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Effect of Selective Memory and Use of Triangulation to Critique Songwriting

Maxwell A. Ramsey
Belmont University, drew.ramsey@belmont.edu

EFFECT OF SELECTIVE MEMORY AND USE OF TRIANGULATION TO CRITIQUE SONGWRITING

By
ANDREW RAMSEY

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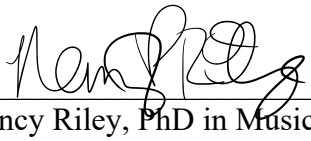
Accepted on behalf of the Graduate Faculty of the School of Music by the Mentoring Committee:

___12.14.23___
Date

Keith Mason, Master of Music
Major Mentor



Nancy Riley, PhD in Music
Second Mentor

___12.14.23___
Date

Joel Treybig, Doctor of Musical Arts
Ex-Officio Member

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Introduction

Consider the memory of playing “the telephone game” as school children. Take a moment to recall how much an initial word, phrase, or story would change from its inception. In those cases, everyone was sitting in the same room at the same time, and the story would alter drastically. Consider how much more, then, the story would change if participants began in the same room but then departed and having the time and opportunity to project upon the initial prompt things such as biases, ego (whether overvaluing or undervaluing), prejudices, and emotional baggage. There would most certainly be misattributions, misinterpretations, and/or misremembrances of how things occurred. That is what it is like to recall how cowriting a song came together in its creative conception. It’s the same reason witness testimony is unreliable. To get an accurate picture of how events occurred, one would need to triangulate and reconstruct from several sources. If a songwriter wishes to hone technique based on successful previous collaborations (similar to how athletes and coaches use game film) then the telephone game challenge will present a problem. Unless a recording device was running the entire time, and even if there are snippets of voice memos, then each contributor would need to be consulted regarding who did what, when, and why. Once all contributors are consulted then the scene can be reconstructed and a perspective gained that allows learning to occur. To that point, a process of triangulation was applied in

accordance with previous successful qualitative research methods such as those developed by Norman Denzin.

> Triangulation is described in the literature as an approach where the researcher uses either multiple methods, several theories, different data sources (in time and space) or different independent researchers in order to strengthen the study's credibility. (Denzin 1978)

By employing this method, it will be possible to reconstruct the cowriting of three successful songs from the perspectives of those who created them for the purposes of uncovering the decisions and techniques that proved pivotal in best serving the idea in the room that day. Current writers, future writers, and even these writers themselves may learn something they can implement in subsequent collaborations to better serve future ideas. In the end, perhaps past collaborations will lead to future collaborations.

Chapter One

The Songs and Their History; Why These Songs?

Three compositions were selected for this research. Because of my involvement as a writer, performer, recording engineer, and producer, I had unlimited access to all aspects of the creation of these songs as well as to the other writers and artists involved. Because I was basing the project on triangulation, I knew that there would be interviews with the other collaborators to either confirm or refute my recollections. These three songs have sold millions of copies, garnished multiple awards, and have been licensed and sampled for purposes other than their original intention. Even the creators of such songs are often as baffled as anyone as to which ones will resonate and the underlying reasons. What was so special about these songs, as opposed to the thousands of other songs that I'd been a part of writing, many of which I personally think are "better" songs?

> …on average, less than 4% of all songs are successful each year. By comparing acoustic characteristics of songs, we have shown that successful songs are quite different from the majority of songs… (Interiano et al 2018, 14)

What did the writers capture on the days that these three songs were written? Could we, or any other writers, replicate that approach on future songs? Let us look at the accomplishments of the three songs before delving back into their humble beginnings.

Song One: The Heather Headley song "In My Mind" was released as a single by RCA records on September 27, 2005 and then as the title track on the album of the same name which was released January 31, 2006. By May 17, 2006 it had achieved the Gold Record sales status (one-half million units) (RIAA 2023). As a radio single, it remained in the top thirty for thirty-nine weeks and reached number two on Radio and Records Urban AC chart on March 2006 (R&R 2006). It has since been sampled in nine hip-hop/rap songs. The following is a list of those songs.

"I'm Here" by Jeezy (2008)
"King" by Big K.R.I.T. (2010)
"Hold Us Down" by Reconcile and Thi'sl (2012)
"Yeah 5X" by Starlito and Don Trip (2017)
"Car Confessions" by Young M.A (2018)
"The Come Up" by Polo G (2018)
"In My Mind" by Ball Greezy and Trina (2018)
"First Things First" by KEZ (German Rapper) (2020)
"Seeing Green" by Nicki Minaj, Drake, and Lil Wayne (2021)
(Who Sampled 2023)

"In My Mind" was also licensed and featured in one television show *The Game*, Season 2, Episode 16. "Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee." 20 April 2008, The CW Network (Tunefind 2023).

Song Two: The India.Arie song "Good Man" first appeared on a soundtrack to the film *We Were Soldiers* which starred actor Mel Gibson. The album, which featured various artists such as Johnny Cash, Dave Matthews, Train, and Michael McDonald, was entitled *Music From And Inspired By We Were Soldiers* and released on Columbia/Sony/Combustion Records on February 26, 2002 (Evans Price 2002). On September 9, 2002 India performed "Good Man" at the NBC Kennedy Center "Concert for America" commemorating the first anniversary of the September 11 attacks (PBS

2023). Due to response to the song, as well as the attention it had garnered from the film soundtrack, Motown decided to include it on India's next album *Voyage To India* which was released later that year on September 24, 2002. By October 29, 2002, the album had reached Gold sales status (one-half million) and then Platinum (one million) on August 4, 2006 (RIAA 2023). The song was nominated for Best R&B Song in 2003 and the album *Voyage to India* won the 2003 Grammy for Best R&B Album (Grammy 2023). The song "Good Man" was sampled and included in the following two songs:

> "Boy or Girl" single by Bow Wow (2011)
> "911" by Kevin Gates for *The Fate Of The Furious: The Album* (Fast & Furious 7 Soundtrack) (2017). (Who Sampled 2023) This project achieved Gold sales status (one half million) on March 5, 2018. (RIAA 2023)

Something about the song "Good Man" moved or inspired the writers, artists, and/or producers of those songs to include it in those newly written compositions.

Song Three: "Ain't Nothing Wrong With That" appeared on the Robert Randolph and the Family Band album *Colorblind* which was released by Warner Brothers Records on October 10, 2006 (Discogs 2023). In 2007, GSD&M licensed the song for the AT&T/Cingular ad campaign announcing the merging of the two companies and Unity plan with a voiceover by actor Stanley Tucci (Splendad 2023). While the song was never a single, it has enjoyed a plethora of licensing opportunities in film, television, and advertising. The following is a list of those television shows, films and other usages.

