are at the core of music city. The Grand Ole Opry, the A-Team, the Musicians Union, BMI and ASCAP, and the good ol’ boy network have all been here since just about the dawn of time, and an understanding of these institutions is essential to all aspiring music professionals in Nashville.

The fifth part of the book, **Nashville Specifics**, talks about the culture shock of relocation, Tennessee climate, cost of living, where to live, getting around, non-music related employment, and a few other helpful things specific to living and working in middle Tennessee.

**Sustainability**, the sixth and final section of the book, explores some of the long-term problems and potential solutions of being a career musician in Nashville and beyond. Issues like repetitive motion injuries, self-marketing, home recording, wearing a lot of hats, and overall mindset and character will be discussed.

Interspersed throughout the book are some real-life accounts from my experiences and travels as well. Although many of these situations and stories are specific to the Nashville music industry, many of the concepts put forth are universal to all who desire a career in music. If you are considering moving to Nashville or another big music business metropolis to pursue your career in music, this book can give you some idea of what to expect. If you are new to town, this book could be a valuable tool in helping you get off the ground. If you have been here a while and are struggling, it might inspire you to try some different approaches. If you already enjoy a successful career, it might help re-enforce what you already know or give you a different perspective. This book only scratches the surface of the possibilities that exist in this place, and one can only truly comprehend this scene by experiencing it firsthand. However, I believe the knowledge on these pages can potentially save you some time, money, frustration, and maybe a few embarrassing moments.

I don’t consider myself an expert on the Nashville music scene; certainly there are many others here with greater credentials and differing opinions. I don’t claim to have all the answers either; I simply want to share what I know, based on my life experiences, from my perspective, as well as the perspectives of some of my friends and peers. The concepts and strategies I am putting forth are a set of guidelines that stem from my knowledge and have worked for me. If you talk to others here in Nashville, you will certainly hear about

alternate approaches to earning a living from music in this town. At the end of the day it is up to you to determine your own path.

After living my first 35 years in small town America, relocating to Nashville was a wakeup call of epic proportions. There are so many supremely talented individuals here, and I feel truly blessed to be a small part of a place so rich in music culture and tradition. It is my goal that this book will offer assistance and inspiration to those who quest knowledge and insight to the Nashville Music Scene and desire a career in music here and everywhere. It's a strange and mysterious world; the tour starts now.

## Craftsmen and Dreamers

*“A man who works with his hands is a laborer; a man who works with his hands and his brain is a craftsman; but a man who works with his hands and his brain and his heart is an artist.” – Louis Nizer*

To succeed in the music industry you need to first understand how the business works, but more importantly, you need to understand yourself. Why are you here? What are you trying to accomplish? Are you trying to make a good living from your craft or become rich from it? Do you want to be a superstar, or would you be just as happy to be a sideman? How important is it to you to “make it” in the music business? What is your definition of “making it”? Do you feel that you need to be in the public spotlight, or do you think you could be happy working behind the scenes? Are you a craftsman or a dreamer?

The concept of the craftsman and the dreamer is a way of looking at the music industry I have devised to help clarify the bigger picture and to help you decide how and where you fit in. So, what is the difference between a craftsman and a dreamer, and into which category do you think you fit? No matter which side you tend to lean towards, it is likely that you have some elements of both, and one is not necessarily better than the other.

Craftsmen are musicians, singers, engineers, songwriters, technicians, and other music industry related workers that approach their careers from the practical standpoint of earning a living from their craft. If you are a craftsman, you are interested in jobs, gigs, recording sessions, and anything that will pay you for your services on a regular basis, both short and long term. Skilled craftsmen are good at what they do and approach their career in music in the same manner that carpenters, factory workers, and other service and manufacturing industry professionals approach theirs. Find work, do the work, get paid for the work, and do what you must to have plenty of work. You are goal oriented and work at honing and perfecting your skills. You view each job as a challenge to be conquered and see each gig, session, or tour as an opportunity that might create more opportunities. You approach your career systematically and work at building relationships that will ensure your survival long-term. In the world of the craftsman, your desire to earn a consistent living from your craft will often make it necessary for you to put your personal and artistic preferences aside, as your employer's wants and needs will usually take precedence. A good craftsman understands his role, enjoys his work, and is willing to do what is necessary for the bigger picture and long term goals.

Dreamers are musicians, singers, engineers, songwriters, technicians, and other music industry related people that view their career destinations in a more immediate manner. If you are a dreamer, you are likely interested in becoming a popular recording and touring

artist, a hit songwriter, or maybe a Grammy winner. The success you are envisioning is one in which you are on top of the pile as the artist, writer, or producer that creates the product that will ultimately command the attention and adulation of the masses. You are trying to “make it” in the music biz and will do so at all costs. You feel compelled to put yourself out there and make things happen. You are sure of your talents and certain that you are on the verge of being discovered and getting a deal soon. Your next gig, tour, or recording is your biggest priority and goal, and seeing it through will ensure your success. A dreamer might or might not be a skilled craftsman, but in most cases, you are definitely in search of being something beyond a regular working musician or craftsman.

