

AMERICAN SONGWRITER INTERVIEW August 2010

American Songwriter sat down with Songsinc Owner and Creator Andrea Standley and Songsinc Partner Gia DeSantis to talk about their company SONGSINC and their TrackShop and MelodyShop platforms.

Andrea and Gia have a wealth of music industry experience between them: Andrea is a prolific songwriter as well as major label veteran, working for Warner Bros. Records for 27 years in marketing, promotion, video, production and International. She eventually became the lead analyst in helping to design many of the data systems still in use today by the Label.

Gia is a 25-year music and entertainment industry veteran, beginning her career as a KROQ DJ and Host of the highly acclaimed Los Angeles market music video program "Request Video." She spent 15 years with major labels in Video and Marketing (Reprise and Capitol), and went on to develop her own independent marketing and promotion company called Pretty Mouthy Marketing, contracted by Warner Bros. Records, Disney, Sony, Universal Music Group as well as other artist management firms and independent labels.

Q: So, let's start with the obvious! What is Songsinc?

Andrea: Great first question. Songsinc (*pronounced Songs-inc*) is an online music company specializing in "TrackWriting" within a uniquely structured music business model.

Q: When did you come up with the idea for Songsinc?

Andrea: I'm going to say the late nineties. I used to come here and pitch songs and go through the whole thing and I would cut tracks. The guys there talked me into keeping the backing tracks. Then as I would pitch songs, I would hear people say: 'I don't like the storyline of this.' So I would consciously just go in, take the backing track, rewrite a new melody and lyric and re-pitch it and find that I got fairly decent success with re-pitching a completely different song using the same exact track.

About 2002, the light bulb went on and I realized I needed to do something with this. There was something important about being able to create songs this way; to collaborate with Music Creators who have great tracks that could be shared with others who might not have 1,000 bucks to produce tracks. So near the end of 2006, we actively started to build the site and officially went live in August of 2007 with an ad in Broadjam that brought in over 200 Members. We "beta tested" in that live environment with those members until just recently. As a point of reference, those members have written over 500 new Songs through TrackWriting and over 20% of those songs are actively being pitched (yes, they are *that* good!). So, after 3 years with these members fine-tuning the concept legally and proving out the concept beautifully, we're opening this up to the world!

Q: You said “fine-tuning the concept legally”. Can you embellish?

Gia: Sure. The final approval by the legal guru’s in the music industry was with the PRO’s (Performing Rights Organizations) and how they were going to recognize these instrumental tracks when filing copyright of the new Song Sound Recordings created with those tracks. They finally agreed each track could legally be downloaded and used as a “sample”; everybody understood what a sample was, and that legal mechanism was already in place.

Q: Everyone is familiar with sampling, but not everyone is versed in the legal aspects of it. What is your role in getting this across to clients?

Andrea: Basically, the download fee is the licensing fee that you’re paying for the specific rights to use that track to inspire a new song (new melody and lyric) and then use that track in the production of the new song demo master. That download fee is split between the master owner and the publisher of the original track, or if you are one and the same, you share that download fee with Songsinc. That’s basically the royalty fee. Further, the TrackOwner (or songwriter / composer of the track or song the track comes from) also receive 20% Writer Share of every new song created with his/her track.

TrackOwners who give us tracks, they have the opportunity to earn over and over again since there is no limit to how often their track can be downloaded – it’s the gift that keeps on giving. The royalty they are getting for these tracks is 40 percent of the gross download fee as well as 40 percent of the gross “buy-in” fee, which allows the songwriter more rights to the master song demo created with that track (such as full administration control and the ability to sell it on places like iTunes). So, they have the opportunity to constantly earn sample licensing income over and over again instead of a one-time fee that a label or an artist would pay at a label and a publisher to use a sample.

Q: Could you talk a little more about the concept of TrackWriting?

Andrea: TrackWriting is similar to writing to tracks or beats, but the similarity stops there. It’s a far more intimate relationship and collaboration with the composer and another really fun and challenging way to create a new *song (melody & lyric)* - with production benefits, since there is no cost in track production to the songwriter. Once you think of our tracks as fully produced chord progressions (C-D-G-F, etc.) with built-in structure (Verse, Chorus, Verse, Bridge, etc.), you’ll get it. Just as songwriters find a melody and lyric within a structured chord progression on a guitar or piano, members can find a melody and lyric within our fully produced chord progressions. And just as hundreds of different songs are created all the time with an exact chord progression, the same is true for TrackWriting.

