

Evolution Music Partners Interviews

Chris Tyng

Composer and Founder of the Grow Music Project

By Carrin Tanaka

Chris Tyng created the *Grow Music Project* with a “pay it forward” attitude, setting out to provide emerging artists and bands with the resources they need. Each round, Chris selects five artists from a pool of online applicants and invites them to his world-class studio for three days of mentorship and recording with industry veterans- all for free! The GMP has completed its second round, and recently launched a webseries called *The Session Diaries* that details the experience and growth of the artists. We spoke with Chris to learn more about this venture.

You’ve stated that you created GMP in order to “pay it forward.” Who helped you early on in your career to inspire this act of kindness?

I’ve been asked this question in a few GMP related interviews now – and it’s interesting – every time I respond, I realize even more people who helped me along when I was getting my start. One of the coolest

things I’ve found, with almost anyone who has had the good fortune to have some success in this industry, is that most of us recognize the part that others played in their achievement, and are motivated in a variety of ways to return the favor. For a business that is often maligned as ultra-competitive and dog-eat-dog, I’ve found there really is a strong sense of community and of helping and supporting other people that you believe in. My own ‘thank you’ list definitely includes BMI, who awarded me their Pete Carpenter Fellowship; composer Mike Post who hosted me for that; BMI’s Doreen Ringer-Ross who has been my guardian angel for so much of my career; composer Basil Poledouris who became my mentor, advisor, and my adopted west-coast dad; agent Richard Kraft who let me sleep on his couch for a month and apprenticed me to his composers; Richard Gibbs who essentially gifted me my first real scoring job... the list goes on and on from there. Grow Music Project isn’t really an act of kindness; it’s an act of responsibility to “pay forward” what was done for me; and it’s a conversation that I’m working to invest others in our industry in – that now more than ever, this type of support is vital to emerging artists.

How many submissions did you receive for each round and what was the selection process like?

We had hundreds of submissions from around the US for each of the first two rounds. We originally started with the concept of “rounds,” but have since moved to rolling

submissions – so we don't keep track in the same way - but it's a lot. :)

Submitting artists do so online at www.growmusicproject.com by providing links to their current music and answering a few questions that can help us understand who they are and what they're up to; as we are able to only award a small handful of the submissions an artist slot in the program, GMP looks to identify artists who stand out for their own dedication, hard work, and efforts at being compelling; we want to offer this to artists and bands who can then really take the GMP opportunity and run with it.

The selected artists had the opportunity to work with you and your team at Star Hill Studios. How long did it take you to build this amazing facility? Can you describe it?

Thanks for the kind words! I think that everyone who comes to work here finds it's a really special and unique place. It's located out in farm country near Santa Barbara, so there's a lot of "big sky" and other inspiration to be drawn from the surroundings. The actual studio took three years from the ground up to build, and we've been fine-tuning it for the four years or so since completion. The ethos of the studio – the way it all works as one big seamless creativity engine/recording environment/artistic sanctuary – has been evolving all throughout my career and from lessons learned from my prior studios. I suppose it's equal parts mad scientist's laboratory and ultimate musician's playpen full of some

very fun toys – we have instruments, mics and studio equipment from vibey vintage and quirky to current state-of-the-art - our control room even spins around on a giant turntable... In a way, it's harder to condense it all into words here, then it is to use! I'm a lucky guy though that I get to work here every day.

What role do you take in the recording process?

Haha – we're still very 'grass roots', so there are a lot of hats I wear within GMP. Mainly I serve as record producer for the song and executive producer/director for "The Session Diaries" webseries that we film, edit, and produce to accompany the artist's songs. I work with the artists in advance of their GMP sessions in an artist development capacity, and I do pre-production with them. I typically do the final mix for the song, and sometimes even the mastering. Whatever else I can contribute to usefully enhance the song, whether it's as a writer, a player [drums/keys/programming/guitar/etc.] or as an arranger [strings/horns/etc.] - I do so willingly and for free within the scope of GMP. I'm also incredibly lucky to have a fantastically creative and growing team of musicians/filmmakers/supporters who are also each jacks-of-all-trades in a variety of ways – which means I can take myself out of a particular part of the equation if there's someone else who is a better fit for a particular artistic goal. One of the most rewarding parts of this project for me is helping to engineer these other collaborations, and watching the happy accidents occur.

The artists also got to stay on-site while recording. Any funny stories?

Well... a few... though I wouldn't want to risk anyone's embarrassment! Certainly we've had some interesting moments along the way. We had an outdoor interview filming where, every time the band would get on a roll with their answer, a cow on a neighboring ranch would moo so unbelievably loudly we'd have to cut and start over. Artist's lives can be understandably chaotic, and we've had ten bands through the program so far - so there's always a little chaos theory at work. Singers have flown across the country to find that they arrive with a sore throat – and it's off to the natural food store for emergency supplies of throat remedies, tea, and honey! GMP has resulted in the first time I've ever gotten a call from Santa Barbara County jail [or any jail, for that matter!] ... we've had an artist's creative momentum in a session knocked for a loop by unexpected news from back home, or even the sudden realization that a particular stuffed-animal band mascot was missing and perhaps lost forever at a club in San Francisco. In the end it all turns out great, but it can get exciting in some unusual ways. One artist had such a viral fanbase that while she was here in session, they had apparently google-earthed my house to a surprising extent, and were having a lengthy online forum discussion about whether a creek deep on our property was going to flood and affect the recording sessions... another band has a tradition that new inductees into their world have to drink the absolute worst whisky they can find – and I think they

planned to drink me a bit under the table. The good news was that the whisky wasn't that bad, and I know how to drink whisky. :) So, never a dull day!

What opportunities has GMP opened up for the artists?

Besides the 'boot camp' experience gained from going through the residency/sessions here, and having a finished, fully produced song that they can release, sell, license, promote themselves with, or use in any other manner that serves them best, we are always working to connect these artists with exposure and development opportunities on an ongoing basis. This February we debuted our first artists and their songs, so the program is still relatively new; but many of the artists have garnered interviews and coverage in national, online and local media already; and we are helping make industry introductions and working to foster opportunities that are a good fit for them, whether that be a showcase, a licensing placement, or a co-writing or co-touring collaboration. Our goal is to create a hub where talented artists from many disciplines can cross-pollinate, collaborate, and bring value to each other's endeavors as they progress.

What do GMP and the Session Diaries have in store for the future?

Every month we debut a new episode of "The Session Diaries" on our YouTube channel which features one of

our artists and their new GMP-produced song; our first season of episodes will continue each month thru until November. Next up on May 6th we release our episode with artist Holly Henry, who was a viral fan-favorite contestant on “The Voice” this year and is amazing. We’re excited to share and call attention to all of these upcoming artists - they’re each unique and compelling in their own way; and we feel they all stand out as breakout new artists ready to be discovered by a much wider audience, both in our industry and by fans alike. And we continue to search for more new bands to invite into the program, and more members of our industry to get involved in helping us support some great emerging talent – so please help us spread the word!