> *Titans*, Series 2, Episode 5, "Deathstroke," 4 October 2019.
> *So You Think You Can Dance*, Series 13, Episode 2, "The Next Generation: Auditions #2," 6 June 2016.
> *Moms' Night Out*, 9 May 2014.
> *So You Think You Can Dance*, Series 8, Episode 14, "Top 12 Perform," 13 July 2011.
> *The Game Plan*, 28 September 2007.
> *Grey's Anatomy*, Series 3, Episode 23, "Testing 1-2-3," 10 May 2007.

Grey's Anatomy, Series 3, Episode 22, "The Other Side of This Life," 3 May 2007.
Las Vegas, Series 4, Episode 11, "Wagers of Sin," 19 January 2007.
Stomp the Yard, 12 January 2007.
(Tunefind 2023)

Licensed by Chuck E. Cheese for performance the animatronic band for birthday parties.
Licensed for *Thursday Night Football* for the 2023 season on the Amazon Prime Video platform.

The research included within is a quest to uncover how these three songs in particular attracted so much attention, were afforded so many opportunities, and generated so much income for their rightsholders.

Chapter Two

Reconstructing the Moment of Creation; What Do the Writers Say?

To reconstruct the origins of the songs in this study, I interviewed each collaborator separately. Each contributor answered the same seven questions regarding their recollections of how these songs came to be:

1. What/who were we writing for? Was it a cowrite set up by a company?
2. Where were we writing?
3. Was there a direction for music or production?
4. Was there a concept in mind for lyrics?
5. Did anything major change after the first initial draft or inspiration?
6. Was there a champion for the song?
7. Was the song used for its original intention?

The complete interviews are included within as Appendix A while Appendix B represents the triangulation of all interviewee answers.

Interviewing songwriter Shannon Sanders about cowriting songs was a challenge because of how many thousands of hours we have spent together, both writing songs and living life. In order to maintain neutrality and get to the truth without "leading the witness," I was forced to stick to the questions and resist the desire to just take a walk down memory lane. Also, our relationship to each other and to our writing process had historically been based on the outdated maxims that one does not talk about feelings and one should not dissect the creative process for fear of spoiling the soup. An interview such as this would be breaking both of those unwritten rules. When it came to the song

"In My Mind," Shannon seemed to recall much of the same details that I did. Because we were stranded in a hotel, our experiences were recalled similarly. The innocence of simply "entertaining ourselves in the moment," as Shannon put it, and it feeling so "natural" and how it just "went and went" (Sanders 2022) were possible because we were not tasked to write and had nothing in mind other than passing the time. There were no preconceptions or expectations projected onto the process. This also allowed the song to remain very much like the conversation that had birthed it. Like me, Shannon remembered having the conversation about running into an ex-girlfriend (or her mother) and how we had pursued that as the theme.

Where his answers did shine a light and provide details, however, was on the question of who had convinced Clive Davis, then president of RCA Records, to have one of his artists, Heather Headley, record the song. Years after that recording, Shannon had met and discussed the subject with Kenneth Wilson, the Radio promotions executive who championed our song. In 1999 a small independent label in Nashville, Southern Way Records, had released a version of Shannon singing "In My Mind" on the album *Outta Nowhere*. Kenneth told Shannon that he and his wife would drive the Pacific Coast Highway on the weekends and listen to that original version of the song with their top down. In relaying the facts to Shannon, Kenneth said when it came up that Heather Headley was doing a record, he went to Clive Davis with "In My Mind" and said "cut this song on Heather" and "on my job I'll take it to number one" (Sanders 2022). In recalling that first day of writing, Shannon thought that we had decided to base the song around the acoustic guitar because that's what I was playing in the room that day but, in fact, I had only brought an electric guitar on the trip. However, at that time in our creative

careers, we had both been experimenting with writing soul songs that would begin softly with acoustic guitar but then build to grow larger. We wanted “In My Mind” to have that arc to a penultimate emotional degree. On the subject of what we later altered to tailor the song to Heather, I had mistakenly thought we changed the key of the song but Shannon correctly remembered that we’d only changed the melody to favor upward movement. We redesigned the melody to go up at the ends of the phrases, an interval of a fourth or fifth and had her ad-lib sections go up as much as an octave. We both remembered that Heather would not sing the word “damn” so the line “I don’t really give a damn” became “it don’t matter either way” and then, obviously, we had to put the song in the first person from a female narrator. As for whether “In My Mind” hit the mark and was used for its original intention, the answer could be “yes” and “no.” Shannon did record the song, but it was the subsequent rewritten version that climbed the radio charts and has been sampled by multiple hip hop artists in the years since.

I had never met songwriter Will Baker prior to the time representatives at Windswept Publishing connected us. During his interview, Will recalled having previously written with my publisher Chris Farren (Combustion Music, a Windswept subsidiary). Unbeknownst to us, Will’s publishers at HitCo Publishing, Shakir Stewart and Billy Calloway, had worked with Chris to arrange our cowrite. Will and I both remembered me knocking on—and him opening—his apartment door in Atlanta and then me playing him an idea on the guitar. He thought it sounded like something we could finish for Boyz II Men while I brought up India.Arie, who he was familiar with around Atlanta. I recall mentioning that I had seen a rough edit of the movie *We Were Soldiers* that morning before I drove to his apartment. What I did not know until I interviewed him

was that his publisher had told him about the plans for the film's soundtrack. Will described the next moments; "when you hit that riff with that melody it was a perfect storytelling riff. When that thing came it was like it the song wrote itself. I closed my eyes and starting "singing 'da, da, da…'" Will recalled saying, "I looked at you like—I think we gotta hit" (Baker 2023). We both remembered discussing the idea of me taking a copy of the song to play for my writing partner Shannon Sanders and India. At that point, Shannon enters the picture and described it this way: "You sent it to me. I remember being on the bus and telling her (India) about it and somebody set it up for us to go to a screening of it (*We Were Soldiers*). Then it all that made sense and that's when you and I got together and did some tweaking a couple of nights straight at your studio" (Sanders 2022). Both Shannon and I knew that India was receiving a lot of attention for her first album *Acoustic Soul* and was working on her follow-up record. If we were going to be successful in our endeavor to have India record it, we knew this song idea would need to lean in that direction of acoustic guitar-driven soul music.