There are extremely important elements that lie within both the craftsman and the dreamer, and most successful people have traits from both. Within the dreamer there is ambition, desire, passion, and an incentive to keep moving forward. The dreamer dreams of being more than he already is and going places he has never been. Within the craftsman lie the skills, knowledge, and practicality that will enable the dreamer to pursue and achieve his or her dreams.

If you are a dreamer, try to look past your immediate goal and desire of “making it”, and maybe ask yourself, what is it that you want to make? How do *you* define making it? Once you can determine that, use the practical skills of the craftsman in you to get there. No matter what “making it” means to you, there will forever be more steps to be taken, so get used to walking. A continued education of your own nature and the potential roads that lie ahead will help enable you to choose the best steps possible. If you are leaning more towards the craftsman side of the fence, you are already in a good position to continue moving forward, as are most journeymen; just remain aware of the path.

Regardless of where you fall within this spectrum, the life of a career musician is comprised of a series of steps on a ladder to be climbed, relationships to be nurtured and developed, thresholds to cross, and doors to be opened. Don’t expect the music industry to be the system that makes your career happen, for in reality, it is you that creates the system. So take a little time out and ask yourself, are you a craftsman, a dreamer, or a little of both?

# Chapter I

## **M**usic Related Jobs In Nashville; Connecting The Dots

*"I had been on the road for a long time and was not really getting anywhere. Bob Johnston, a friend of mine, had taken over Colombia in Nashville. He asked me if I wanted to come down. I did - thank God I did."*

— Charlie Daniels

If you are a musician or entrepreneur living in Nashville, thinking about moving to Nashville, or just curious to understand how the world's second largest music production city conducts its business, the first thing you will need to understand is the hierarchy of things - how this place works. If you are interested in navigating these waters, it will be to your advantage to understand the industries within the industry: what the potential music related jobs are, how they are interconnected, and how these jobs can be acquired.

### **A Changing Landscape**

First of all, the Nashville music industry, like all music industry at this point in time, is going through a change. Under the old model, a major label would sign a promising artist, finance an album project, help organize touring, provide the marketing and financial means for that artist to achieve radio airplay, and essentially put that artist on the map. In many cases, the label would also help artists develop a lasting career.

Now, this is happening on a much smaller scale and with less frequency than it was in the booming 90s, a time many consider the heyday of the modern Nashville era. It's no secret that radio is dying a slow and painful death as the masses have gravitated to the Internet

## Freelancers - Ships At Sea

*“Once you’ve decided what aspect of your field to freelance, take the time to establish yourself. The biggest misconception people have is that they’re going to jump right into it and start making money, ... Not true. Just because you build it doesn’t mean they’ll come.” — Laurie Rozakis*



What is it like to work as a freelance musician in Nashville? In a recent conversation I had with a young drummer considering relocating to Nashville, I was asked this very question. It seemed like such a simple question, yet it's answer was difficult to easily explain to someone that had never been here. After giving this question much thought, I realized this was because the career of a freelance musician in Nashville can cover a lot of different ground and go in many different directions at once. There are a lot of freelancers or “hired guns” working in every aspect of the Nashville music industry, and the experience can vary greatly depending on each individual's unique circumstances and relationships.

The term “freelance musician” implies that you are an independent contractor, and that all employment is temporary, even if it is temporary for a long period of time. If you are working as a hired gun in the nightclubs around town, you will probably never join a band, but you might play in many. If you are hired to play in the road band of a touring artist, you will be working for artist X Inc., and while you may be traveling, performing, and living with a “band” you are, nevertheless, an independent contractor employed by the artist. This same basic principle holds true in the world of paid recording sessions as well. You don't belong to any one group, but you try to get your fingers into everything that you can. Throw yourself to the wind, and see where the wind takes you.

One way to look at it is to compare it to the career of a lone professional assassin (think CIA, James Bond movies, etc.). A call comes in the middle of the night with instructions about a job that needs to be carried out. You decide to accept this job, make the necessary

## Chapter 1.2

### **N**ashville Touring Industry

*“I’ve seen every highway in the United States, and they all look alike to me.” — Loretta Lynn*

Working as a musician or crew member for a national act based out of Nashville is a realistic and attainable goal for competent and easy to get along with musicians and techs. Touring is all about the hang, or the downtime. To work in the touring industry, It’s a given that you will be competent enough to do your job when it’s show-time. The real unknown for many musicians new to touring, and perhaps a bigger variable, is attitude. For the most part, people that get fired from tours lose their job because of bad attitudes and personality conflicts, not lack of musicianship.

