

# *Songwriting Article for January 2012*

By Clayton B Howell of KCCH Music

OK, boys and girls. It's a new year with a new focus. We are going to get back into the swing of writing about the things in songwriting that you need help with. SO, that said, please send us any questions about songwriting that you may have and we can address those. Or, just let us know what type articles you want to see more of in the magazine and we will try to accommodate.

We had talked about hymn albums and what they entail to make them work and I wanted to try a little exercise/assignment with you. I want you to think about two hymns that mean the most to you and I want you to write down the reasons that they mean a lot to you. Then, I want you to take one of them and re-write the melody for it, using however many verses you can and still have it be under 4 minutes. Secondly, I want you to take the other one and use the tune from it, but give it different words.

When you do this little exercise, you learn 2 things about meter; 1<sup>st</sup>) the rise and fall of the meter of the words will often suggest a melody and the underpinning rhythm, and 2<sup>nd</sup>) by tasking yourself to fit the meter of the original melody, you will learn the discipline of matching up the number of syllables/words with the melody on a consistent basis. Hymn-writing is WONDERFUL for making you stick with a form. There is a wonderful sense of structure to the great hymnody of Christendom that causes us to respond to the words and melodies, but using the words with different melodies lets us experience the freedom to let those words soar outside of a structure. Both of these things have their place in gospel music and both of them should be learned. "Glorious Day", arranged/written by Casting Crowns is a great example of a contemporary melody for ancient words.

Robbie Seay was in a workshop that I attended at West University UMC a few years back. My good buddy Kimberly Orr was the music director there at that time and she put together a great group of clinicians for an enjoyable day. Robbie's little spiel at the first of the sessions was what really caught my ear, though and I have tried to remember this. He said that some of the people who were coming to Ecclesia, the church his brother Chris helped to plant in Houston's mid-town area had a surprising number of un-churched and barely-churched people in it. The conclusion that he and Chris came to about music was that the only thing some of these people knew about church was the hymnody that they grew up with going to church sporadically with family and friends. SO, Robbie and Chris came to the conclusion that taking old hymns and putting a contemporary beat on them was a good way to sink home the message of what the church stood for. I think it is still a valid technique and one that I want us to explore for maybe a couple articles in this series. With that said, pick your two and let me know how it turns out. Till then, keep on writing for Jesus, my friends.