Lyrically, I had been taken by a scene in the film at that first screening; the night before the soldiers will be deployed into battle they are depicted in bed with their wives but not a word is spoken. While watching, I was wondering what one would even say to their spouse in such a circumstance knowing they may not return home? I conveyed this to Will Baker and we explored the idea of writing from the perspective of a policeman, a fireman, a first responder of any kind, but also possibly a drug dealer because when writing for film you don't want to be too obvious or specific to what's happening on screen. We kept coming back to the soldier, partially because the father of my godson served in the first Gulf War, but also due to the movie setting. This provided the spark

needed to begin but the entire song was initially the same three chords over and over. It was revealed in the interviews that my hands had gotten so tired playing those same chords that I slipped up and played a "wrong chord." However, upon hearing that incorrect chord Will Baker exclaimed, "that's not a wrong chord that's the bridge!" (Baker 2023). It was, in fact, the emotional lift that the song needed at that point. It also came to light that we had tried to put words to that bridge but it felt forced, so we left that section instrumental. That day when we started the song, Will wrote on a CD of our demonstration recording of the idea "India.Arie or Boyz II Men." I explained to him that Shannon was India's musical director and that Shannon and I could further polish and tailor the song for India. Obviously, that would mean changing the perspective from the soldier to the spouse. This switch piqued our interest but it was very difficult and took another four days of rewriting because we knew, in the end, that the soldier would have to die in the song. To make it even more emotional, we decided to change the third verse and add the children's perspective so that the chorus about their father would resonate on another level. All of the hard work rewriting the lyrics paid off when India agreed to try singing the song. Shannon revealed in his interview that we were "glad we got that vocal on there" (Sanders 2022) because after then, the song garnered its own momentum. India really seemed to embody the character of the soldier's wife in our song. September 11 was still fresh on everyone's minds and many military families were making the sacrifice of having a parent deployed in the war in Afghanistan. No one was more taken by the impactful nature of the song than Combustion Music who was overseeing the *We Were Soldiers* film soundtrack album. The interviews also uncovered the fact that when India was in the vocal booth recording her vocals, she changed a few words in the second verse

lyric. When asked, “was the song used for the original intention?” Will Baker put it best in his response “you know that never happens—what we intended and set out for actually came to fruition!” (Baker 2023).

The emergence of the song “Ain’t Nothing Wrong With That” could be described as a difficult birth or at least the one from the litter that was least likely to survive. It was revealed in the interviews that the beginnings of what turned into “Ain’t Nothing Wrong With That” came about as part of an artist visit to Nashville. My publisher at Windswept Los Angeles, Val Bisharat, had arranged a cowrite with a South African-born Australian artist named Jeremy Gregory. Although Shannon did not recall this in his interview, we were, in fact, at his studio that day with Jeremy. It was a collaboration that was not going well as Jeremy was not impressed by any of the multiple song ideas that we presented to him. Almost out of frustration, he prompted us to come up with something that combined the seemingly polar opposite sounds of the bands The White Stripes and Outkast. Little did he know, due to our very diverse musical backgrounds, that we would often combine genres. As a result, Shannon made a 1960s surf R&B beat on an Akai MPC drum machine and I added an electric guitar part that was also 1960s but in a rock James Bond-vein. We started writing lyrics to a song we were then calling “Can’t Go Wrong With That.” It was all about different kinds of girls—redhead, brunette, tall, short, every kind of girl. While we were excited by how we had responded to his request, he was not, so we tabled the idea for something or someone else at a later time.

Other facts that came out of the research were that, because we had produced and won a Grammy with Jonny Lang for A&M Records, Ron Fair (President of A&M) had recommended us to Bruce Flohr at Red Light Management, who was Robert Randolph’s

manager. Months later, an appointment was arranged for us to write with Robert at my studio. He was in town to perform at a venue then called City Hall (now an Urban Outfitters) in the Gulch in Nashville. Robert revealed in his interview that he could not only immediately tell that the "Can't Go Wrong With That" idea could work for the record he was working on but that he needed something just like it to round out the musical variety of the project. He shared that, as much as he liked the idea when we first played it for him, he was also quietly obsessing over adding a signature guitar melody to the song. He did not verbalize it in the room at the time, but he was thinking that it needed something like the guitar riff in the Jimi Hendrix song "Voodoo Chile (Slight Return). Robert said "you guys kept running the track and I played all the different options I was hearing in my head and you seemed to like that one in particular that we ended up with" (Randolph 2022). As was also divulged in the interviews, seeing Robert's performance later that night became a turning point for the song lyrics. His audience was made up of gospel musicians, jam band fans, and sorority girls all dancing and it was Robert's music that had brought them all together. This unlocked the potential that the idea could be bigger if it wasn't limited to being only about girls. The next day of writing saw the song morph, broadening to highlight different cultures, hairstyles, dances, and music. As Shannon said in his interview, "just in us having conversations with him (Robert) about who he was and who he wanted to speak to . . . was . . . everybody can come to the party!" (Sanders 2022). The third day saw the band all in a larger studio (what had once been Roy Orbison's, then Ronnie Milsap's, then Universal Publishing, now Black River Entertainment) recording the song now titled "Ain't Nothing Wrong With That." The idea that had begun months before as a failed attempt for Jeremy

Gregory came together in a three-day period once it had found its true destiny with Robert Randolph.

Chapter Three

Comparing the Recollections; What Does the Data Say?

Detailed examination and triangulation of the interviews yielded several interesting revelations. Commercial songwriting operates in a supply and demand economy where prompts often lead to a deliverable product. The first interview question addresses where the prompts for these songs originated. In the case of the song "In My Mind," it turns out there was initially no company involved—it was just a conversation between two friends that turned into a song, whereas the writing of song "Good Man" was requisitioned for the film soundtrack for *We Were Soldiers*. The publishing companies Combustion Music and HitCo Entertainment, both subsidiaries of Windswept Publishing, initiated the first cowriting session. As for the third song, "Ain't Nothing Wrong With That," it was also arranged by Windswept Publishing for the recording artist Jeremy Gregory but was rejected for that project. Later, Red Light Management arranged a cowriting session for their artist Robert Randolph where the song was presented and selected for his Warner Brothers Records album *Colorblind*.

As far as where the writing sessions took place, "In My Mind" was written in a hotel room in Virginia Beach and was not planned but, rather, a spontaneous occurrence. The cowrite for the song "Good Man" began in cowriter Will Baker's apartment in Atlanta, Georgia. The occasion was planned but the first two cowriters on the song w

not previously acquainted. “Ain’t Nothing Wrong With That” initially took place at cowriter Shannon Sanders’s studio for one recording artist but the song was revived and revisited later at my studio with another artist.