That being said, if you can learn 20 songs note for note, are easy to get along with, enjoy living in close proximity of your coworkers 24-7, and would like to see the country while slowly building connections in the music industry, you are a perfect candidate to work on a tour. This section of the book will outline many of the most common touring jobs and provide an overview of basic job requirements, pay scales, and how to go about the networking required to land those jobs.

Keep in mind that in Nashville, most of the tours reside in the Country or Country/Pop genres. As most in Nashville know, the term “country music” is broadly used, and in many cases an artist categorized in the country genre has just as many, if not more elements, of rock, pop, and R&B. This is good news for all the musicians in Nashville who lack roots

in traditional country music (which are many). If you are in this category, it wouldn't hurt to learn a little Merle Haggard and Hank Sr. anyway.

If and when you do get a job with a national act, in most cases you will be working for an artist, not a band. Although you will be playing with a band on stage and spending more time with the band members than the artist, the artist is usually the ultimate CEO of the tour. Whether the artist is currently on top of the heap, somewhere in the middle, or a one hit wonder from 10 years ago, never forget that it's the artist's show, and that the artist is the boss.



*Crowd before a Rhett Akins concert in Bristol, TN - 2009*

*Photo courtesy Clint Jacobs*

# A rtists

*"I don't know anything about music, in my line you don't have to."*  
— Elvis Presley

If a singer or aspiring artist works towards their goals hard enough, long enough, knows the right people, and/or has a great streak of luck, he or she might become successful enough to earn a real living as an "artist". The term artist implies one who makes art, and in reality many musicians are artists on some level. However, in Nashville, "artist" usually refers to a singer that has become commercially successful enough, or has enough financial backing to warrant touring, hire musicians, managers, and a crew, and has or at one time had a record deal. For musicians that don't want to squeak out a meager living playing on Broadway forever, landing an artist gig can be a great way to establish yourself, earn a living, and gain some clout that will help elevate your status as a musician in Nashville. Here is some perspective that might help you understand the world of the artist.

Most great artists usually possess some unique and less than obvious characteristics that helped to get them where they are. Perhaps they have a certain intangible aura or charisma that turns heads when they walk into a room or that commands attention during performances, or maybe it's as the French would say, "a certain kind of I don't know what". To be a successful artist, one must be a great politician onstage and off, knowing how to say the right thing at the right moment and knowing when to say nothing at all. They must be a great salesperson selling songs, ideals, merchandise, and ultimately themselves. They must be willing to live within a strange, media driven world that often deprives them of privacy. They must be willing and able to handle an unspoken, yet relentless pressure that will last for most of, if not their entire career. Many artists enjoy being the center of attention, and some also possess some narcissistic-like tendencies.

Not all great singers have what it takes to be a successful artist. Just because someone is a brilliant vocalist doesn't mean he or she will be an exciting performer or transfer well to tape. How many times have you seen a show where you thought, "Great voice, but I'm bored to tears"?

Not all great artists are great singers. Some of the biggest names in modern country music (and other genres) sing live and in the studio through pitch correction software such as the

Antares auto tuner (some artists may never have had a career if it weren't for the invention of this magic little box). This is commonly known throughout the industry, and virtually unknown to the masses. It is the artist's total package that sells the song.

Not all artists write their own material. Some do, but many do not. This doesn't really matter to the audience either, as most are unaware of this fact. The artists that do write their own material often have more control over their career and earn more money, but not always. Most of Elvis's hits were not written by him, as is also the case with George Strait, Shania Twain, and many other mega stars. This obviously didn't stop them from becoming successful.

There are different levels of success for artists, with some having long strings of hits and decades of touring, some having a more moderate success, and others only having a brief moment in the sun. The level and duration of success they achieve isn't always within their control, but artists that have a lot of drive and/or great management seem to fare better.

A newly emerging artist will more than likely be touring on a small budget. This means that he or she will probably be traveling and living with a band and crew on the same bus or van. This might also be true for mid level artists, artists with minimal airplay, or artists that simply choose to keep touring costs at a minimum. Touring on this level, in close proximity of the artist, can be great or not so great, depending on the artist. Some artists are great to be around - personable, fun, easy going, and these situations can be ideal, with a family like atmosphere. Of course some artists might be better off to have their own bus as they can create a "walking on eggshells vibe."

Most mega-stars like George Strait, Toby Keith, Faith Hill, etc; travel on their own bus with only a driver and small entourage consisting of possibly a manager and assistant, while the band and crew travel on another bus or busses. On this level, there is often a sense of disconnect between the artist and band/crew. It is not uncommon for the band and crew to rarely see or have any contact with the artist except for on stage during performances.

