



Spring Training

2010 Bios

JESSI ALEXANDER

Ten years, a handful of cuts, and one major-label minor album release into her career, **Jessi Alexander** was feeling discouraged. "I was in a very frustrated place at the time," she recalls. "In all those years, nothing I'd tried in music had been an overwhelming success, and it was really starting to get to me." It was at the BMI Awards in 2007, however, that Jessi had the revelation that would ultimately catapult her to the level of success she'd been dreaming of. "It finally struck me: I moved to Nashville with the goal of making a living making music, and one way or another, I'd done that. I'd always wanted longevity in my career, and that night, I realized I'd achieved that. It's not a race. It's not about how fast you get there...it's the climb." That epiphany inspired the lyrics for "The Climb," which, with the help of co-writer Jon Mabe, in turn became an instant hit single for teen sensation Miley Cyrus in 2009. "The Climb" firmly established Jessi as one of today's most sought-after tunesmiths. Miley Cyrus scored not only a Country hit with it (her first solo release to the format), she took it to #1 on Billboard's Hot AC chart as well as to #4 on the Billboard Hot 100. She performed the song on *American Idol* as well as the Academy of Country Music Awards. What's more, the director of *Hannah Montana: The Movie* re-wrote the film's script to incorporate "The Climb," which was released as the lead single from the movie's soundtrack and was voted Best Song from a Movie at the 2009 MTV Music Awards.



Yet for Jessi Alexander, there was nothing instant about it. Her climb to Nashville's top songwriting circles took an unflinching work ethic, a commitment to craftsmanship, and perhaps most of all, persistence. Through songwriting, Jessi truly began to find her own voice. "It was when I began co-writing in Nashville that I found the real joy of songwriting," Jessi says. She's of the old school, sitting down to write every day without fail. Whether working with established hitmakers or up-and-coming songwriters and artists, Jessi thrives on the collaborative approach to making music. A few years after moving to Nashville and leaving Middle Tennessee State University, where she studied social work by day and played in bands by night, Jessi scored her first songwriting cuts with Patty Loveless and Kathy Mattea. She has also written songs for Toby Keith, Trisha Yearwood, Little Big Town and others.

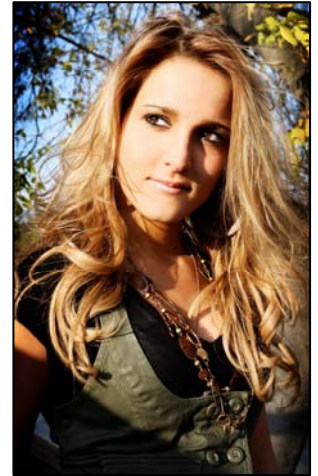
For more on Jessi Alexander, visit cmt.com/artists/az/alexander_jessi/artist.jhtml.

VERONICA BALLESTRINI

The face of Country Music was undergoing a profound shift in direction the year **Veronica Ballestrini** was born. That year was 1991, and the country genre was rapidly evolving into a more accessible, pop-friendly format in the millennium's last decade. A new generation was growing up on a steady diet of superstars like Garth, Shania, LeAnn and Faith. Now, nearly 20 years later, the guise of country is changing once again, this time behind the youthful exuberance of female artists like Taylor, Carrie, Kellie and... *Veronica*.

Veronica Ballestrini might not be the household name that our modern American Idol-era industry is capable of producing overnight - - yet. But there's no doubt that Veronica is well on her way to mastering the art of our new media age and bringing a legion of fans with her in the process.

"I spend about four hours a day answering messages from fans," she reveals. "Every message I get, I answer myself." It's a formula that's paid big dividends for the surprisingly down-to-earth young star.



With one modest dream and an Internet connection, the enthusiastic yet mature-beyond-her-years teenager from Waterford, Connecticut has raised more than a few eyebrows with her self-made success story. The staggering numbers on her social network sites are proof that Veronica has that special ability to connect with people. On Myspace alone, that number totals more than 120,000 friends, 7.5 million page views and 11.5 million plays of her music. On country-lifestyle portal DigitalRodeo.com, Veronica is one of the most in-demand artists on the entire site.