Q: What is the breakdown among genres for your clients, if you had to guess?

Andrea: Pop, Rock, Country, Alt and Dance as being our top downloads. Country is a wonderful genre because so many songwriters love writing Pop Country and so many of those can crossover into pop. We'll also soon be introducing international ethnic tracks (Indian, Japanese, Spanish, etc) as we want to open up TrackWriting to the local songwriters in those markets, as well as expose songwriters everywhere to instrumental tracks they may have never heard before. Our ultimate goal is to create very real worldwide collaborations, inspiring songwriters to also create outside their comfort zone.

Q: You mentioned to us that Songsinc does more for its Members than other "Indie Music Communities" - can you elaborate?

Gia: Yes, because it's important to understand we are *not* an Indie Music Community. We're an actual Music Company with 3 Publishing companies (Songsinc Songs/BMI, Circle Of Return Music/ASCAP and Thoughts Are Things Music/SESAC). We're actively looking for great writers and great songs, as well as encouraging all newcomers to experience songwriting via TrackWriting. But we're serious about finding and working the songs that are created through our site and this process. We have Music Supervisor partners, gaming relationships (in fact, we placed a member song on the last Wii Family Fun Football game) and work with respected song pluggers. Our music company goal is to get our songs heard, cut and placed!

Q: Now MelodyShop, this was a new venture.

Gia: It's perfect for someone like me who doesn't play an instrument or can't write a song per se, but I can write a poem, I can write a lyric and now there's a place I can go to where I can hear melodies that I get to do something with. Yes, even someone like me can find a melody in a genre I like and I get to add this kooky little ditty I just cooked up to it and create a song! When I started talking to [people], especially someone who wasn't in the music business, who weren't songwriters or lyricists, or even had an idea about how to write a song, when I started to tell them about MelodyShop, their eyes immediately lit up and they'd say "really? I can do that...my kids could do that!"

Andrea: We created MelodyShop for lyricists, but it does open up the ability to expose anyone to songwriting; to give anyone an opportunity to experience the joy of creating a song, and that's the surprise plus to our original intent - giving lyricists more opportunities. We all know lyricists have a tough time finding composers to work with. With MelodyShop they have immediate contact with composers from all over the world. In fact we're hoping the hardest thing for them to do will be to decide which composer / melody to co-write with first.

Q: A lot of aspiring musicians and writers live in the middle of nowhere. They have a hard time finding a producer and collaborators.

Andrea: And that's the beauty of MelodyShop. By the time we are finished, we are going to have thousands of melodies and more. Imagine this: you tell lyricists and poets anywhere in the world that they can go to one place and they have thousands of melodies that they can choose from and there are world-wide collaborations with composers. Now, you tell songwriters that if they want to earn some royalties and they want to participate in this exceptional concept of earning income fairly from Songsinc, they can download a track from TrackShop, they can create a melody, add that in the line above the track, return it to us, and we will put it into MelodyShop. Each and every time that is downloaded, they'll share the download fee with the track owner and they will be the MelodyWriter. Now, they too have a way to earn income by sharing their melody.

Q: A lot of musicians that have been on labels in the past are now adopting a do-it-yourself approach, in terms of producing and recording and even marketing. How does Songsinc jibe with this trend?

Andrea: The artists that I've spoken with are all very enthusiastic about what we do and offer. We've always said Songsinc offers just another way of inspiring and creating a new song - of adding songs to your catalog. A lot of writers (PRO included) create songs using our tracks. We see more and more embracing it. We tested for a long time with PRO, Amateur and mid-level writers and the reception is nothing short of wonderful. We can produce some pretty great testimonials.

And as for TrackOwners - Master Owners worldwide? They have assets they don't know they have. Assets songwriters around the world **will fairly pay to use!** It's that recording sitting on their shelves or in their vaults; the instrumental track from the song that was the 4th cut on that second album that isn't making a dime. We are telling the world of Music Creators, what you thought was useless; what you've been told is no longer viable - it could actually be one of the most valuable assets you've ever owned. We've seen firsthand how what was once thought dead is suddenly very much alive and giving birth to new music.

End Interview.