The third interview question pertained to preconceived notions as to musical direction for the songs. In the case of the song “In My Mind,” when the conversation morphed into a songwriting session, it was revealed that the direction was acoustic-soul in the spirit of the Isley Brothers whereupon the chorus would introduce rock elements of Nirvana while incorporating Gospel background vocals. With the song “Good Man,” the cowriters quickly isolated the artist India.Arie as a potential performer of the song so the direction was steered towards acoustic soul, a genre that she was instrumental in bringing back to prominence. The interviews uncovered that the prompt for what became the song “Ain’t Nothing Wrong With That” was a challenge occurring in the first writing session. That challenge was a request that the writers attempt to create a song combining the sounds of the two bands The White Stripes and Outkast. Two of those writers interpreted this direction as a blending of 1960s R&B, Go-Go music, and surfer rock guitar.

Songwriters often journal ideas as a way to kickstart cowriting sessions instead of starting with a blank page. The fourth interview question sought to uncover whether that tactic was utilized. As previously mentioned, “In My Mind” began as two friends discussing running into a former girlfriend (or girlfriend’s mother) and the emotions that can be elicited in such a scenario and the song grew from there. “Good Man” started as a song for the soundtrack to the Vietnam War film *We Were Soldiers* but the portal into the lyric was opened when one writer decided to use the opportunity to tell the story of a friend who was deployed in the Gulf War. The song “Ain’t Nothing Wrong With That” is

what songwriters refer to as a "list song." In this case, the lyrics were initially a list of different kinds of girls or female beauty but grew to include varieties of things that people love in different cultures like music, dances, and clothing.

Moving past composition, the interview questions start to delve into the next phase of each song's journey to finding success, beginning with who may have been a champion for the song being played (or pitched) for recording projects or artists. It was uncovered that an RCA Records Radio Promotions executive named Kenneth Wilson had discovered an independent recording of the song "In My Mind" and took it upon himself to convince executive Clive Davis to have the singer Heather Headley record it. As for the song "Good Man," Combustion Music, the publishing company and record label for the *We Were Soldiers* film, promoted the song for the soundtrack internally with the films' executives. It turns out that "Ain't Nothing Wrong With That" was not received well initially but two of the songwriters (also the songs producers), me and Shannon Sanders, believed in the song and continued attempting to find a landing place for the idea.

The next interview question was "Did anything major change after the first initial draft or inspiration? (Lyric, music, etc.)." Answers revealed that the song "In My Mind" began from a male perspective but was rewritten to a female perspective when the record label requested it be changed for singer Heather Headley. The melody then also needed to change to better fit a female singer's range. "Good Man" initially started from the perspective of a firefighter, policeman, drug dealer, or first responder but settled on a male soldier to more closely align with the film soundtrack. It also began in a male narrator voice but was changed to be from his widow's perspective so it could work for

the female recording artist India.Arie. As previously discussed, “Ain’t Nothing Wrong With That” was first titled “Can’t Go Wrong With That” and was a list of types of girls but broadened to include music, clothing, hairstyles, and dances once the writers saw the artist Robert Randolph and the Family Band perform in concert. The title was then changed to better fit that perspective.

During the interviews, the cowriters were next asked about whether these songs were ultimately used for the purposes for which they were originally written. In the case of the song “In My Mind,” the answers were “yes” and “no.” It was independently recorded for Shannon Sanders, one of the writers and part of that initial conversation. However, the song found success when that independent version floated all the way up to the offices of legendary record executive Clive Davis and became a hit R&B song for his artist Heather Headley. In what songwriters would consider a rare instance, “Good Man” was included on the film soundtrack for which it was originally written. As previously discussed, “Ain’t Nothing Wrong With That” was not well received by the artist it was written for but two of the writers kept playing it for others until the artist Robert Randolph raised his hand, as if to say, “I’ll take it!”

Two additional revelations came to light in the triangulation process. One pertained to whether the songs lyrical content had any basis in fact. The other had to do with whether the song was unusual for its genre at the time. As for lyrical fact, it was mentioned that “In My Mind” was based on one of the writers running into an ex’s mother in public. The first verse of the song “Good Man” partially tells the story of one of the writer’s friends who was deployed in the Gulf War, and his family. The lyrics to “Ain’t Nothing Wrong With That” pivoted to include descriptions of Robert Randolph’s

fans at one of his concerts at the former venue City Hall in Nashville, Tennessee. In considering any genre-bending aspects of these songs, the interviews pointed out that a song like “In My Mind” beginning with quiet acoustic R&B guitars and adding rock electric guitars (using almost a Nirvana formula) but then layering gospel background vocals was out of character for R&B radio at that time. “Good Man” being acoustic soul would not, in and of itself, have been unusual but the fact that it was a story song about a military family would have been something normally heard in country music. “Ain’t Nothing Wrong With That” blended surf rock guitars with 1960s Go-Go music and was performed by a recording artist whose primary instrument is the pedal steel guitar. Each of those scenarios on their surface might be considered a recipe for failure but, as we learned, these songs have sold millions of copies and generated millions of dollars in royalties. It is definitely worth noting that each of these songs were outliers in their genre.

Conclusion

Upon reviewing the processes of how these compositions came to life, it is noticeable how many hands were involved in their lifting. As much as we songwriters like to lead the rally cry of "it all begins with a song," there were multiple publishers and managers introducing and encouraging the writers, two-thirds of the time in the case of these songs. To further conjugate the saying some have added "it all begins with a song*writer*" and I now submit that we should also add "it all begins when someone asks a songwriter to write a song."

Later, in the promotion and prioritization of the songs, artist and repertoire (A&R), and even radio promotion representatives came aboard to champion. In the case of this study, there was no shortage of focus in the musical and lyrical direction from the writers once the process had convened, even though the types and professionalism of the locations were varied. When a reputable song was birthed, the writers themselves were always involved in promoting the songs but two-thirds of the time an executive was directly involved in landing homes for them. In every instance, the songs studied here had a major change including direction, perspective, title, lyrics, and melody, and only two-thirds of the time was the song used for its original intention. Anecdotally, 100% of the song lyrics were based on factual events that had occurred to at least one of the writers involved.

Each of the parties involved in these songs surrendered to a process that was bigger than any one of them individually. From the vantage point of hindsight, there is patience and wisdom regarding the process that can be gained on both the business and creative sides that might be hard to comprehend when one is engaged inside of any of these individual phases:

- Understanding creative personalities
- The value in willingness to write on demand
- The importance of focus and intention
- Understanding the writing process
- Understanding the editing process
- Understanding the promotion process

I was told throughout the process of completing my master's thesis that I would not only discover surprises but might also have my preconceptions disproven. I admit there was a part of me desiring to put on display how songwriters are misunderstood geniuses whose creations are magically born in private writer's rooms with no outside influence or assistance. Taking a step back and viewing it from a distance has revealed to me just how much everyone involved needed one another to accomplish the goal of creating and gifting a song to the world.