"What Veronica has done without a label, without television and with virtually no press is absolutely astounding," says Digital Rodeo Director of Marketing and Promotions John Pyne. Her accomplishments first began at the innocent age of 13, when Veronica first picked up a guitar and unknowingly logged on to a career.

Part of Veronica's success comes from her undeniable pop-country crossover appeal. She points out that while she considers her music country, that doesn't mean that it can't have a spin on the genre.

"It's just a different style of country music," she says. "Keith Urban, Taylor Swift, Carrie Underwood - they all have their own style." She continues, "It's important that people know that I'm not trying to be anyone else. I'm just trying to be who I am. I'm writing from the heart about issues and things I'm experiencing, and hopefully people can identify with that."

Check her out at VeronicaBallestrini.net.

DAVE BERG

Cal IV songwriter **Dave Berg** comes by the title of Billboard's #1 Hot Country Songwriter and ASCAP Writer of the Year (2008) in an honest way – honest songs and honest hard work. It is no surprise that NSAI also named him Songwriter of the Year, having penned #1 hits for Keith Urban, Rodney Atkins and Emerson Drive. Dave is a recent recipient of the Country Music Association's coveted Triple Play Award for achieving three number one singles within a twelve-month period.



His breakout run began in 2004 when his hit, "Somebody" performed by Reba McEntire reached the number one spot. Then in 2006, Dave celebrated a four-week number one for Rodney Atkins' "If You're Going Through Hell (Before The Devil Even Knows)." The hit was honored as ASCAP's 2007 Country Song of the Year, the R&R/Billboard 2006 Country Single of the Year, and received song and single nominations at the Academy of Country Music Awards and the Billboard Music Awards, respectively. Shortly thereafter, Keith Urban's recording of "Stupid Boy" climbed to number one on Music Row's Breakout chart, earning Dave a nomination for CMA's Song Of The Year Award.

Other include #1 hits with Emerson Drive's "Moments" and Rodney Atkins "These Are My People." He also scored a Top 5 for Chris Cagle's "What Kinda Gone," a Top 10 for Bucky Covington's "It's Good To Be Us" and debut singles for two of Country Music's rising stars, Sarah Buxton and Emily West. He also found success with Blake Shelton's hit single "Don't Make Me." Most recently, he's had cuts on new projects by Darius Rucker, Emerson Drive, Jimmy Wayne, James Otto, Tracy Lawrence, Bucky Covington and Rodney Atkins.

Originally from Portland, Oregon, Dave moved to Nashville as his Ty Herndon single "I Want My Goodbye Back" hit the Top 5. Since his songs have been recorded by Terri Clark, Tracy Byrd, Ronnie Milsap, The Warren Brothers, Lorrie Morgan, Katrina Elam and more. Dave has also enjoyed international success with songs on projects ranging from a number one-selling Hungarian album to the top-selling record and ad campaign for Chinese recording artist and movie superstar Aaron Kwok.

A successful independent artist in his own right, Dave has recorded two critically acclaimed albums *Surface* and *Three Perfect Days*. To learn more about Dave, visit myspace.com/davebergmusic.

ODIE BLACKMON

Odie Blackmon is a Nashville songwriter with the following credits to his name: 2005 Grammy Nominee for song of the year "I May Hate Myself In The Morning" recorded by Lee Ann Womack, 2005 Country Music Association's song of the year "I May Hate Myself In The Morning", 2005 Academy Of Country Music nominee for song of the year "I May Hate Myself In the Morning", George Strait's 50th number 1 Hit "She'll Leave You With A Smile", Gary Allan's # 1 Hit "Nothing On But The Radio."

Odie has won three (ASCAP) American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publisher Awards as well as NSAI's "Ten Best Songs of 2005" and was named Billboard Magazine's Number 1 Hot Country Songwriter. Other artists who have recorded Odie's songs include Martina McBride, Blake Shelton, Cindy Thompson, Andy Griggs, Rachel Proctor, Marty Brown, Arron Tippin and more.