No matter how friendly or distant the artist may appear, never lose sight of the fact that the artist is the boss. Even though they may have a manager or group of managers running the day to day details, including hiring and firing, the artist usually has the final say. After all, it is their name, image, and talent (or lack of) that provide employment for the rest of their organization. They are the president and CEO of their company (of course in many cases, they have to answer to an invisible money man somewhere or their boss at the record company).



*Darryle Singletary at the Grand Ole Opry, 2005*

### Some Things To Consider When Working For An Artist

- » Don't "crowd" the artist. Artists are regularly poked and prodded by everyone imaginable and, in most cases, don't want to deal with that from their employees.
- » Work hard. If you always give 110% there isn't much they can complain about.
- » Read body language. Some artists are shy and don't volunteer their thoughts. Learn to read between the lines.
- » Avoid the star territory. The front line of the stage is for the artist. Some artists want their players more forward during performance and some don't. Know the acceptable boundaries and work within them.
- » Always follow their lead. Listen to them and watch them closely during performances so you won't be caught off guard.
- » Give the artist their space, both onstage and off. Artists may like attention, but sometimes they just want to chill. It's all about balance.
- » Make them look good. That's why you are there in the first place.



*Rhett Akins and band performing at Country Rendezvous in Crapponne, France - 2007*

## Chapter 1.3

### **N**ashville Recording Industry

*"It was just like a dream. I could have ended up with an album that's not all that different from anything else coming out of Nashville. Mutt made the difference. He took these songs, my attitude, my creativity, and colored them in a way that is unique." — Shania Twain*

The Nashville recording industry, and recording music in Nashville are two different things. There is a relatively small group of session musicians, studio owners, engineers, and producers that are individually and collectively involved with a large part of the paid recording work that happens in Nashville. Then there is everybody else, fighting for table scraps. While this elite group of professionals within the Nashville music industry has had a corner on the market for decades, this doesn't mean that some paid recording sessions can't happen for others.

Historically speaking, the Nashville recording industry has been a conglomerate that includes major record labels, major recording studios, A-team session players, producers, songwriters, publishing companies, and major recording and touring artists. Under this old business model, major album projects and demos alike were spit out with extreme efficiency, almost daily, for decades. That old model also included a group of smaller studios in which another group of lesser-known session players referred to as the B- team recorded many of the demos.

While this old model still exists, it downsized greatly during the early 2000s. Although there are still some big time recording studios here that regularly record major artists from Nashville and beyond, a whole new crop of home-based project studios have been part of

## Session Players And Recording Musicians

*“The only thing in your mind was to do that particular song, then go onto the next one. Then you’d walk out of the studio and not remember one song you did.”* — Gordon Stoker, original member of the Jordanares

Ask any musician that is new to town what he or she is looking to do and many will say “I’m interested in getting a road gig and/or session work.” Not to be a buzz kill but, get in line, everybody wants those jobs. Session work is highly sought after and very appealing to players that want to make a good living with their craft without leaving the city. Although some gifted players with great contacts might get walked through the door shortly after arrival, most of us will have to sweat it out and slowly build and nurture relationships that might eventually lead to paid session work on a regular basis. It can happen, it just takes time.

### There Are 3 Ways To Attain Recording Session Work In Nashville

1. Build relationships that will lead to session work
2. Build your own studio and hire yourself
3. Become good friends with an A-Team session player and ask him to leave you his spot in his will

Of these three options, I have found the first two to be the most practical. Over time, slowly build relationships with as many singers, songwriters, musicians, engineers and producers as you can. If you are a good to great player with a great attitude, you might eventually get hired to play on some projects through these contacts. This doesn’t happen for everyone, but if it is one of your goals and you build the right relationships, over time, this can work. This approach can take a long time and I would like to quote a great line from my mentor and friend D.

## Chapter 2

### **T**ouring Life

*“With my guys and with the way that we live out there, we work out a lot and try to eat right, but we try to basically keep it our own rhythm and our own world.” — Brad Paisley*

Over the past several years I have spent much time on the road, touring the country. I have been very fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with many great artists, meet many interesting people, and experience all sorts of scenarios both good and bad along the way. I have traveled on everything from million dollar tour buses to beat up old vans, 747’s to mail carriers. I have performed on small stages in honky tonk dives and concert stages in arenas, plywood stages in the middle of fields in Georgia and Texas and the Grand Ole Opry at the Ryman Auditorium, in front of crowds ranging from 7 to 70,000 and everything in between. All of these experiences have enriched my life and I am grateful for the opportunities I have had.

Touring is hard work. There are many great moments, but there are also many long bus rides and a lot of down time. Many people, myself included, have spent the majority of their life growing up in a small town or region, never experiencing or seeing the rest of the world. If you have never seen the rest of the country, touring with a national act is a great way to do it, much can be seen out the window of a bus. Traveling can help broaden your perspective and view of the world, and it can also help improve your self confidence.

