

MFA Audio and Songwriting Practicum Students Record with A-List Musicians

MTSU Commercial Songwriting students and MFA students collaborate with professional songwriters and musicians to record and release songs.

This project serves as a capstone experience for MTSU's Commercial Songwriting students and students in the M.F.A. in Recording Arts and Technologies program. Undergraduate songwriters and graduate student engineers work with professional songwriters and musicians to record songs in professional studios on Music Row in Nashville. These "Pro Sessions" offer students a unique and intensive real-world music production experience, providing them the opportunity to build relationships with industry professionals and work in a professional production environment, better preparing them for success in the music industry



Students write songs under the guidance of Commercial Songwriting Assistant Professor Odie Blackmon, who then brings hit songwriters from Nashville to the classroom for a professional critique and one-on-one workshopping with students. These professional songwriters from Nashville's famed Music Row not only provide real-world, experiential learning for students, but they also connect them to individuals in the music industry outside of academia. Past guest professional writers include number one pop writers Shelly Peiken (Christina Aguilera, Meredith Brooks), Catt Gravitt (Jake Owen, Adam Lambert), Travis Hill (Kenny Chesney, Brett Eldredge) and Hugh Moffat (Ke\$ha, Merle Haggard).



With the assistance of these professional songwriters, students grow stronger in their craft as they compete for slots on demo sessions in Nashville recording studio with professional musicians from the A.F.M. (American Federation of Musicians). Musicians who have participated in this project are world-class session players including Jerry Kimbrough, Kenny Greenberg, Lonnie Wilson, Dave Pomeroy (A.F.M. president), Michael Rojas, Steve Brewster, Duncan Mullins, Jimmy Nichols and John Hammond. Students enrolled in the Master of Fine Arts in Recording Arts and Technologies are the recording and mixing engineers for the music, working with the student songwriters on vocal performance, final mix, and mastering of the final product. The M.F.A. students are guided by M.F.A. Director Professor Bill Crabtree. This collaborative learning experience is a unique opportunity for both undergraduate and graduate students under one program. The resulting work will be made available to the public through a CD and/or digital album.

Former student Jaci Johannsen states, “I honestly feel that the practicum class was the best class I have taken in my college career. It allowed me to grow as a songwriter and get incredible feedback from talented hit songwriters. Also, I think seeing our songs get put together in the studio is an experience every songwriter should get to have. I truly learned a lot.”