An equally accomplished teacher, Odie lectures at workshops and songwriting seminars around the world. He has recently released an instructional DVD entitled, "The Craft of Writing Hit Songs", which has received industry-wide acclaim. Learn more at myspace.com/thecraftofwritinghitsongs.

JONATHAN CAIN

After performing, writing and recording with some of the some of the best known bands and vocalist of the eighties, keyboardist and longtime member of *Journey*, **Jonathan Cain** can look back and reflect on a successful career. With the band Journey, their song "When You Love A Woman" was nominated for a Grammy Award, he has received two of the most prestigious BMI songwriter awards – *Most Performed Song of the Year*, for over two million or more radio plays with "Open Arms" and "Who's Cryin Now". Journey's *Greatest Hits* received the *Diamond Award* for sales of ten million and the band has sold 60 million albums with a string of Top 10 singles accounting for over two decades of music played on the radio.



As a songwriter, he's had songs recorded by Michael Bolton, Sammy Hagar, Kenny Rogers, Heart, Greg Allman, Conway Twitty, The Oak Ridge Boys, Colin Raye, Lorrie Morgan, Mariah Carey, Jimmy Barnes and Peter Frampton. As a producer he's worked with Michael Bolton, guitarist Neal Schon and most recently wrote or co-wrote most of the songs on the new Journey CD *Generations*. He's also produced seven of his solo albums - *Back To The Innocence*, *Anthology*, *Piano with a View*, *Body Language*, *For A Lifetime*, *Namaste*, *Animated Movie Love Songs*, *Bare Bones* and *Where I Live*.

Cain tours during the summer with Journey which includes over 25 thousand miles of touring the country on a tour bus and 50 shows playing to about a half million people. He has toured with Journey since 1981 and with the new the lineup since 2007.

He was inducted into his high school's Wall of Fame in 2004. He also sang the National Anthem at Wrigley Field in July of 2004 and threw out the first pitch with his son Weston by his side.

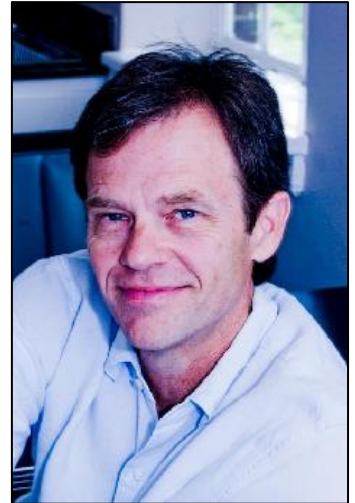
Journey received a Star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in early 2005 and the mayor of Hollywood declared January 21, 2005: "Journey Day."

TOM DOUGLAS

After a successful career in commercial real estate – but with a lifelong passion for music – **Tom Douglas** attended a songwriters' seminar in Austin, Texas in 1993. He played one of his early compositions, "Little Rock", for publisher/producer Paul Worley, who took it with him back to Nashville. Sony/ATV/Tree signed Douglas as a staff writer and in June 1994, "Little Rock", as sung by Collin Raye, became a #1 hit and a nominee for CMA Song of the Year.

Tom has gone on to become one of the most widely respected and successful songwriters of our time. He earned his second #1 hit on the pop charts in 1998 with "The Gift", as recorded by and co-written with Jim Brickman. In 2001, Tim McGraw took "Grown Men Don't Cry" to #1, and subsequently collaborated with Tom on the Top 3 country hit, "My Little Girl" – which also became the end title for the Fox film, *Flicka*, in 2006. His song "Love's the Only House", recorded by Martina McBride, reached the Top 5 on the Country charts followed by another hit, "God's Will." In July of 2009, Lady Antebellum took their hit single "I Run To You", co-written with Tom, all the way to #1.

Over the course of his career, a whole cast of appreciative performers have brought Tom's discography to life, illuminating not only the work but the man behind the music too. Garth Brooks, George Strait, Brooks & Dunn, Randy Travis, Trisha Yearwood... and the list goes on. Lee Ann Womack, for whom "Something Worth Leaving" behind was a hit single as well as an album- and book- title, sums it up: "Tom's great at taking a snapshot of real life and putting it in a song. He's not afraid about writing about the hardships or the beauty of the world, and in my opinion, that's what makes a true artist."