This next section of the book gives some insight and perspective to the daily life on a tour. The daily activities for touring musicians, artists, and crew members can vary greatly depending on the level and characteristics of a given tour, but the basic principles are the same. Long hours of travel, late nights, living out of a suitcase, being constantly around people, and living on a bus for days or weeks on end are all part of the job. The

## Sleeping At 75 MPH

*"He who sleeps in continual noise is wakened by silence."*  
— William Dean Howells

Sleeping on a tour bus comes easier for some than others. No matter how nice the bus, how good the driver, or how respectful your band mates are, you are still traveling at 75 MPH down an interstate. Depending on what part of the country you're traveling thru, the quality of the roads can vary greatly. A bumpy road can make for a rough night of sleep. One bus rider once described the experience of sleeping on a bus as being similar to that of sleeping on the back seat of her parents' car while being driven to her grandmothers' house as a child.

Aside from getting used to sleeping while in motion, there are other elements that may affect your ability to sleep on a bus. From inside of your bunk you may be able to hear conversations coming from the lounges, the sounds of the TV or stereo being played, the bunk aisle door opening and closing, people getting into their bunks, and possibly the rumble strip on a regular basis if your driver isn't that great. If you sleep in a bottom bunk the engine noise and vibration will drown out a lot of this noise, but you will hear and feel the road and diesel drone intensely. If you have a top bunk, the engine noise will be much quieter and you will feel the road the least, but sounds from inside the bus will be louder and you will experience the most amount of side to side sway. Many bus riders consider the middle bunks to be the most desirable for sleeping as they are a good happy medium and the easiest bunks to get in and out of.

Of course, as these are the most coveted bunks they are usually already spoken for by the senior members of the tour. On many tour buses there is a pecking order regarding bunk status, with the artist always having first choice. Behind the artist, the bunk preference order is usually established by seniority within the rest of the group. When someone leaves a given tour, the most senior member of the tour gets first dibs on the newly vacant bunk, and so on.

Hopefully you will get used to sleeping while in motion, the sound of a loud diesel engine, the sounds of distant conversations and maybe some random TV blaring. Another

## **BB** Watson, The Southern Rock All-Stars, And **BB** Barbeque Sandwiches

*"The best thing about this gig is the barbeque; it's the best in the state."*

— Anonymous

It was early fall in 2003 and I received a phone call to do a weekend of shows with country music artist BB Watson. I met the band leader downtown and received a CD of material to learn for the show. Our bus left Nashville on a Thursday morning for a weekend tour of three cities in the Deep South; Baton Rouge Louisiana would be our first stop. We had a full bus, as it was being shared by two bands, BBs group and the Southern Rock All-Stars. The Southern Rock All-Stars were a tribute to the great southern rock bands of the 70s, and featured a former member of Lynyrd Skynyrd, 38 Special, and Rick Derringer, as well as a couple of guys that thought they were in those bands.

The bus was a 79 eagle with a manual transmission, and a real gem. Anyone that has had the experience of traveling on one of these realizes that this is by no means a luxury liner. The bus driver was in his late 60s, although he looked like he was in his early 90s, and probably weighed all of 73 pounds. He was a sweet old guy, but unfortunately lacked the strength required to fully depress the clutch pedal. This meant that we would be hearing *and feeling* every shift, or grind rather, for the entire weekend. Needless to say the ride was a little rough. To make things even more interesting, we quickly discovered that the air conditioning did not work at all on this bus, and by the time we reached Louisiana, we were all soaked with sweat.

Somewhere close to our destination, we pulled up to a busy intersection at which point the bus died. The driver tried to start the bus several times with no results. Finally, he utilized a method of engaging the bus generator to begin slowly powering the bus through the intersection. With no power steering, the turning of the steering wheel was near impossible, and three of us gathered around the driver, pushing and pulling on the wheel to make a nine point turn to get through the intersection. This nine point turn completely blocked the intersection in every direction for about 15 minutes. During this slow-motion turn, those not involved in the wheel turning ceremony crouched down low or sat on the

## Sammy Hagar In San Diego

*"I've been drinking tequila for a long time now, and it's never been about drinking to get drunk. I don't do that. I never drink tequila during the day, and I don't drive at night." — Sammy Hagar*

It was a hot summer night in August of 2003 at the Coors Amphitheater in San Diego, California and show-time was just a couple of hours away for Toby Keith and his band. It was just after dinner when Sean, the production manager, called me on my two-way radio and requested my presence at the production office. He informed me, as I was the guitar tech on this tour that it would be my responsibility on this night to set up an additional guitar rig for a surprise guest. Unbeknownst to the 20,000 or so anxiously awaiting fans, this surprise guest would be none other than the Red Rocker himself, Sammy Hagar.