Appendix A

Interview Transcription

Song One: "In My Mind"
Interview with Shannon Sanders Interview, June 17, 2022.

DREW RAMSEY: What/who were we writing for? Was it a cowrite set up by a company?

SHANNON SANDERS: No it wasn't—it was like we were literally sharing a hotel room. I was in your room, brother, we was literally sharing a room, so it was nothing else to do, like, we didn't have no money. Man, you know, so that's what was so amazing it was really just how we were entertaining ourselves in the moment,

DREW RAMSEY: Where were we writing?

SHANNON SANDERS: We were in a hotel room Virginia Beach—we're waiting on Teddy's [Riley] camp to pick us up, they were running behind. We chillin' in a room, with no money you know, you got to the guitar out so like I'm a big kid across the bed, man, and then just having, like, you start it.

DREW RAMSEY: Was there a musical or production direction that we had in

SHANNON SANDERS: It just felt like the only way to go, especially building it around acoustic and it just felt like it wanted to be live [as opposed to midi instrument programming], like.

DREW RAMSEY: Was there a lyrical concept in mind?

SHANNON SANDERS: I know, for me, that there was a particular scenario on my mind that was that scenario but it was interesting because it really hadn't played out that way. It just went and went, man, it was just this thing—this story, man, and we just went back and forth on it, it was amazing, and it just seemed like—you know interesting thing is I don't remember writing it beyond that day. Like, in my mind, we just did it that day and that was it.

DREW RAMSEY: Was there a champion for the song after we wrote it?

SHANNON SANDERS: I think that that's what gave it life man, I think it was . . . just because of how it started, you know it was so natural for you to play it was so natural for me to sing, man, and I just remembered that, like. That's why that song just kind of you know, even as we just kept writing other songs . . . that one stayed around and stayed on top of mind, because it was, you know, accessible, so accessible. Kenneth Jackson [Kenneth Wilson]—I'd have to look it up. But he, if you remember, he was working at J records, but before that he was somewhere else, but he was aware of the album *Out Of Nowhere* [Shannon Sanders solo record]. What he told me later was that when he was at some major label, he was the head of radio, you know at a major label, but this was his, you know, independent boutique R&B album that he loved—he and his wife—and he was in L.A. at the time, and he would—they'd hit, you know, the Pacific Coast Highway on weekends and ride and listen to the record with the top down, it was just their record and so that's what he said—he just loved it, right. So, he said, by the time he got to J [Records] and it came up that Heather was doing a record, he said he went to Clive [Davis] and said “on my job cut this song on Heather” that’s how it came, because he knew it. What he said “on my job and I'll take it to number one” and far as I know, it only

made it to number two because Mary J's "Be Without You" was in the way, but, uh, you know still a hell of an accomplishment, man, and hope he didn't lose his job!

DREW RAMSEY: Did we change anything in the song for it to find success?

SHANNON SANDERS: Seems like Heather came down and came to Nashville like four times on that right, like a lot to get that. And she wouldn't say "damn"—didn't want to say "damn." You know, I think melodically [sings the first line] "Imagine seeing you . . ." That [melody] was for me, you know for Heather we went [sings a higher melody] it was a different melody.

DREW RAMSEY: Was it used for our original intention?

SHANNON SANDERS: I remember connecting to it and saying "yeah, this song—that's my song, man, like. It wasn't even recorded it yet, but in that moment, it was like—just singing it felt good.

Interview with Drew Ramsey, March 31, 2022.

QUESTION 1: What/who were we writing for? Was it arranged by a publisher?

DREW RAMSEY: It wasn't a songwriting session—it was a conversation among friends that turned into a song.

QUESTION 2: Where was it written?

DREW RAMSEY: So, here we fly to Virginia Beach, we took a shuttle to the hotel, I think it was a Holiday Inn next to an interstate up there. There was really nowhere to go without trying to cross an interstate – you couldn't get an Uber 'cause it didn't exist, you didn't have Yelp and all that stuff . . . Anyway, we're stuck in a hotel room we probably

could have hung out in the hotel bar, a crappy hotel bar, but instead I get out the electric [guitar] but we start talking we're having a conversation.

QUESTION 3: Was there a musical direction in mind?

DREW RAMSEY: We'd been experimenting a lot with old soul music like Bill Withers but also Nirvana—like, could we get something to start kind of Bill Withers Isley Brothers-ish acoustic guitar, right. That wasn't happening in soul music at the time. So, like, could we start something acoustic maybe have it ramp up and some electrics [guitars] come in and some . . . we liked this idea of quiet/loud, you know, the Nirvana thing. So, you know, I start playing this riff [plays guitar chords] just start playing these chords kind of walking down thinking about Isley Brothers. You know, so, he [Shannon Sanders] just starts telling the story. “Imagine seeing you on the town with your new old man, he’s staring me down so I figure that you told him who I am.” Just telling the story, you know?

QUESTION 4: Was there a lyrical concept in mind?

DREW RAMSEY: Shannon had run into a . . . an ex-girlfriend’s mother somewhere around town in Nashville and it just got him thinking “man, I wonder what's going on with her?” It was a friend asking another friend who was married recently, like, “what do I do with that emotionally?” I know this sounds real sensitive and tender but it’s . . . it just was honest… it was an honest conversation. I said “this is just one of those things you gotta keep in your mind it can't be shared this is just for you.” And he was like “Oh, wow, in my mind, in my mind, that's cool, that’d be a good song!”

QUESTION 5: Was there a champion for the song after it was written?

DREW RAMSEY: It got the attention of the A&R representative for Heather Headley. Heather had been in the original *Lion King* cast and was the original *Aida* after she was noticed in *Lion King*. So, then she decided to do an album of R&B songs for herself as an artist and her A&R had heard Shannon's version of this song. Her A&R, Steve [Ferrera] at RCA, talked to the radio promotions guy and the radio promotions guy said "I can make this a number one R&B song if you can get Heather [Headley] to cut it."

QUESTION 6: What was changed or altered after the fact for the song to find success?

DREW RAMSEY: So we had to change it to a [first person] female perspective; "saw *his* momma the other day, said *he's* doing well," "in my mind you'll always be my baby," right, umm, and it just resonated.

QUESTION 7: Was the song used for its original intention?