ELIZABETH ECKERT



Slugfest Records Nashville (Warner/ADA) recording artist **Elizabeth Eckert** is an accomplished singer/pianist/songwriter. Her music encompasses classical, jazz and pop stylings as well as many things in between. Elizabeth's classical training earned her a degree from Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music and culminated in a performance at the prestigious Carnegie Hall. When a tragic wrist injury ended her classical career, Elizabeth discovered the art of songwriting. She packed up, moved to Nashville and never looked back. In addition to extensive recording and performing, she is an Adjunct Artist Teacher of Piano at Vanderbilt University. Elizabeth's debut album *Bloomington* is an exciting combination of virtuosity and pop that will remind listeners of Norah Jones, Sara Bareilles, and Regina Spektor.

For performance schedule, photos and a taste of her music, visit

myspace.com/elizabetheckert.

BRETT JAMES

Over the past decade, Grammy winning singer, songwriter and producer **Brett James**, has established himself as one of the most prolific and versatile songwriters in Nashville having had more than two hundred of his songs recorded by major label recording artists. James has become a fixture on the Billboard Country chart with seven #1 and scores of top 10, 20 and 40 singles to his credit. In 2009 alone he posted four #1's with "It's America," Rodney Atkins, "Out Last Night," Kenny Chesney, "Cowboy Cassanova," Carrie Underwood, the three week #1, "The Truth" Jason Aldean, and charted eight overall singles including the Billboard #2 hit "Summer Nights," recorded by Rascal Flatts. A native of Oklahoma City, Brett attended Baylor University where he completed two years of medical school before moving to Nashville to pursue his dream of becoming a country star. In 1995, Brett James was signed to the Arista subsidiary Career Records and subsequently released his self-titled debut album, Brett James. Career Records was later dissolved in consolidation and with it, James's recording artist aspirations. Brett persevered as a writer at Patrick Joseph Publishing which fostered the relationships that positioned him for success as a songwriter.



In 2000, James received his first major label album cut with "Love Is A Sweet Thing" and a top 20 single with "You Won't Be Lonely Now" recorded by Faith Hill and Billy Ray Cyrus respectively. Over the next couple of years he landed his first Billboard Country #1 "Who I Am" (Jessica Andrews) and "Blessed" (Martina McBride).

As his chart successes continued, Brett appeared on Billboard Magazine's top-ten country songwriters list for the next five consecutive years, the only writer to do so, and in 2006 reached yet another musical milestone winning ASCAP writer of the year. In 2007, Brett received the music industry's highest honor winning the Grammy Award for Best Country Song "Jesus, Take The Wheel" (Carrie Underwood).

The list of artists that have recorded songs penned by James extends beyond what resembles a who's who in country music list, into American and world pop music alike. Notables include Jon Bon Jovi, The Backstreet Boys, Chicago, Leona Lewis and Daughtry. He has also had two #1 songs in Europe and a worldwide top 5 Latin hit.

Brett's talents extend far beyond the writers room and into the studio with production credits that include Taylor Swift, Jessica Simpson, Josh Gracin and Kristy Lee Cook. James is currently serving his fifth term on the board of directors for the CMA as well as NSAI.

For more on the many facets of Brett James, visit myspace.com/brettjamesmusic.

DENNIS MATKOSKY

A native Philadelphian, **Dennis Matoksky** moved to Los Angeles in 1979 and began his song writing career, writing his first song, "Mirror Mirror," a top five hit for Diana Ross. He soon had another hit with the song "Maniac", from the movie, *Flashdance*. He was nominated for an Academy Award, a Golden Globe Award and two Grammys; one for Best Song of the Year and one for Best Soundtrack, which he won. "Maniac" has been elevated to cult status, appearing in a variety of movies, advertisements and media venues.