Of course this was exciting news to me, as I had grown up listening to all of the guitar rock from the era of which Sammy was born. Years before I had thoroughly worn out a cassette tape of Van Halen's 5150, one of Hagar's shining moments with the group, along with some other recordings of his earlier work, and now I would be guitar teching for him. It was almost like I was working for Van Halen! With a sense of real purpose, I was off to guitar world where I set up a Gibson Les Paul and dialed it in for Sammy to use during his sit-in.

The concert began a couple of hours later, and the crew and I were busy with our regular tasks. I was watching the band from side stage by monitor world when Mr. Hagar suddenly appeared, seemingly from out of nowhere. A couple of minutes later our production manager formally introduced us and explained to Sammy that I would be setting him up with a guitar to play. We walked a few feet over to guitar world and I showed him the Les Paul I had chosen for him to use. He tried it out for a minute and exclaimed "This is a beauty! It'll work just fine."

We returned to monitor world and watched Toby and band stomping through some more of their set. Sammy was all eyes and ears, watching the show intently. At one point he turned to me and commented "country music is great. The lyrics are so direct. I love the

## EJ Bernas

*EJ Bernas was raised in North Tonawanda, New York and already enjoying a successful career as a college soccer coach when he was offered a job at UMG (Universal Music Group) as director of secondary promotions. Growing up in a rural community halfway between Buffalo, New York and Niagara Falls, he always had a passion for music, being introduced to the songs of Willie Nelson, Johnny Paycheck, and Kenny Rogers by his father at a young age.*

*Never having envisioned a career in the music business prior to being approached by UMG, his story is a unique one, and his “abduction” into the record industry the direct result of long-term friendships and relationships he had formed over the years. He is currently the Senior Director Southwest Region UMG.*



*{EN} How did you first begin working in the recording industry?*

*{EJ} My college roommate in Brockport New York, just outside of Rochester, was a communications major and he was working at the college AM radio station at night. He got me doing an on-air shift; they let me do whatever I wanted to do, kind of just “Go have fun”. Music wasn’t a dominating passion of mine, I don’t play an instrument, I listen*

to music, I love music, but it's not like I was telling about album cuts from Pink Floyd's third record.

We became friends, built a relationship and I was the best man in his wedding. Damon Moberly, who is currently the vice president of national promotion for Mercury records, was the Northeast director of promotions for Mercury at the time, and was in attendance because he was their radio guy. He met me at the wedding, I was just being EJ and having fun, and he was like *"You're a pretty good dude"*. So every couple of months when he came back to Buffalo, we were out of college at that point, I was included in Terri Clark's dinner with the radio guy because I was Damon's friend. Then three or four years later they said we have this position opening up at Universal, the bosses at the time had met me at an event, we hung out, and they just thought I was this outgoing, easy to get along with kind of guy. They said we have a position that we would like to see if you would be interested in interviewing for.

At the time I was coaching soccer in Buffalo, working for Canisius College, a Division One School. I ran an 80,000 square foot athletic facility and was one of the head coaches of the premier football and soccer club in Buffalo. I was very intertwined in my coaching career and worked for the national team and the Olympic fundamental program, so it was some pretty elite stuff that I was climbing the coaching ladder on. I came down for the interview, and needless to say they wanted to hire me. I moved to Nashville in April of 2003 after coaching my last soccer tournament the weekend before. I was hired as the director of secondary promotions for Universal Music Group. So basically every Erie Pennsylvania College Station, Texas, Peoria Illinois, College Station Texas, the markets that are big enough to have Wal-Marts and airplay and sell records with really big radio stations, they weren't really being focused on if you weren't on the billboard or media-based chart. So they had me, I was their rep. With very little budget to travel, and meeting very few of them, I built relationships over the phone. Basically, they let me learn how to work records.

*{EN} So you were kind of abducted by the record industry?*

*{EJ}* I've met so many people that move to town that so badly want my job, there's probably 10 people that want my job, and I didn't go looking for it, it found me. It's been one of the greatest things in my life, period. Coaching is a different level of satisfaction and a different kind of reward. Working music, being in the business and working with all these talented people, and being a part of Josh Turner's career from the beginning is something I'll never, ever forget. I'm also on the tail end of George Strait's career; I mean I've had the last eight number ones on George Strait. Pretty Incredible!

