

Songwriting and Poetry Fellowship

Bobby Murray, Class of 2023

The *Songwriting and Poetry Fellowship* consisted of songwriting research (history, technique, convention) and daily writing of original music. Figuring I would be deep in the weeds of songwriting, I moved into a house a mile from Broadway in Nashville for the summer. Just outside the heart of ‘Music City,’ I spent my time out of the studio connecting with other songwriters, artists, and producers—as it turns out, there are tons of them in Nashville.

Most mornings, I perused books like *Tunesmith; Inside the Art of Songwriting*, *How to Be a Hit Songwriter*, or *Bob Dylan’s Poetics*. These books were instrumental (no pun intended) to my development throughout the summer: many of them not only discussed the intricacies of songwriting but mused on the arduous path of songwriters and artists in the ever-evolving entertainment industry. In this way, Nashville was a perfect place for me to research this summer; after a days-worth of research, I would spend my nights in studios, bars, and clubs with musicians who really live the life—who spend their days applying these techniques to their craft while navigating the complex music industry. I will be forever grateful for the connections I made and the insights I received this summer.

The content of my original work this summer varied; I began by trying my hand at country music. Before Nashville, I knew three country songs: *Tennessee Whiskey* by Chris Stapleton, *A Boy Named Sue* by Johnny Cash, and *Sweet Home Alabama* by Lynyrd Skynyrd (if that counts). Quickly, though, I found myself immersed in the country scene—attending songwriters rounds (I didn’t know these existed), and listening to country cover bands every other night. Inspired by songwriters like Hardy, Ernest, and Morgan Wallen, I began the summer by writing two country songs: *Wine Dizzy*—an uptempo line-dancing country smash, and *You Make My Day Better*—a poignant guitar/vocal ballad that I imagined would work at a songwriters-round.

At the beginning of the summer, I experimented a bit with genre, writing for a few pop and indie-pop artists. As the summer continued, my Fellowship Professor, Tracy McMullen, advised that I start writing music that I would consider releasing or performing (I released my debut R&B/Pop album, *Planet 2*, last year). This was great advice, and I spent the rest of the summer writing R&B/Pop music with Nashville songwriting techniques and culture in the back of my mind. In a few of my songs, I meshed a Motown sound with modern R&B production, writing various demos that are sitting in my ‘New Music’ folders, titled *Emmeline*, *Who Says??*, *love, and you*, *Brooklyn*, *I’m Coming Home*, and *Cows in Switzerland*, to name a few.

Overall, this summer was an incredible musical and personal opportunity that I will never forget.