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Nashville cat 'gettin' better all the time'

Though songwriter Ronnie Bowman's record label closed, his solo album has received universally good reviews.

By [Ralph Berrier Jr.](#)

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Back in June, Ronnie Bowman was honored for having written a No. 1 country song. Corporate guys in suits, singers in leather jackets and black cowboy hats, and big-shot Nashville disc jockeys all gathered for brunch in a Music Row office building to recognize a guy who still keeps his Food Lion discount card on his key chain.

Bowman moved to Nashville a couple of years ago after a decade spent in rural Franklin County, where he worked in the notable bluegrass group Lonesome River Band. After leaving LRB, he decided to take his shot in Music City.

In 2004, one of his best friends, LRB founder and Doobie Shea Studio owner Tim Austin, moved his operation to Nashville.

Both have achieved varying degrees of success, with Bowman finally hitting the big time when a song he co-wrote, "It's Gettin' Better All the Time," went No. 1 for the country duo Brooks and Dunn.

The song also served as the title track for Bowman's solo record, which came out on Koch Records in October. Three weeks later, Koch announced it was shutting down its Nashville label.

Fortunately for Bowman, his album had already been shipped to stores, radio and reviewers. Even though he

lost the aid of Koch's publicity wing, the album received universally good reviews.

"It's been a big year, all good," Bowman said by telephone from his home north of Nashville. Not even Koch's closing fazed him. He believes another label or distributor will take the album and promote it.

"We'll have to find somebody else to pick it up. That's something we'll work on as soon as the holidays are over."

In the meantime, he is still writing songs with a platoon of collaborators, including Don Cook of Nashville publisher Sony/Tree, who co-wrote "It's Gettin' Better All the Time." Several of Bowman's new songs are being considered by country artists, although no decisions will be made until well after the holidays.

"I'm keeping good work ethics," he said. "I'm just doing what I did before. I'm still writing, still demo-ing songs. Sony's pitching them to artists I can't name yet. We'll get back on it after New Year's."

Austin is still working on opening a studio. During his years in Ferrum, Austin recorded some of bluegrass music's biggest stars. These days, he has worked as a sound engineer for the Grand Ole Opry and went on the road with Ricky Skaggs. He wrote in an e-mail two weeks ago that he was back in the area in October when Skaggs played the Blue Ridge Music Festival at Salem Memorial Baseball Stadium.

Bowman hasn't performed with his band as much lately but still makes the occasional gig. These days, he is focused on writing, which is a full-time job in a city that cares less about what you did last week or last year and more about what you will do in the future.

"It's been a good year," Bowman said. "I'm real thankful for it. I'm not going to get too excited about things. I'll just keep working like I always have."

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