*{EN} What does your job as senior director of Southwest region for Universal group entail?*

*{EJ}* I cover Nashville, Memphis, New Orleans, Kansas City, Albuquerque and everything in the middle including Oklahoma, Texas and Louisiana. There are 24 radio stations in that region that report to media base and R&R. There are two stations in Houston Texas, two in Dallas, Tulsa has a station, Oklahoma City has two, I work those radio stations. I have relationships with the program directors, the promotions director's, the DJs, the morning shows, and I'm the relationship between the artist and the radio stations. I have George Strait, Gary Allen, Josh Turner, Lee Ann Womack, Vince Gill, David Nail, Mallory Hope, the Randy Rogers Band, and Josh Kelley. We set up a schedule when we are coming out with singles, we choose a single off an album and then we work that to radio to try to get that single up the charts. For instance Gary Allen's 'Kiss Me When I'm Down' single is going for airplay on September 27th. So we're going to ask radio to start playing this record then. If everyone gets the same time frame, that's how the song climbs the charts. The longer the song is on the air and climbing the charts, the more commercials we have to sell records.

The ultimate goal in promotion is getting a number one record. Some artists might have a song on the charts for 40 weeks, or sometimes you have an artist whose song is added right away and then in four weeks it goes number one. Taylor Swift got a number one record last year in one week and that's never been done before.

So basically a radio station will commit to playing a record. To start it off, it plays three to five times a week roughly. Then it goes into a light rotation which would be like 8 to 10 times a week and it might stay there for a couple weeks. If it continues to go well, it will go up to medium rotation which would be 10 to 25 times per week. And then if it's overwhelming that people want to hear it more, it goes to a heavy rotation of as many as 40 times a week, some stations even playing it 50 times.

*{EN} So listener response is part of what drives this.*

*{EJ}* Yes. There are phones, there's research, they have these new things called PPM meters, in some markets, people used to fill in little diaries, ratings diaries, and there's only a handful of people that have them, but those are some of the many ways radio conducts its research. Our research we get every week is in Sound Scan. A radio guy might say, "Boy, you had 400 plays on Josh Turner this week and we're up 18% in sales in your city." And then the next week we might have 800 plays on Josh Turner and were up 22% in sales. You can see that. As soon as the fans are hearing it and starting to hear it more they want to buy it, that's how we know we have a hit.

The radio world and the record world, as much as we have to work together, have two different lines of thought. When you start turning your radio station off when a song comes on, they don't want that. So they have to figure out what song made you turn it off, and if it made you turn it off, then how many other people turned it off at the same time.

## Colt Ford

*Hailing from a small town just outside of Athens Georgia, Colt Ford has made a recent splash in the music world with his unique blend of southern country with hip-hop, rock, and R&B influences. His interesting journey has taken him into some unsuspecting worlds which collide to make this bigger than life “average Joe” a one-of-a-kind artist and entertainer. Before his recent arrival on the Nashville scene, Colt had spent some years as a professional golfer and had already invested a lifetime into his passion for songwriting.*

*He discovered his knack for songwriting while in high school, when he wrote a rap for a friend, and soon after this discovery he began working with acclaimed producer Jermaine Dupri (Mariah Carey, Usher).*

*After recording a hip-hop album with Dupri, Colt would spend the next six years as a professional golfer before returning to his musical pursuits. His recently re-focused efforts have yielded him a wave of success as his self released country album “Ride Through The Country” sold nearly 150,000 copies within a year of its release. Without any help from radio or TV, this album has made it to the hot 200 albums chart through word-of-mouth and a rigorous touring schedule (200 dates in 2009).*

*His recent songwriting credentials include country music songwriter and recording artist Jamey Johnson, songwriter/guitarist Jeremy Popoff of the alt rock band Lit, and hip-hop writer Attitude. Other musical contributions include country artist John Michael Montgomery, hip hop artists Bone Crusher and Sunny Lefurd, and No Doubt’s Adrian Young.*



*Photo by Heather Brand*

{Eric Normand} *Tell me a little bit about your younger days. What was it like growing up near Athens Georgia?*

{Colt Ford} Athens is a great town, University of Georgia....I've lived there my whole life. My dad's from Hart County which is a small country town, and my mama's from Anderson South Carolina, so I was raised country, and country music and stuff I learned. Growing up there, I did a lot of hunting and fishing, and before I was as fat as I am now, I was a pretty good athlete (...laughs). I played a lot of sports, was pretty gifted as an athlete and had a lot of baseball scholarships and golf. I ended up playing college golf and then I played professional golf for living. Just a great town, hard to leave Athens.

{EN} *Who were your musical idols and influences back then?*

{CF} I've never been like, specific one thing or one genre. Music from all different styles has always interested me. If it's something I just like, I just like it whether it be Run DMC or Johnny Cash or Waylon Jennings or Lynyrd Skynyrd. All that stuff I listened to, and still continue to listen to. If you picked up my iPod you'd go, wow this dude's got such a wide range of stuff. The Commodores and the Barkays to a lot of the old country stuff, and Kenny Rogers or a lot of the new country stuff.



On stage with DMC Photo by Lisa Carpenter

{EN} *A pretty wide variety, even in your early days.*

{CF} Yeah, always has been, I've always been like that.

