

THE WRITE BRAIN

A free, semi-occasional newsletter for and about songwriters ✍

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"Your First Cut, A Step-by-Step Guide to Getting There"
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Contents:

1. Website Updates:
 - Discussion Forum
 - The Missing Link
2. Interview With Hit-Songwriter and SGA President, Rick Carnes
3. Cool Ideas For Songwriters
4. 2003 Tour Schedule

Dear Reader,

Welcome to our first edition of *The Write Brain*, a free, semi-occasional newsletter for and about songwriters. Little did we know that when Jerry created a questionnaire for songwriters (inspired by *Cosmo Magazine!*) back in November 2000, that a book idea would become reality eighteen months later. Since *Your First Cut's* first printing in the spring of 2002, we've shipped books throughout the United States and as far away as South Korea, England, Australia, Canada, and Sweden! A special thanks goes out to all who have purchased our book and contributed to its success. And thank you to hit-songwriter and SGA president Rick Carnes for graciously giving us his time to be interviewed for *The Write Brain*.

Happy reading,
Gracie and Jerry

Website Updates:

Discussion Forum

The *Your First Cut* Discussion Forum is a bulletin board designed to be a forum for songwriters to share and discuss experiences, questions and information as presented in the book *Your First Cut, A Step-by-Step Guide to Getting There*. It's our way of staying in touch with you and to be able to "service what we sell" if you have questions while working your way up the pyramid. Some recent topics have been: "Staying Focused", "From Good News to Bad News", "Speaking of Demo Singers", "Co-writing Question", and "Weird Situation" just to name some. Please drop by and post away.

The Missing Link

A new "Friends of Your First Cut" page has been added. If you would like to widen the circle by setting up mutual links, just add a link to <http://www.YourFirstCut.com> on your website and send an email to gracie@yourfirstcut.com with your URL. The top section of our "links" page lists the companies referenced in the appendix of the book and then "Friends of Your First Cut" links follow. You don't want to be the missing link, do you?

Interview With Hit-Songwriter and SGA President, Rick Carnes:

Nashville songwriter **Rick Carnes** is the newly elected president of The Songwriters Guild of America. He has served as SGA vice president and a member of the Nashville Steering Committee, and has represented SGA on numerous panels regarding contractual, technological and legal issues affection songwriters. A native of Memphis, Tennessee, Carnes and his wife, Janis, moved to Nashville in 1978. Soon after, the duo signed their first record deal with RCA Records, later recording for Elektra Asylum, Warner Bros. and MCA Records.

In 1983, Carnes wrote Reba McEntire's first #1 hit "*I Can't Even Get The Blues No More*" and co-wrote with Janis and Chip Harding three top ten hits for the Whites: "*You Put The Blue In Me*," "*Hangin' Around*" and "*Pins And Needles*." An exclusive staff writer with *peermusic Nashville*, recent cuts include: Garth Brooks' "*Longneck Bottle*," included on both the Sevens and Double Live CDs and selling in excess of 18 million copies; Steve Wariner's "*Burnin' The Roadhouse Down*" and "*If You Don't Know By Now*"; and Alabama's "*When It All Goes South*." He has also had success with recordings by Dean Martin, Conway Twitty, Karen Brooks, Loretta Lynn, Lacy J. Dalton, Johnny Rodriguez, Janie Fricke, Ronnie McDowell, T.G. Sheppard, Pam Tillis and many others. Carnes is a graduate of Memphis State University with a B.A. in Political Science and a Masters in Elementary Education.

YFC: You moved to Nashville in 1978 and you and your wife had a record deal with RCA. Tell us a little bit about your recording career. How long did it take you to sign your first deal and fill us in briefly on the highs and lows of that adventure?

RC: It took us about two years to get Janis a record deal on RCA and she was on the label for about 18 months with limited success - then we got a deal as a duet on Elektra/Asylum records where we had several singles with steadily improving success. Then E/A merged with Warner Bros. and we had our first solid record moving up the charts (It was 32 in the third week) and then Jimmy Bowen (the label head at the time) decided to leave the label and take us with him. This basically killed our single and it was almost two years before we were able to release another record so we were doomed at that point. But I was sick of being an artist by that time and just wanted to write songs. Janis is the real singer anyway and it is a shame that she never had a bigger recording career, but such are the fortunes of the business.

YFC: After your recording pursuits subsided, tell us about your first outside major label cut. Who was it, how did it get recorded and where were you when you first heard a copy of it?

RC: Our first big cut was before our recording career. It was a song Janis co-wrote with Margo Pendarvis. It was recorded by Joe Stampley and went to 13 or something - it was called "After Hours". It got recorded because Janis and I pitched it to the producer who had used Janis to sing a duet with one of his other artists (Moe Bandy).

YFC: Tell us about your first hit on the radio and where you were when you first heard it.

