

LOCAL SOUNDS

IN CELEBRATION OF SONG

Tin Pan South gives the writers behind the hits their due praise with weeklong festival.

BY BAILEY BASHAM

Jennifer Purdon Turnbow remembers her mom getting aggravated with her for humming too loudly through the aisles of the local grocery store. Turnbow has always loved music—she grew up on 80s pop music and still loves it.

But back in 2005, when was preparing to walk across the stage at Vanderbilt's commencement and step into the working world, a career in music was far off her radar. Turnbow, who describes herself as someone with no background in music and absolutely no musical talent, majored in mathematics. Like most soon-to-be college graduates, she was searching for a job when she came across a posting for finance director with the Nashville Songwriters Association International (NSAI).

She hit 'send' on her application and almost 15 years later, she's the Senior Director of Operations with NSAI and also serves as the brains behind the largest songwriter festival in the world, co-directing Tin Pan South.

"I've found such a love for songs and songwriters, for hearing the stories behind the songs I hear on the radio. I truly believe that my passion found me as opposed to me finding it," said Turnbow.

At the start, Tin Pan South was a small, two-day festival with three venues. Now, in its 26th year, Tin Pan South is a week-long event hosted in 10 different venues that celebrates the writers behind many of our favorite songs — a long-time NSAI tradition.

The NSAI was founded in 1967, and the association's founders chose to make advocating for songwriters' names to be listed on records one of their first missions. Tin Pan South began as a fundraiser for that mission and continues to make the minds behind the songs into the stars of the show.

"Without the songwriters, you don't have the song. You don't have the material that's out there healing hearts, making people dance and making people cry," booking

manager Shelby Yoder told WSMV.

In 2017, among those at the festival were Ashley Gorley, who has written 32 number one singles (and counting) over the course of his career; Carrie Underwood collaborator, Barry Dean; Lori McKenna, who won the 2017 Grammy for Best Country Song; and Hillary Lindsey, the artist behind Lady Gaga's hit "Million Reasons."

Craig Campbell with Campbell Entertainment Group works in publicity for artists who attend the festival and handles publicity for Tim Pan South. With more than 30 years in the business, he knows the importance of a festival that brings writers to the forefront.

"The way I look at it, without someone writing a song, I don't have a job. Really, no one who makes their living in music has a gig without someone writing a song. That's where our whole world starts," he said. "Tin Pan South brings those writers front and center—whether they're artists who write their own songs or songwriters who write for other artists. I love hearing the stories behind the songs and hearing them sung exactly as they were written. That will never get old for me."

Preparation for the spring festival starts in November. Applicants to the festival are reviewed in January, and it's not just Nashville's country music artists that flock to Music City for Tin Pan—artists from any genre are welcome.

"Nashville is obviously known for its country music, which abounds in the festival, but we also have amazing Christian writers represented, a Bluegrass round made up of award-winners in their genre, huge pop writers from LA and Nashville and lots of writers who are multi-faceted and fit somewhere in between. The festival does a good job of highlighting the diversity of songwriting talent in the city and Tin Pan South provides an outlet to celebrate that," said Turnbow.



Each show is formatted to allow writers to play their own songs and to share the stories that inspired them. Turnbow said one of the things that makes Tin Pan South unique is the intimacy of the small shows.

"Our biggest venue holds around 350 people, and then we've got all the way down to the Bluebird that seats about 80. We want these shows to be intimate and feel authentically Nashville," Turnbow said. "Through everything we do, we try to look back to our found-

ers and what their original goals for the organization were—giving that recognition to the songwriters and educating the public that there are these people who make a living being amazing craftsman of something we all love."

Tin Pan South 2018 starts April 3 and runs through April 7. Venues, show schedules and more about the artists attending can be found at tinpansouth.com. The official Tin Pan South app can be downloaded from iTunes or Google Play.