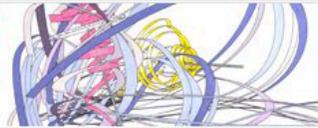




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WHAT GOES AROUND: Composer Chris Tyng sits behind the keys in his Star Hill Studio in Santa Ynez.

Chris Tyng Is Giving Back to Indie Artists

Santa Ynez Composer Opens His Studio for Grow Music Project

Wednesday, October 2, 2013

BY [ALY COMINGORE](#) ([CONTACT](#))

Chris Tyng's life story reads like a real-life *Pay It Forward*. Long before he was scoring the music for *The O.C.*, *Suits*, and *Futurama*, Tyng was living on Cape Cod and trying to "make it" as a drummer. In between practices, he picked up and tried on instrument after instrument, teaching himself how to play as he went along. To sustain himself, he took a job managing a college recording studio, where his girlfriend (and now wife) stumbled upon a sign for a film music contest. After some not-so-gentle coaxing by his friends and family, Tyng reluctantly entered, all the while reminding himself of his real dream ("I wanted to be on the cover of *Rolling Stone*") and the reality of most competitions. "I kept telling myself, nobody wins these things anyway," Tyng recalled last month from his Santa Ynez home.

A few months later, though, Tyng took home the prize and was flown out to Los Angeles by his newfound benefactors. "It turned out to be a much bigger deal than I realized," he said. The contest, he learned, was put on by the educational arm of BMI, one of a few huge music companies that track royalties for artists. And the competition? It amounted to a year's worth of entrants, all vying to be the next great new voice in film and television. "They pick one person and bring them out to Hollywood and basically say, 'Here he is,'" said Tyng.

Not long after, he was getting jobs that involved huge orchestras, working alongside big-name composers like Basil Poledouris (of *Conan the Barbarian* fame) and writing music for award-winning shows like *L.A. Law*. "I was sort of drop-kicked into the industry," Tyng laughed. "But I also really liked it. I realized that side of music was also really cool."

Still, Tyng kept one foot firmly planted in his rock-star dreams. He continued playing live (including a stint in Santa Barbara's own Sunshine Brothers), produced other artists, and facilitated recording through his many Los Angeles studios. So, when the time finally came to relocate to the Santa Ynez Valley, Tyng started thinking seriously about giving back.

That's where the Grow Music Project (GMP) comes in. An online talent search of sorts, GMP is Tyng's way of re-gifting the career boost that BMI bestowed upon him 20 years ago. Musicians are invited to submit one song to the contest. Tyng picks the winners and then invites them into his home studio to cut a professional recording. For free. No strings attached.

"I had a shower epiphany," Tyng laughed. "I have this great studio, and I had people do this for me when I was young. BMI was my guardian angel in a lot of ways; they made sure I didn't get taken advantage of, and they never asked for

anything in return. They just did it because they believed in me. And I'm fortunate enough now, 20 years later, to return that favor. All of a sudden, it hit me that this was a way I could do that."

Walking into Tyng's Star Hill Studio, you can't help but have a jaw-drop moment. Tucked into a tall, barn-like building down the hill from Tyng's full-time home, and codesigned by Chris Pelonis, the space is literally brimming with music toys. Vintage drumheads line the walls of the big studio; pristine acoustic guitars surround the vocal booth; Jim Messina's old Wurlitzer sits unassumingly in the corner alongside a small collection of synths. And then there's the mixing room, with its huge bay window, serene Valley views, and dizzying collection of computers, boards, amps, and effects pedals.



By Paul Wellman

Tyng helps Grow Music Project winner Julia Lucafo get miked up and ready to record.

"I kind of freaked out when I saw it," says Julia Lucafo, one of the seven recipients of GMP's first round of recording mentorships. A singer/songwriter hailing from Arizona, Lucafo found GMP through a listing on the music-based social media site ReverbNation. "I clicked on it and saw what it was and just

thought, ‘Oh my god, I have to be a part of this,’” she explained. After being selected, she and drummer Chase Brickenden headed up to Star Hill for three full days of arranging and recording. The session will ultimately leave Lucafo with a fully mixed and mastered version of the song she submitted to GMP’s website, which she intends to release on iTunes, as well as make a music video for.

In the coming weeks, while Tyng is on break from *Suits*, his Grow Music Project will host and record the remainder of this round’s acts, including North Hollywood rockers Dialtone; Hollywood songwriter Engelo Charles; songwriter Joey Hendrickson of Columbus, Ohio; Northampton, Massachusetts, artist Joshua Meltzer; Nashville soul rocker Scott McLeod; and New York dream-pop songstress Star + The Sea.

In addition, Tyng is already gearing up for round two, which he’s accepting submissions for currently. And not surprisingly, the early feedback has been glowing. “It throws everybody for a bit of a loop,” said Tyng. “We tell people we’re doing this and it’s free and no one has to sign anything and everyone immediately asks, ‘Well, what’s the catch?’”

Catching up with Lucafo a week after her session, she excitedly admitted, there simply isn’t one. “I’m a huge fan of what Chris is doing,” she gushed. “There are not a lot of people taking artists in and working with them for the cost of nothing. It’s really cool, but it’s also really rare and kind of shocking. It’s a blessing. I feel like I got really lucky.”

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For more about the Grow Music Project, visit christophertyng.com.

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