



## **Dante's Bop - One foot in Memphis, the other in the Midwest....**

Hello Music Fans:

Nora and I just got back from our trip to Nashville, Tennessee. Nora was running in the Nashville Country Music Marathon (for the third time). This time she registered for the Half Marathon, (only 13 miles). Although it was very hot out and the course was hilly, she did GREAT. So congratulations to a Hard Working Woman!

As we were in Music City USA, we also planned to do some networking when we were down there. My expectations for this trip were low. I wanted to check out the music scene, and possibly make some connections for a future trip. Nora was more optimistic. She was figuring we would get an opportunity to perform, so we brought along our guitars. Well as the song says, "She's always right and I'm always wrong," we ended up performing every day we were in Nashville.

On our first night there we found a Writers Night, in the Hotel we were staying at. Let me explain about the Nashville music scene as it is drastically different from ours here in Wisconsin. First off, in the downtown Nashville most of the bands play for tips, even the house bands. Every club has an outstanding house sound system, so the musicians just need to bring their guitars and amps. Many even had drum kits. The second big difference is the emphasis on original material. Some of the clubs and all of the Writers Nights do not allow cover material to be played. It is expected and encouraged that you play your own material.

Now here is how the Writers Nights work, and these were ALL over town. There is typically a local writer or producer who organizes these. The first two hours are assigned seats for local writers who have a track record of solid writing and performing. For these the artist either gets a 15 minute slot to perform some of their material or they are on stage with 2 other writers for a 30 minute slot. In this last arrangement, each artist plays one song and then it passes to the next, a kind of round robin. In these, you usually play 3-4 songs. After the initial lineup of assigned artists, they will then have a local singer songwriter who is under hire by one of the Nashville Music publishers or is an independent who has had some of their material make it to the market. The artists we saw who were featured in this portion of the shows, had songs recorded by successful artists, like Lonestar, Keith Urban, George Strait, and others. During this part of the show the featured artist will perform for about 30 minutes, talking about the songs and their experiences in the music business. Down here all Singer Songwriters are on the same team, trying to help each other be successful. After this part of the show they will then have an Open Mic section. Here artists will sign up to play 1-2 of their songs. This is just a lottery depending upon time available.

We had contacted a few of these Singer Songwriter organizers prior to our trip down here. To our surprise we were placed in the first part of the shows where we were given an assigned time to perform! Needless to say, we were very excited and a little nervous.

On our first night in Nashville we were given a slot in a Writers Night in the hotel where we were staying. The bar was named "The Sandbar." This venue was new to this type of show. The organizer was Mike Mayo, singer songwriter with some success. There was no open mic portion. We spoke with him and he gave us a time slot, without having heard us, which I thought was very nice.



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We went on towards the end of the show, around 11:00 PM. We played four songs, which were well received. At this point we were performing almost exclusively for other assigned musicians and artists. Always a little nerve wracking, but we did fine. As he had not organized an Open Mic, Nora, asked about just jamming with all of these talented musicians in the room. So Mike thought that as long as we were all there we should all play some more. He had us all get in a Writers Circle. Here, you all sit around in a circle and go around and each play one of your songs. We did this until about 3:00 AM. Wow. First night in Nashville and here we are sharing our material with all of these Nashville cats.

On Thursday, we went to one of the bigger Writers Nights at "The Nashville Palace." We had to be at another event later that evening, so we could not participate in the Writers Night as we would not be there for the Open Mic portion. The organizer moved things around and gave us a slot to play two songs anyway. We were well received and after our second song he asked if we could do a couple more. We had to decline as we needed to be at the event that evening, and were already cutting it close. He put us on his Artists List, and said next time we come down, he would guarantee us an assigned slot.

The event we had to attend that Thursday evening was a very small gathering. The show was titled, "Heroes Behind The Hits." It was recorded and produced by the Nashville Convention and Visitors Bureau and was broadcast by XM Satellite Radio. There were only 150 tickets sold. It was a live broadcast featuring 3 very successful Nashville Singer Songwriters. We had great seats right up front. The three artists, Billy Kirsch, Georgia Middleman, and Tony Haselden, all are career writers here in Nashville. They performed in the round robin format I mentioned earlier, each taking a turn. The only difference was that they would each add to the other artist's song, (guitar or piano work, and backing vocals). It was a wonderful and very inspirational show. As a footnote, Tony Haselden is a very talented and funny guy. He has a Christmas song, "Who Da Baby Daddy," that was just hilarious. Nora bought his CD. He autographed it and gave us permission to perform the song in our shows.

Friday evening, we performed at another popular Writers Night at "The Commodore Bar and Grill." The organizer for this event is a local producer named Lorna Flowers. She gave us a designated slot at 7:00 PM to 7:30 PM. As we shared the round robin with only one other artist, we played five songs vs. only 2-3. Here again, we were well received and had a great time. Lorna said that the next time we come back we should let her know and she will get us a slot on the bill.

Backing up a bit, during the day on Thursday, we were on Broadway. This is the strip in downtown Nashville where all of the Honky Tonks are. We went into many of the ones that Nora had targeted on her earlier trips here. One of these was "The Paradise Trailer Park Restaurant." We talked to the manager about playing there. They were very receptive to the idea and offered us a Friday afternoon, 2:00 PM to 6:00 PM slot as they were facing a possible cancellation by the scheduled artist. As it turns out the artists confirmed that they would be there. Nora then pitched to the manager that we play a Noon to 2:00 PM slot prior to the regular 2:00 PM show. They loved our Sun Studio connection and gave us the green light. So on Friday we played from 11:30 AM to 2:00 PM right there on Broadway in Nashville, Tennessee. It went very well and they said that when we come back they would be more than happy to give us either the regular afternoon slot, or if we bring down the band, the evening slot.



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After this show we asked about doing the same thing on Saturday, (depending on how Nora felt after the race). They said they would love to have us. So after getting up at 5:00 AM and running 13 miles up and down the hills of Nashville in 80 degree heat, Nora dragged us to the club and we played from 12:30 PM to 2:15 PM. Later that evening we celebrated a very successful trip by attending a post race concert featuring Billy Currington with special guests Ashton Shepherd and The Carter Twins with some of our very great friends (Tina, Lori, Cheryl & Jodi) who came down to Nashville with us and were a HUGE support throughout our entire trip! "Thanks you guys, you're the best!"

All in all, a very exciting and motivational trip! We got a lot of insight to the creative side of the business. One of the big things was that our music was accepted and recognized by other writers, including some who have made a living doing this. As an outcome of this trip, Nora and I are going to try to organize a Writers Night right here in Wisconsin. We think this would be a great way to support other local writers and get the word out. Nora and I have been playing music together for over 20 years. We always enjoy playing music by our favorite artists. But at some point, as a musician you need to take that big step and start sharing some of your own material. This is difficult as it exposes your soul and leaves you feeling vulnerable. But it is so rewarding when people such as you, come hear us perform and smile, dance, applaud, or sing along to our songs.

Thank you for all of your support! Looking forward to seeing you all this summer.

Nora Wolff and Jerry "Jerome" Unger of Dante's Bop