

## » Jim Melko

### BAND STORY

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I grew up during the 60's listening to the big bands of the '40's and "Muzak'd" popular music. While I heard the Beatles and other pop songs on occasion, I mostly remember sitting in the back seat of our car while we traveled all over the continental U.S. on my dad's business trips, listening to what I later called "milk of magnesia" music. I got my first current album as a gift from my older brother Bob. It was [i]Mud Slide Slim[i] by James Taylor.

Starting in about 1974, I formed a partnership with Joe Paulus - a friend a year behind me in high school - who backed me up on guitar while I sang originals, Jim Croce, John Denver, James Taylor, and many others. At Miami University as a graduate student, I met Jay Battista - the program director at WOXY - and we formed what started out as a punk band. I wrote a few rock songs of my own. Then one day, Rick Joyner - our bassist - sat me down and said, "Are you going to get serious about this songwriting thing?" So I began to get serious.

On Dec. 9, 1980, I awoke to my alarm radio playing a song I'd never heard before. I thought to myself, "I don't know who wrote that, but I'm going to find out and study how he writes melodies." The song was "Staring Over (Again)" by John Lennon, and it was being played because Lennon had just died the previous night. That brought about a revival of Beatles music just as I resolved to study it. I learned everything I could about the Beatles and their songs, then moved through the rest of the British invasion and their American cronies, as well as Motown. I moved quickly but thoroughly through the decades, and then began to write songs with our band's newest keyboardist - Dave Winston, an ROTC recruiter at Miami.

Dave became one of the best friends I've ever had, and my wife and I spent a lot of time immersed in black culture with Dave and his fiancée (whose name now escapes me). Dave and I cowrote a lot of R&B and funk, and visited Nashville together to pitch our songs. In May of 1989, my daughter Erica was born, and I called Dave and asked him to come up and meet my daughter. Dave didn't show up, and I haven't



### STATS

| VISITS  | PLAYS     |
|---------|-----------|
| 79,931  | 4,392     |
| STREAMS | DOWNLOADS |
| 4,392   | 0         |

### FEATURED SONGS

-  **American Dream** Rock
-  **At Night** Rock

seen him again since. I never did find out why. He called me once about 15 years later, and we chatted briefly. He promised to look me up when he was in town, and that was it.

I went to Nashville and quickly realized that I was not going to make it writing R&B on my own as a white guy. I made the switch to country and then started the Dayton/Cincinnati chapter of the Nashville Songwriters Association International (NSAI) in 1993. In 2000, we formed the Songwriters Workshop (which included the now-separated Dayton and Cincinnati chapters).

Meanwhile from 1996 to 1999, I became the only staff songwriter for Chris Keaton in Nashville. In the end, Chris decided to go into band management and graciously returned all my songs and rights to me.

I am now the teaching coordinator for the Songwriters Workshop, and I continue to write and cowrite.

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#### LATEST NEWS

### **New Year's Workshop 2013**

Well, I need to get serious about what this year's workshop will be. We'll be launching the promotion of the Song Gallery, and I'll do a follow-up on the state of the record industry vs. the Internet. But what this year is really going to be about is "Writing Young"!

### **Making Songs Pop**

Well, so much for my thoughts in February. I will eventually get back to poignancy and "Focus and Lens", but in the meantime I've decided to do a lesson called "Making Songs Pop" in which we examine how to use phrasing and phrase length to "pep up" a song.

I've noticed during critiques that most of us tend to use long lines for our verses, while some of our better writers use varied phrase lengths - although this most often happens in our choruses. On the other hand, pop writers like Bruno Mars and his writing gang will often use short bursts of phrases throughout the song to hold and pique the listener's interest. It is a technique that probably is the basis for "ear candy" - pure pop - but it does work!

So I'm going to review phrasing itself and then introduce this new concept. I'm really excited about it.

I'm also excited about how Thumbplay is giving me the opportunity to find examples from the very latest releases in country, pop, rock, and so on. When I was dependent on radio, I usually had the most recent songs in my lessons as examples, but with the Internet and my foray into alternative rock, that happened less and less. Now I can keep up with all the markets!

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