RC: My first hit was (I think) "You put the Blue in Me" by the Whites. I can't recall where I was when I heard it on the radio. The only one that I remember having a 'radio moment' with was "I Can't Even Get The Blues" when I was driving in my beat up old Volkswagen and I heard the song come on the radio and then the radio started shorting out (as it always did) and I started pounding on the dash and screaming at it!!!! I finally got to hear the second verse and I thought it sounded much better than when we wrote it *grin*.

YFC: Tell us about your involvement with SGA and how that has been an asset to your songwriting career.

RC: I got involved with the SGA thru my publisher E/A music run by Dixie Bowen. She took the whole company over and told us we should all sign up. I did and I have been a

member ever since. My involvement with the Guild has taught me more about the music business than I could have ever learned any other way. I am eternally grateful to them for taking me under their wing and protecting me from myself for the last twenty years. No one should be in the songwriting profession without availing themselves of all the information they can find, and the Guild is the oldest and most knowledgeable group of songwriters around.

YFC: Often times aspiring writers don't see the benefit of joining SGA, thinking it's only for pro writers. Please tell us your feelings about that.

RC: I won't lie to you - The Guild IS for professional songwriters. So if you are one, or intend to ever be one, join the Guild. If you aren't that serious about songwriting you should save your money. You will never need us to audit a publisher or lobby congress or sue to protect your copyrights. I'm sure there are other organizations that are much less serious than us and a LOT more fun to be around! *grin* We are pretty much all business. That being said, if you want to be in the music business and are really serious about being a professional songwriter I would seriously suggest joining the guild very early in your career. DON'T wait until you sign a lot of really bad contracts. We hate having to try to solve problems after the fact!

YFC: What do you think are the big issues facing songwriters, pro and aspiring alike today?

RC: The biggest problem we have is the fact that the public doesn't understand the idea of intellectual property, so they don't place any real value on it. They think that writing songs is all fun and games so we shouldn't complain when the government limits our earnings to 8-1/2 cents per song on a CD; or when people steal the song for free off the internet. They don't know that it took us our entire lives to get that cut.

YFC: What gets you through the occasional moments of doubt/rejection that is always present in this business?

RC: Since doubt and rejection are what happens EVERY DAY in the music business it doesn't bother you very much after a while. If it does you should find a job working in a library somewhere and live a long a secure life. I really don't even care anymore if they don't record my songs. What I care about is if the songs I'm writing now aren't better than the songs I wrote last year. I hate it when I don't feel like I'm improving as a writer. That really worries me. I feel like maybe I've reached some limit of my talent or something. Then I really struggle to find a way to get better.

YFC: Any advice you can give to aspiring songwriters out there?

RC: Stay very healthy and learn to live very cheaply. NEVER NEVER NEVER buy your dream house, and write at least three hours every day whether you want to or not.

YFC: Any parting thoughts or comments?

RC: Study the masters - Harold Arlen, Hoagy Carmichael, Cole Porter, Yip Harburg. Once you have learned where everything came from, you will find it much easier to figure out where it is going.

YFC: Thank you Rick.

Cool Ideas For Songwriters:

Have you ever been taking a shower when suddenly a great song idea pops into your head? Or maybe you were brushing your teeth when you finally came up with the bridge for a song you weren't even consciously working on? What's a songwriter to do?

For about one dollar, you can buy a grease pencil at an art supply store. They're great for jotting down lyrics on mirrors or shower tiles (and the water won't wash them away). We've bought them in blue, black and red and noticed that sometimes it takes a little scrubbing to remove them so unless you have lyrics that you want to live with forever, we suggest testing it out first on a small portion of your shower or mirror.

Got any helpful hints you want to share? Send an email to gracie@yourfirstcut.com then watch for them in an upcoming newsletter.

2003 Tour Schedule:

Feb. 10, 2003 Nashville, TN	Workshop Sponsored by NSAI's MTSU Student Chapter
Feb. 16, 2003 Atlanta, GA	Workshop Sponsored by NSAI's Atlanta Regional Workshop
Feb. 21, 2003 Nashville, TN	Tunesmith Songwriting Seminar
Feb. 23, 2003 Memphis, TN	Songwriters Guild of America Presents "Building a Songwriting Career"
Mar. 6, 2003 Nashville, TN	NSAI's "Thursday Night Workshop"
June 7, 2003 Detroit, MI	Workshop Sponsored by NSAI's Detroit Regional Workshop
June 17, 2003 Nashville, TN	ASCAP presents "Music Business 101"
Aug. 3-5, 2003 Nashville, TN	NSAI's SongCamp 102

A special thanks goes out to all who have purchased our book and contributed to its success.

Where to purchase *Your First Cut*

<http://www.yourfirstcut.com/order.php>

<http://www.Amazon.com>

McCabe's Guitar Shop - Santa Monica, CA (<http://www.mccabesguitar.com>)

Borders Books & Music

Country Music Hall of Fame Museum and Bookstore - Nashville, TN

Davis-Kidd Books - Nashville, TN

Nashville Songwriters Association International (800) 321-6008

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