DREW RAMSEY: It was used for Shannon's project, which is what we originally wrote it for. We got a little bit of a following on an independent label Southern Way Records—got a great write up in *Billboard* [magazine]. People seemed to love the electric guitar and the acoustic guitar mixed in with the gospel thing and the R&B soul. But it was the fact that it resonated after changing it from a male perspective to a female perspective that helped it find its ultimate place in the world.

Song Two: "Good Man"

Interview with Will Baker, February 27, 2023.

DREW RAMSEY: What/who were we writing for? Was it a cowrite set up by a company?

WILL BAKER: I had gotten a voicemail to do this [soundtrack] record. I was just hoping they would take it for the movie – for the soundtrack. And I was just like "I'll write with this guy and hopefully we can come up with something cool. We didn't know each other, we never wrote. I do know this; me and Chris Farren had a writing session together, so I was hanging out with Chris for a minute and I think that's kind of how they—Chris connected I guess Shakir said Chris and here's Will…

DREW RAMSEY: Where were we writing?

WILL BAKER: Man, all I know is you kind of came up to my apartment.

DREW RAMSEY: Did we have a direction for music or production?

WILL BAKER: We did, and I remember what came up. I remember it was Boyz II Men popped up. And I worked with them—I did some of those records. But I was like Boyz II Men, and then I remember India. I think Kedar [Massenberg, President of Motown at the time] brought India to me before her first album . . . sand I was like "naw, I'm good, I've got this artist that's just like it." And later I was like "why did I pass it up!" and then you gave me an opportunity to be able to do something with her.

DREW RAMSEY: Was there a concept in mind for Lyrics?

WILL BAKER: When you hit that riff with that melody it was a perfect storytelling riff. Once we got that melody—because we didn't have words—it was like lava. Then we started constructing verses. We were in the zone and then we started building. When that thing came I was like it the song wrote itself when you did that thing like—there it is, man. I closed my eyes and starting singing "da, da, da . . . " You know we were chasing it for a minute, for hours all day. I don't even know—did we stop and eat? And then we

ended up thinking about the first couple of a hundred soldiers that were going to that war, and they probably knew they wouldn't come back.

DREW RAMSEY: Did anything major change after the first initial draft or inspiration?

WILL BAKER: You and I wrote a first verse, I think, yeah. And then I think we started bleeding to the second verse and then we kind of left it hanging there, because I remember you saying we'll leave it open, you know, for Shannon. I looked at you like—you know how you get the feeling you like “bro I think we gotta hit.” Yeah, that was a great day, man, that was awesome. I mean, when you go in these writing sessions, I've been in plenty of them, and you just never know what you’re gonna come out with. It’s so amazing, man, when we create ideas in our little rooms from our head. What gets me is when something we created in my little apartment spreads and lets the world feel it and touch it.

DREW RAMSEY: Was there a champion for the song?

WILL BAKER: I think we started that second verse and we were like “let's leave this open.” We just stopped and left it open, and you took that. You said “print that for me. Let me take this to Shannon.”

DREW RAMSEY: Did it end up being used for the original intention?

WILL BAKER: This is a rare case where the answer is actually “yes.” You know that never happens. Because, you know, we write like we can hopefully get on this record. You know how it is, they send us these lists of who's looking. But this is the case where they set us up to write to possibly get on the soundtrack of this movie. And we wrote it, and we got it on the soundtrack. And you're right, for me, that was the first time that what

we intended and set out for actually came to fruition. Right? It was like getting the wish list and it granted it.

Interview with Shannon Sanders, June 17, 2022.

DREW RAMSEY: What/who were we writing for? Was it a cowrite set up by a company?

SHANNON SANDERS: This was a real movie, you know, this *Braveheart* trilogy, basically, that Mel Gibson had—I felt like, you know, a huge opportunity. I think you played it for me—sent it to me and I was like "it's dope but for her it would need to change, you know." I remember being on the bus and telling her about it, she had to have known for there to be a screening, you know, and a tweaking. We were in L.A. on the road and, I don't know who we to talked to, Val [Bisharat of Windswept Publishing, parent company of Combustion] set it up, somebody set it up for us to go to a screening of it, and then we got to see it and see . . . the whole movie—saw the scene. I remember thinking, like "wow, okay cool!" Then all that made sense and I think after that's when you and I got together and did some tweaking.

DREW RAMSEY: Where were we writing?

SHANNON SANDERS: You were like, "when you're home [Nashville] let's do it, right." And I just remember us getting together, like a couple nights straight at your studio.

DREW RAMSEY: Was there a direction for music or production?

SHANNON SANDERS: Acoustic soul, because mainstream radio only became aware of her at the Grammys. She's trying to get this next record up [*Voyage to India*] so we were getting stuff done for that.

DREW RAMSEY: Was there a concept in mind for lyrics?

SHANNON SANDERS: It was honestly so emotionally taxing like every verse. You know, it seems like we'd get through a verse a day and be like "we got to shut it down" and be depressed as hell at this point, right, like because you gotta die in the song—it was crazy.

DREW RAMSEY: Did anything major change after the first initial draft or inspiration?

SHANNON SANDERS: You know, I remember—maybe that was the conversation was like "for her you might need to change some" and that's why we got together. She really didn't have much too much to say by the time we recorded it in Atlanta at Avery's [Avery Johnson] house. I think she wanted to tweak something on the spot lyrically, there were just a couple tweaks, and then she sang it.

DREW RAMSEY: Was there a champion for the song?

SHANNON SANDERS: We were saying "sure glad we got that vocal on there" and it all took off after that, like it had a life after that.

DREW RAMSEY: Was the song used for its original intention?

SHANNON SANDERS: We got it and it started getting all that press.

Interview with Drew Ramsey, March 31, 2022.

QUESTION 1: What/who were we writing for? Was it a cowrite set up by a company?

DREW RAMSEY: They screened a movie for us that the publishing company [Combustion Music] was involved with the soundtrack of—a Mel Gibson movie called *We Were Soldiers.* It's a Vietnam story and they had a special screening for us at the Belcourt Theater. So, they said "well you're going to go down you're the guy from the Nashville office that makes the most sense to go down to Atlanta and write and you're going to go out and write with this guy here's his address."

QUESTION 2: Where were we writing?

DREW RAMSEY: So, I show up—it's an apartment complex, you know, I knock on the door . . . so Will Baker opens the door . . . and he's really nice, he's like "come on in man!"

QUESTION 3: Was there a direction for music or production?

DREW RAMSEY: Wynonna [Judd] was doing a record and Wynonna at the time was pretty big on the on the country charts. But as far as country artists go was more soulful for that market. So, I just remember trying to get some ideas together and I had this idea [plays basic chords structure and verse melody of what became "Good Man"]. I just had that melody and at that time we didn't have a smartphone—you couldn't do a quick voice memo I had it on something probably on a desktop computer.

