

- **Nashville's Almo/Irving Nurtures Hits.(Company Profile).**

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Publishing Co. Strives To Support Writers, Maintain Flexibility

NASHVILLE--Ever since senior VP David Conrad opened the doors of the Nashville office of Almo/Irving Music in 1981, the company has had a reputation for nurturing important songwriters and churning out hit songs.

With a writer roster that includes Mike Reid, Annie Roboff, Craig Wiseman, Craig Bickhardt, Jeff Pennig, and Paul Kennerly, the company has been responsible for such recent chart-toppers as Faith Hill's "This Kiss," Tim McGraw's "Where The Green Grass Grows," and Kenny Chesney's "She's Got It All."

Almo/Irving is owned by **Herb Alpert** and Jerry Moss, who founded A&M Records but kept their publishing operations after selling A&M to PolyGram, which in turned has been acquired by Seagram Co.

Conrad says one of the reasons he's been with the Nashville company since its inception is the approach taken by the founding fathers.

"Any company is a reflection of its leadership, and this one is no different," he says "Then attitudes about music, artists, and songwriters trickle down. There's the attitude of leaving great people alone to create and support what they do. Be there for them when things are lean, then celebrate with them when things are great."

In the past year, Ammo/Irving Music Nashville has known both triumph and tragedy. After suffering a major blow at the end of 1997 when Kent Robbins, one of the company's best-loved and most successful writers, was killed in a car accident, Almo/Irving managed to rebound with a strong year in 1998.

"It was a hard thing last year," says Conrad "As bad as the end of [1997] was, 1998 turned out to be a really wonderful year for us."

Recent key cuts by Almo/Irving writers include Bickhardt's "It Must Be Love," recorded by Ty Herndon, and Jess Brown's "Cover You With Kisses," cut by John Michael Montgomery Brown's "A Little Past Little Rock" was a hit for Lee Ann Womack.

Robbins' songs are also continuing to garner attention "He's got the current single by Gary Allan, 'I'll Take Today,' "notes Conrad "He got on the first Randy Travis album on DreamWorks. He got on the George Strait album released in 1998, and he's going to be on the new George Strait record It's just delightful. It proves the power of the songs and a writer who knew the craft and was a master."

Conrad oversees an administrative staff of nine people and a songwriter roster of 22, including such writer! artists as John Anderson, Beth Nielsen Chapman, Nanci Griffith, Waylon Jennings, Lari White, Gillian Welch, Max Carl, and Emmylou Harris.

A native of North Carolina, Conrad moved to Nashville in 1971 and began his career on Music Row as a guitarist, doing both session and road work. In 1973 he became a song plugger for the Pi-Gem/Chess companies, owned by Charlie Pride and Tom Collins He remained there until opening Almo/Irving in 1981.

"I think you could call us a major publisher in impact and resources," says Conrad, "but we're certainly not the biggest in the world. That's not what motivates us. We seem to have achieved a pleasant and prosperous middle ground in terms of the size of publishing companies in Nashville and the rest of the world. We have everything we need to work, but we have a staff that's small enough for all of us to know each other well and to communicate. There's not so many that one of us can't stop what we're doing any time one of these folks are excited about a song That's when we need to be there for them."

In addition to Conrad, Almo/Irving has three other song pluggers in Nashville-Mary Del Scobey, Scott Gunter, and Bobby Rymer. "They each have their own constituencies in the A&R departments," he says.

Conrad says his writers frequently interact with those from other offices.

"We're really into cross-pollination in terms of having our writers work with writers from Los Angeles or from the U.K. or other parts of Europe," he says. The company has three domestic offices-in New York, Nashville, and Los Angeles-as well as offices in Hamburg, Amsterdam, London, Paris, and Sydney. It also has subpublishing deals in other countries.

Conrad says the European offices have been supportive of Nashville writers making inroads in the European market, particularly Welch.

Supporting writers in all their endeavors-from Welch's current album to the play Reid is working on to the string of country radio hits Wiseman is generating-is what Conrad considers important.

"It all goes back to the time and attention paid to the writers," he says "That's the only thing that sets you apart and keeps your hits coming."

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