{EN} *I understand that you discovered your knack for lyric writing while in high school, at which point you wrote a rap for a friend. How did this come about?*

{CF} Yes, just a buddy of mine, I think I was a freshman in high school and we had a song. He was wanting to be in this contest and he was having a hard time writing it. When I was little, I used to sit in the front seat and rhyme words together. I would beat on the dash. I've played drums since I was real little and I guess the rhythm and the patterns have always kind of intrigued me. I just wrote something for him and he went in the contest and won. And I was like, man, well maybe I should just do it (...laughs). I got into that, it was different; it was like a movie for me. Hip-hop was really taking off then and I certainly didn't know about most of the stuff I was talking about. Back when I was into it, hip-hop wasn't bashing women or as violent, it was more about fun and party kind of stuff.

{EN} *Just good stories.*

{CF} Yeah, stories, fun, party kind of stuff, that's what really intrigued me. A lot of the new stuff doesn't move me very much, most of them don't really put any thought in to the lyrical content.

{EN} *It's kind of strayed.*

{CF} Yeah, I've got a 14-year-old daughter, and I'm married... I'm not interested in hearing you tear women down and all the violence there. When you put that to a kid's ear, if they hear it over and over again, that's potentially dangerous, as the world has shown.

{EN} *Upon your discovery of your songwriting abilities back then, did you ever consider the possibility of pursuing it as a career?*

{CF} Yes, I kind of always wanted to. There's two things that I always wanted to do and that was music and golf and I've done both of those (...laughs). I kind of set out to do both of those and have been really lucky and blessed and given a lot of opportunities; you don't do anything like that on your own. First of all, you're given a gift; God's blessed you to be able to do something. These people that go, you know I've made it and I've worked hard, well no, somebody helped you along the way, that's the way it is. So I've been lucky to have a lot of people to help me. I mean my parents never stifled me, being a white kid in the middle 80s and being really good at rap in Athens Georgia was a little bit different (...laughs...) a little bit different. So I was just a big outcast, it was like, wow, that dude, what's wrong with him.

{EN} *But your parents were behind you.*

{CF} Yeah they never stopped supporting me; it's as much their dream as it was mine I guess.

{EN} *Early on in your career, you recorded a hip-hop album with Jermaine Dupri. Can you tell me a little bit about what it was like to work with him on that project?*

{CF} Truthfully, Jermaine Dupri is the most talented producer maybe ever in the Hip-Hop and R&B world of things. They can say whatever they want to, I know Timbaland is fantastic, and Dr. J, and Puffy, a lot of those guys are fantastic, but if you put them all in a room they cannot do what he can do. He can play just about every instrument, he writes songs, he can write a rap song, he has written songs for Mariah Carey and Usher and Madonna, he's just unbelievably talented. Jermaine, I met when he was only 16 or 17 and he had just done his first record, produced his first record then for a girl rap group on Geffen records. We met and hit it off and started working together. But I'm glad it didn't work out because it led me to where I am now and it led me to being myself instead of being something, you know, that whole career, although it could have been great and it

## Culture Shock

*"I believe in a long, prolonged, derangement of the senses in order to obtain the unknown."* — Jim Morrison

For me, relocating to Nashville was like starting a new life, and this is the case for many. I spent my 35 years living and working in New England, and all of my friends and family, literally everyone I knew, lived there. My decision to move to Nashville was solely based on my music career aspirations. I knew I would miss New England and all of the people I knew there once I was gone, but I didn't realize to what extent until much later. You never realize what you have until it's gone.

I was fortunate enough to have a support cast come with me, as my wife and son were a part of this relocation. We packed up all of our belongings, said our goodbyes, and began to drive away from our native land in a U-Haul truck packed to the gills. Many emotions ran through me like waves as we began to put miles between ourselves and our old home; fear, sadness, excitement, anxiety, accompanied by a sense of mystery and adventure. Driving off that day I felt like my life was a novel and I had just finished reading the last pages. I then immediately grabbed a new book but when I opened it there was nothing but blank pages. I knew very little about Nashville and what the future would hold for me there, and the feeling was both unsettling and empowering.

The early days of living in Nashville for my family and I were the toughest to endure. Gone was all familiarity as the people and daily scenery I had grown up with were now absent. The familiar backdrop of life that I had grown so accustomed to was now replaced with a new landscape and nothing but strangers everywhere. My daily routines, once taken for granted and almost comforting, now had to be completely reinvented.

This town that would be our new home in our new life was called Gallatin; a suburb of Nashville located about 30 miles to the north of the city. It's a medium-sized town not unlike many towns across the land. It has stores, businesses, schools, people, and its own set of problems just like any place else. Missing from this town was familiar faces, a street name that I recognized, or a way of life that I yet understood. I felt this sense of confusion