QUESTION 4: Was there a concept in mind for Lyrics?

DREW RAMSEY: There was this scene in the movie where . . . the night before they're going to be deployed they just show each one of these characters in bed with her respective wives right and nobody's talking because what are you going to say, man, but the viewer understands these people might not be coming back. So, what would you even say to your wife, anyway, right? I'm trying to explain this to Will in Atlanta. Like "dude I

just saw this movie and it's like got me thinking about people that leave for a job and they're not sure if they're coming home." Now, 9/11 it just happened so I'm thinking about first responders of any kind, right, police, fire, rescue, but I'm also thinking about just the normal day for a policeman he doesn't know if he's coming home and I'm also thinking about the other side of the coin—what about a drug dealer you are going to know if he's coming home he might be dealing drugs to support his family so I'm not limiting it just to some highbrow crap. I'm trying to do the chords I'm thinking about my godson who's whose dad was sent to the first Gulf War.

QUESTION 5: Did anything major change after the first initial draft or inspiration?

DREW RAMSEY: When we were writing I was so tired of playing those chords it was hard on my hands. I kept saying [to Will], "hey, man, I'm sorry I played the wrong chord" and Will said "that's not the wrong chord, that's the bridge!" And then that became that other moment, you know, and it needed that. There were lyrics to a bridge, so instead of just the "la"s. [Later] Shannon [Sanders] and I tried and tried and tried and said "we can't put words in this, man, that's just the guy going to heaven." I said [to Will] "man, this is perfect for this movie but" I said "you know you should let me play this my partner, Shannon [Sanders] who's out with India.Arie and see if India likes it." I have a CD where we wrote that on the CD it was either for India or Boyz II Men. We knew we were on to something, but it was just so hard it took me and Shannon another four days because we knew in the end the guy had to die, right, so it's like how are we going to flip this to the wife is now alone with the kids? We tried all kinds of stuff. I can't remember what line India changed. She did change something in the song.

QUESTION 6: Was there a champion for the song?

DREW RAMSEY: I guess, in a way, Shannon and I were both running point on it because I stopped with Will, and I said, “let me play this for Shannon.” And then Shannon was playing her [India.Arie] demos of the song. At the same time this song was its own champion. After we [The United States] got more involved in Afghanistan and over in Iraq a lot of families were impacted so the song seemed to resonate and we got a couple of newspaper articles where couples kind of made it their unofficial song. And they started getting requests for it at certain radio stations. I remember then India played it at the first anniversary of 9/11 in a concert [on PBS] and the song ends up getting nominated for a Grammy Award and it was never a single. So, the song itself had its own momentum.

QUESTION 7: Was the song used for its original intention?

DREW RAMSEY: At the movie screening the Belcourt was full of songwriters—I'm talking about Emmylou Harris was there, Michael McDonald from the Doobie Brothers was there, the guy that was ASCAP country writer of the year that was there, and I was like “I got no chance in hell of getting the song on this soundtrack.” I never imagined it would get on the soundtrack and then on India's [next solo] record and then get nominated for Grammy.

Song Three: “Ain’t Nothing Wrong With That”

Interview with Robert Randolph, April 29, 2022.

DREW RAMSEY: What/who were we writing for? Was it a cowrite set up by a company?

ROBERT RANDOLPH: I could tell it was something that could work for my record - we needed something like that.

DREW RAMSEY: Where were we writing?

ROBERT RANDOLPH: " . . . I remember we were at your studio and you guys had that track and played it for me.

DREW RAMSEY: Did anything major change after the first initial draft or inspiration?

ROBERT RANDOLPH: I was sitting there trying to think of a riff to go with it. I just kept thinking it needed something like Jimi Hendrix "Voodoo Chile." You guys kept running the track and I played all the different options I was hearing in my head and you seemed to like that one in particular that we ended up with.

Interview with Drew Ramsey, March 31, 2022.

QUESTION 1: What/who were we writing for? Was it a cowrite set up by a company?

DREW RAMSEY: My publisher [Val Bisharat at Windswept Los Angeles] had hooked us up with this guy I think he was on *The Voice Australia* or something [Jeremy Gregory]. Later, I think because we'd worked with Jonny Lang, Robert's manager [Bruce Flohr at Red Light] was meeting with Jonny's A&R [Ron Fair at A&M Records] and he [Bruce Flohr] was like "I got this talented dude—amazing guitar guy pedal steel great band but they need songs so then it needs to sound like them but it needs to have hooks." He [Ron Fair] said, "oh, you need these guys Drew & Shannon—they helped me with Jonny Lang" same problem, kind of, just finding good hooks and songs that make the artists sound like themselves.

QUESTION 2: Where was it written?

DREW RAMSEY: We were at Shannon's studio at the time [he had one behind his house by that time] and I had a little bitty amp there and my electric guitar, a Les Paul. And, you know, we tried a bunch of different stuff, some soul stuff and the guy's just, he's not feeling it, man, he's just never been in that circumstance before he just hated everything—he hated everything we threw at him.

QUESTION 3: Was there a direction for music or production?

DREW RAMSEY: He [Jeremy Gregory] kind of prompted us with this thought; he was like "I bet you guys don't know who Jack White is do you?" And we were like "of course we know who Jack White is" [this is when The White Stripes were still together]. And he said "well, I bet you couldn't make something that sounded like Jack White meets Outkast," you know, and we were like "oh, crap, that's what we do every day." Like, we love mixing that rock thing with hip hop or R&B. So, Shannon made this beat—it was kind of like Outkast or Black Eyed Peas, it was just real simple just "boom-cat-cat-cat-boom-cat-cat-cat" kind of the 60s, you know. And I had the electric guitar and an amp I just went [plays guitar riff]. I wanted like a bluesy, you know, riff but then that was that in-between kind of 60s like, "whoa, James Bond, what's going on, man?"

QUESTION 4: Was there a concept in mind for lyrics?

DREW RAMSEY: We started writing a song called "Can't Go Wrong With That." So our song was about different kinds of girls; redhead or brunette, tall, short, everything, every kind of girl—doesn't matter, big, small "can't go wrong," pick one, you know? We put it down and we loved the energy of it and the song was not written we just had "can't go wrong with that" and a couple of lines.

QUESTION 5: Did anything major change after the first initial draft or inspiration?