His production and writing credits are responsible for over 50 million records sold. He has written and produced for artists including Boz Scaggs, Smokey Robinson, Kenny G, Sara Brightman, James Ingram, Eddie Money, Al Jarreau, George Benson, Sheena Easton, Chris LeDoux, Clark Family Experience, Diana Ross, Ty Hendron, Keith Urban,

Steve Holy, Leann Rimes, Clay Aiken, Rascal Flatts, Cliff Richard, Kool & the Gang, Johnny Gill. He has been in the Top 10 of the Billboard charts in the categories of Jazz, R&B, Adult Contemporary, Country, Rock, Pop, Christian and Gospel. He has seen #1 on The Adult Contemporary charts with "Heart of Mine" by Boz Scaggs and "We've Saved the Best for Last" by Kenny G & Smokey Robinson.

In country music circles, Dennis has enjoyed the top of the charts with Leann Rimes' hit single, 'I Need You', which earned Dennis two ASCAP Awards in Pop and Country for 'Most Performed Songs of the Year'. 'I Need You' spent an unprecedented 111 weeks in the AC chart. He also co-wrote Keith Urban's #1 smash, 'You'll Think of Me' which was named one of the best 10 Country songs in 2004 from NSAI and received an ASCAP Award. Most recently, Dennis' name can be found behind the hit song "Red Light", performed by artist David Nail. For all things Dennis, visit dennismatkosky.com.

RALPH MURPHY

In 1971, **Ralph Murphy** had a number two country hit with Jeannie C. Riley titled "Good Enough to be Your Wife" which gave Murphy his first introduction to Nashville. In 1978, Murphy moved to Nashville and began a joint venture publishing/production company with Roger Cook called PICALIC. The company achieved its first number within a year with a song by Crystal Gayle called "Talking in Your Sleep", written by Bobby Wood and Roger Cook. In 1978, Murphy cowrote "Half the Way" with Bobby Wood, which was cut by Crystal Gayle and became a number one hit. In 1980 Murphy cowrote "He Got You" with Bobby Wood, which was cut by Ronnie Milsap and also became a number one hit.

Murphys' most recent success as "21st Century Christmas", co-written with Paul Brady and cut by Cliff Richards which made it to number 2 on the UK charts. Other artists that have cut Murphy's songs include Randy Travis, Ray Price, Don Williams, Kathy Mattea, Little Texas, Shania Twain, Brotherhood of Man, Vanity Fair, and many more.



Murphy has worked with ASCAP for the past 14 years to facilitate workshops for songwriters, and help protect songwriters' rights. He is currently VP of ASCAP Nashville. He is the author of the noted *Murphy's Laws of Songwriting*, which he has posted to his website to help aspiring writers obtain success in their own careers, and has recently released an album of his previously recorded hits and also several of his own favorite previously uncut songs. For a preview of Ralph Murphy, check out murphyslawsofsongwriting.com.

TIA SILLERS

Tia Sillers is perhaps most famous for having penned Lee Ann Womack's mega-selling (and multi-award winning) "I Hope You Dance." The transcendent song went on to win every conceivable award including the Grammy, CMA, ACM, NSAI, ASCAP and BMI Song of the Year. The song enjoyed success in Europe and South America with artist Ronan Keating and Gladys Knight recorded it for "The Family That Preys," a Tyler Perry movie. "I Hope You Dance" also inspired a series of gift books of the same title that became bestsellers.



But you'll find no "one-hit-wonder" here. Sillers has also had many cuts by other artists including Alan Jackson ("That'd Be Alright" -- #1), The Dixie Chicks ("There's Your Trouble" -- #1 and Grammy Nominated), Pam Tillis ("Land of the Living" -- Top 5), Trisha Yearwood ("Heaven, Heartache and the Power of Love" --Top 20 and Grammy Nominated) and Kenny Wayne Shepherd ("Last Goodbye" -- Top 5, "Was" --Top 5, "Blue On Black" -- #1). Not only did "Blue on Black" hold the number one spot on the rock charts for 17 weeks, it was also the 1998 Billboard Rock Song of the Year. Other artists to have recorded Sillers songs include Martina McBride, Trace Atkins, Trisha Yearwood, Diamond Rio, Wynonna, Patty Loveless, Sister Hazel, Vince Gill, Crystal Shawanda and Gabe Dixon.

For more on Tia Sillers, visit markselby.com/tia.html.