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Longtime producer, songwriter now heads indie company

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Rand Bishop has achieved success in every end of the music business, from penning hit songs to producing top-selling acts.

He has also won acclaim as a writer and composer for films, been an A&R/talent development executive and a music publisher, as well as a scriptwriter for film and television shows. Currently the founding partner and chief manager of Writer Zone Music in Nashville, Bishop's latest project is his production of rising country/Americana performer Trent Summar's fine new release *Horsehoes & Hand Grenades* (Palo Duro). Bishop touts Summar as not only an emerging star and unique performer, but emblematic of the type of people that he now prefers assisting.

"I'm a rocker at heart and the most important thing for me is working with performers who truly believe in what they're doing," Bishop said. "Passion is critical. The music business is not one for dilettantes. If you don't have full commitment and interest, then I don't want to waste my time."

Summar is the latest name in a long and distinguished list of artists — among them The Outlaws, Rhythm Core, Richie Havens, Tom Paxton, Lorrie Morgan and Kick Axe — whose sessions Bishop has produced.

Yet Bishop actually began his foray into the music world at the other end, studying classical piano for seven years before purchasing what he calls a "\$150 mail-order acoustic guitar" and eventually moving into pop, folk and rock music. Before arriving in Nashville 11 years ago, Bishop's many jobs included various stints as a recording artist at Elektra, Epic, A&M and MCA. He's had more than 200 cuts to his credit, with artists from Toby Keith (the 2002 chart-topping hit "My List") to the Beach Boys, Indigo Girls, Doug Stone and Tim McGraw.

“One thing that I’ve discovered when it comes to songwriting is that every song represents a commitment of at least three days of my life in terms of writing and rewriting, doing the demos, getting the arrangement right, so you’re better off if you write from the perspective of making it universal enough to be recorded by anyone,” Bishop said.

“There was a time in the business when I’d jump through hoops trying to write specific songs for certain artists, and most of the time that just hasn’t worked out,” he continued. “In many instances, you write a song for someone, they pass on it, someone else gets it and you might have a hit.”

One thing that hasn’t changed, especially regarding songwriting and publishing, is that in most instances connections and access are key elements within the business — and often far more important than the quality of the song, Bishop said.

“We’d all like to be naïve and think that the only thing that matters is the song itself, but I’ve seen a lot of cases where you have two songs of equal quality and the one whose producer and singer are signed to a label, or people who have access to top producers and A&R, end up getting the cut recorded,” he said.

However Bishop remains extremely happy and grateful that he’s maintained a presence in the industry more than 30 years. Now a board member of the Nashville Film Festival and working on a Nashville-based TV pilot titled Ruffstock, he recently had screenplay The Shepherds of Wildwood optioned by No Negative Pictures.

Still, his primary motivation remains helping performers whom he feels are distinctive and different get their fair shot.

“When you’re running a small independent music company, you’re always in a tough fight,” Bishop added. “You’re going up against the majors and they have access to all the advantages and they want to maintain their status in the industry on a personal level. But I’ve been extremely blessed to be involved in the creative process for all these years and to make a living doing something that I love.

“At this point, my goal is just to keep on identifying and pushing ahead people like Trent and acts that aren’t just about image and marketing, but really have something to say and have a real point of view, whether it’s peace in the Middle East or let’s dance and party all night along,” he said.

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