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EXTRA

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They Write the Songs

Pair Offer Industry Insights on Channel 10

By **MARIANNE MEYER**
Special to The Washington Post

Attention, aspiring singers and songwriters: Jason Blume, who has written for the likes of Britney Spears and the Backstreet Boys, has boiled down the intricacies of the music industry to a handful of basics that practically guarantee fame and fortune.

Here is Blume's advice, according to his book "6 Steps to Songwriting Success":

1. Make friends with songwriters.
2. Date publishers.
3. Marry a recording artist, preferably Grammy-nominated.
4. Have a hot, torrid affair with a record producer.
5. Divorce the person you're married to, and marry the head of a record label.
6. Repeat steps 1 through 5 as necessary.

But for those who either can't or won't make these sacrifices, there are other options.

Channel 10, Fairfax Public Access's television station, debuted a series July 11 called "Nashville Connection." Filmed over a weekend last month at Channel 10's studios, the eight half-hour episodes can be seen at 7 p.m. Wednesday nights with repeats at 6:30 p.m. Saturdays.

The shows were culled from interactive live sessions in which Blume, in a less facetious mood, and vocal coach/songwriter Dave Brooks told stories of their adventures in the industry, performed samples of their work and answered questions from a small audience consisting of local talent. Both live in Nashville.

Fairfax Public Access producer Joan Betros conceptualized "Nashville Connection" and asked McKay Daines, a Great Falls native, to direct. The two are working on a two-picture deal with their own production company.

Though Daines insists that he has "zero" musical ability, he feels an affinity with young songwriters. "As with songs, you want your film to transport people," he said.

While much of the content is designed to benefit ambitious performers, Blume's and Brooks's stories are entertaining for anyone who wants a peek into the musical machinery of modern pop charts.

"It can seem so mystical, so impossible," Blume explained, "and hopefully what we're doing is breaking it down into logical, manageable steps."

Blume admitted that almost all queries from aspiring musicians can be boiled down into one: "How do I become a star?" He and Brooks want to convey that that's the wrong question.

"Don't miss out on the everyday successes," Brooks cautioned.

Not every talented person can make a hit record, but many can live comfortably by writing for superstars and working behind the scenes.

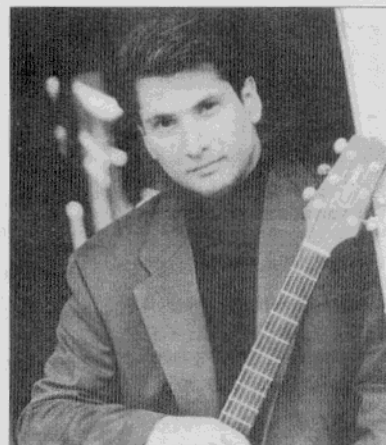
Brooks, for example, is co-author of "Singing Success," a comprehensive vocal training CD program. He also sings national commercials and jingles. Remember the "Wheel of Fortune" promo, "I'm a Wheel Watcher?" That was his voice.

Brooks entered the business as a child, singing with the King Family, a popular act in the Christian market, and then did commercial work in Salt Lake City.

"That really opened the doors," he recalled. "Not only did I get the exposure, but I got a great demo reel that I could show anybody, which is exactly what I did



PHOTO ABOVE, COURTESY OF DAVID BROOKS. PHOTOS AT RIGHT COURTESY OF JASON BLUME



Veteran songwriters Jason Blume, above, and David Brooks, left, share some of their experiences in the music industry with aspiring writers and performers, bottom left, on "Nashville Connection," an eight-part series that debuted this month on Channel 10, Fairfax Public Access cable television. The two also answer audience questions and perform some of their works as part of the half-hour show.



BY MARIANNE MEYER



Blume struck gold when then-unknown teen singer Britney Spears recorded one of his songs. Blume and Spears co-wrote "Dear Diary" for her second CD, titled "Oops! ... I Did It Again."

when I moved to Nashville."

Now he writes, sings demo versions of songs being pitched to major artists and has done backup vocals for James Ingram, Gladys Knight and others.

Blume, meanwhile, is one of few songwriters who has had singles on the pop, country and R&B charts simultaneously and will be first to say that a huge break made it possible.

"The stars lined up just right when a 15-year-old unknown kid recorded a song of mine, and her name was Britney Spears," he said.

That first tune was available only outside the United States on a compilation album, but a second ("Dear Diary"), which he co-wrote with the pop princess, can be heard on her multi-platinum CD, "Oops! ... I Did It Again."

"This crazy business is so much about things that are

out of our control," he said. "Rejection, frustration and disappointment are normal, and if you don't want to deal with it, you're in the wrong business. You need to enjoy the writing and the singing. Then, you're getting a benefit out of it even if you never become a big star."

Preparing to leave the studio, Brooks and Blume carried envelopes stuffed with demo tapes and résumés from hopefuls they have just met.

Those who doubt that newcomers face long odds should consider the case of Albert Peters, a production staff worker at Fairfax Public Access, who helped with the "Nashville Connection."

Daines, the director, was so impressed with the young man's work that he asked Peters to be assistant director on his next project, an independent feature called "Dream Catcher," which is scheduled to start filming this fall in Arizona.