DREW RAMSEY: Months later, Robert [Randolph] just showed up here at this studio here [where I am] in my house. We just played a couple of ideas one of them was that beat with that riff on it and we told him it was “Can't Go Wrong With That.” He wasn't sure about that and he played this cool little line [plays guitar riff]. That's another hook [sings guitar riff melody]. And we’re like, “alright.” Then we saw him [Robert Randolph] perform live at [City Hall] that’s now an Urban Outfitters in the Gulch here in Nashville. The audience was so weird. It was like, like, all these dudes in suits, right, weekend warrior dudes and all these people smell like patchouli in tie-dye all these people, a bunch of like kind of funk gospel musician looking dudes and a bunch of Vandy girls and everybody is just dancing and drinking and the girls are on stage it was, like, “what is happening right now, man, like this is some end-times stuff, man.” But it was beautiful 'cause everybody was partying together and it was all the fact that Robert was there that brought them together which is what music does. That's what the song turned into it was describing his audience—these kind of clothes don't matter—whether you’re from down South or up north, you know, these kind of shoes—this kind of hair—that kind of hair, because music brings us all together and there “ain't nothing wrong with that!”

QUESTION 6: Was there a champion for the song?

DREW RAMSEY: We put it down and we loved the energy of it. I remember having a meeting with Arista in New York and they wanted to hold it for an Aretha Franklin record. It wasn't even written yet but there was something in the energy of the 60s thing with a little bit the rock thing in there with the weird chords—it just was getting all this attention from people and it wasn't even done yet.

QUESTION 7: Was the song used for its original intention?

DREW RAMSEY: No, not Jeremy Gregory. It had to find Robert Randolph, who we'd never been introduced to before, to find a home.

Interview with Shannon Sanders, June 17, 2022.

DREW RAMSEY: What/who were we writing for? Was it a cowrite set up by a company?

SHANNON SANDERS: Like almost every night it felt like we'd just get a vibe for a while man—you and I. You know, so many things came out of that and I think it was very intentional. We were just catching it and just making a concerted effort to just vibe and do whatever we wanted to do. And I remember that being one of those things.

DREW RAMSEY: Where were we writing?

SHANNON SANDERS: I think I'd just moved over on Battery [Lane in Nashville, Tennessee].

DREW RAMSEY: Was there a direction for music or production?

SHANNON SANDERS: You know guitar/MPC [drum machine]. We had the basic guitar riff and the basic beat. I don't know, maybe melodically maybe we had a thing.

DREW RAMSEY: Was there a concept in mind for lyrics?

SHANNON SANDERS: Man, I don't think so. Okay, we were just, you know, trying to get black folks and white folks. I think that's really kind of what it was we were ultimately saying. Like, "everybody can come to the party!" Just in us having conversations with him about who he was and who he wanted to speak to, you know. I think that's when it ultimately became a lyric or vibe, you know, a North star, if you will.

I remember us looking for the contrast “east or west coast it don’t matter, down south or up north it don’t matter.” It was just so easy.

DREW RAMSEY: Did anything major change after the first initial draft or inspiration?

SHANNON SANDERS: I felt like you were doing something that he built upon you know or evolved. I can't remember how that went down.

DREW RAMSEY: Was there a champion for the song?

SHANNON SANDERS: Uncle Bruce [Bruce Flohr from Red Light Management].

DREW RAMSEY: Was the song used for its original intention?

SHANNON SANDERS: I definitely feel like it wrapped around him [Robert Randolph] when he got there. Maybe it was something we were developing to show him. I just remember feeling like him sliding into something we were already doing, like it felt he slid into a place that we were already kind of in and it just made sense, and it just happened to be the same place.

Appendix B

Interview Triangulation

1. What/who were we writing for? Was it arranged by a publisher?

SONG 1: "In My Mind" – It was just a conversation between friends that turned into a song.
SONG 2: "Good Man" – Written for the film soundtrack for *We Were Soldiers*, arranged by Combustion Music and HitCo Entertainment, both subsidiaries of Windswept Publishing.
SONG 3: "Ain't Nothing Wrong With That"– First started for the artist Jeremy Gregory then the artist Robert Randolph. It was arranged by Windswept in the case of Jeremy Gregory and Red Light Management for Robert Randolph.

2. Where were we writing? (Was it a planned cowrite?)

SONG 1: "In My Mind" – Written in a hotel room in Virginia Beach, not planned.
SONG 2: "Good Man" – Written in cowriter Will Baker's apartment in Atlanta, at the time a new collaborator, planned.
SONG 3: "Ain't Nothing Wrong With That"– Shannon Sanders's studio, planned.

3. Was there a direction (Northern star) in mind for music or production (chords/melody)?

SONG 1: "In My Mind" – The direction was Isley Brothers meets Nirvana and Gospel.
SONG 2: "Good Man" – The direction was acoustic soul.
SONG 3: "Ain't Nothing Wrong With That"– The direction was 1960s R&B, Go-Go music, surfer rock.

4. Was there a concept in mind for lyrics?

SONG 1: "In My Mind" – A person runs into an ex in public with their new love interest.
SONG 2: "Good Man" – A person with a dangerous job is not certain they will survive and return home.
SONG 3: "Ain't Nothing Wrong With That"– A list of varieties of things that people love in different cultures.

5. Was there a champion for the song?

SONG 1: “In My Mind” – An RCA Records Radio Promotions executive Kenneth Wilson.
SONG 2: “Good Man” – Drew and Shannon (writers/producers) and Chris Farren at Combustion Music.
SONG 3: “Ain’t Nothing Wrong With That”– Drew and Shannon (writers/producers)

6. Did anything major change after the first initial draft or inspiration? (lyric, music, etc.)

SONG 1: “In My Mind” – It began from a male perspective but changed to a female perspective (when asked by the record label). The key of the song also changed.
SONG 2: “Good Man” – It started from the perspective of a firefighter, policeman, drug dealer, or first responder but settled on a soldier – then to his widow’s perspective.
SONG 3: “Ain’t Nothing Wrong With That”– Initially it was a list of types of girls but broadened to include music, clothing, hairstyles, and dances. The title also changed.

7. Was the song used for its original intention?

SONG 1: “In My Mind” – No.
SONG 2: “Good Man” – Yes.
SONG 3: “Ain’t Nothing Wrong With That” – No.

(An extra revelation from the triangulation):

8. Was the narrative based in fact or fiction?

SONG 1: “In My Mind” – Based on actual event of one of the writers running into an ex’s mother.
SONG 2: “Good Man” – Factual from the very first verse, telling the story of a friend and his family who was deployed in the first Gulf War.
SONG 3: “Ain’t Nothing Wrong With That”– Factually driven by seeing Robert Randolph’s fans at his concert at City Hall in Nashville, Tennessee.

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