

SO, YOU WANT TO



COLLABORATE?

by Alex Forbes for CreativeSongwriter.com

Congratulations! Collaborating is one of the most rewarding and productive activities a songwriter can engage in. It's also one of the most challenging. Co-writing will stretch you in ways you can't even imagine up front.

Take a look at the *Billboard* Singles charts, and you'll notice that the vast majority of hit songs were written by 2 or more writers. Why? Because many songwriters have discovered that the collaborative whole is far greater than the sum of the solo-writing parts. We're all human, with strong suits we can capitalize on, as well as weaknesses we can supplement with the strengths of others.

Many artists find that writing alone year after year is limiting. The jack-of-all-trades approach may produce flashes of brilliance, but solo writers often find themselves stuck in a rut.

If you're feeling the urge to merge with other talent, first take a hard look at yourself as a songwriter from an objective standpoint. Picture your next co-writing appointment as a potluck — what will you bring to the party?

- **Are you passionate, enthusiastic, hard-working, and fun?**
- **Are you willing to commit time, energy, money, and your heart to the worthy cause of making great music?**
- **Do you have unique talents and powerful things to say in your songs?**
- **Are you willing to give and listen to constructive feedback?**
- **Are you familiar with the ground rules and terminology of your chosen field?**

and, most importantly:

- **Have you generated a body of work that shows off your strong suits as a writer?**



BE LIKE A MAGNET

How can you attract quality co-writers? First of all, let's face it, most successful, talented writers aren't looking to pull *you* up by the bootstraps. However, many will want to collaborate if it looks like they'll get something of value from the partnership. Therefore your job is to create material that other writers think will contribute to their success.

And keep in mind that most people to want to work with partners who have achieved a comparable level of development. I can't expect Serena Williams to invite me over to play some tennis, or Tiger Woods to challenge me to a round of golf, until I work on my game just a wee bit more. Why should songwriting be any different?

Make it your goal to become a collaborator magnet. This means getting your contributions into the best possible shape before you walk in the door.

You will inevitably be judged by the actual goods you lay on the table. And if you're honest you'll admit you're weighing your potential collaborators the same way. This is as it should be. Look with an objective eye over your body of work thus far.

Do you have:

- **Neatly typed lyrics, laid out in identifiable song form?**
- **Best versions of instrumental tracks, melodies, hooks and/or riffs?**
- **Lists of possible titles?**
- **A few potential "song starts?"**
- **Any finished songs professionally demoed?**

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These are the “calling cards” you will present to other songwriters and artists. You want to hone them rigorously so you can show them proudly, secure in their value — not apologizing, cringing, or making excuses for their shortcomings. Isn't that the standard of quality you'd expect in return?

You “pay your dues” by polishing up your talents, your diamonds, to a bright sheen. Eventually, if you take your own gifts seriously, word will spread that you have something valuable to offer. This process is sometimes called “eating your way up the musical food chain.” It doesn't happen overnight. There are no “quick fixes,” as in any field of endeavor.



“YA GOTTA KISSA LOTTA FROGS”

Participation is the key. Join up, play out, take risks... basically, you have to lay your talent, your heart and your soul on the line!

No one comes knocking on your door out of the blue, begging you to co-write. You have to make a concerted, consistent effort to create writing relationships from scratch.

In fact, I've noticed that collaborating is very much like... dating!

- **Some collaborations are flings: good for a few tunes, but not for the long run.**
- **Some are nightmares: you want to run screaming in the opposite direction.**
- **Some are unrequited: you feel the urge, but your partner doesn't.**
- **And luckily, some are magical: you stick with them for a long while, maybe even forever.**

And yes, it can be heartbreaking. But I guarantee you'll feel fully alive! There's never a dull moment in this quest because you and your co-writer aspire to the high calling of creating great art together.

You just have to keep writing, re-writing and putting it out there, trusting that eventually you'll attract like-minded souls. So where exactly are these like-minded souls hiding?

A few days of research can provide you with a wealth of

opportunities. Here are some paths that have produced results for me, and I've collaborated with at least a hundred other writers since 1983:

- **Take a songwriting class**
- **Find a teacher, or better yet, a mentor**
- **Start a local songwriting support group**
- **Hire or start a band, even if it's only for a limited number of gigs**
- **Join a Performing Rights Organization (ASCAP, BMI, or SESAC in the U.S.)**
- **Check out programs offered by music business organizations (The Songwriters Hall of Fame, The Recording Academy, Women In Music, Nashville Songwriters Association, etc.)**
- **Join the various online songwriting communities — just Google it!**
- **Check local publications and listings for showcases, classified ads & open mics**
- **Search the Internet for performers in your vein of music**
- **Go to local music stores and check their bulletin boards, or put up your own sign**
- **Post a free ad on Craigslist.com**
- **Read or subscribe to music business publications**

You're only limited by your imagination and your level of commitment.

In summary, there's no such thing as a free lunch, but there is a delicious feast available if you're willing to tap the well of your own talents. How's that for a mixed metaphor?

Finally, I suggest people delve fearlessly into their deeper selves when they write songs. Listeners can always tell when you're being truthful and real.

In a nutshell:

- **Write your truth, and write a LOT.**
- **Dare to write gawd-awful songs in the quest for the brilliant ones.**
- **Create a support team that will hold you to higher standards.**
- **Develop your strengths and supplement your weaknesses as a writer, player, singer and engineer.**
- **Read the books, do the exercises, subscribe to the publications... know your field!**
- **Participate to the hilt, creating relationships with a variety of potential partners.**

Together let's raise the level of songs in the world, so that these become the good old days of music again!

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