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## Jingle All the Way: Gray Sky Music celebrates 25 years in music production business

By Freddie Bourne Messenger-Inquirer  
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Matthew Gray, owner and producer of Gray Sky Music, pictured in his facility in Owensboro.

Photo submitted by Nicole Gray

Matthew Gray, owner and producer of Owensboro’s jingle and music company Gray Sky Music, is celebrating their 25 years in business.

Gray, while proud of this accomplishment, wasn’t certain it was possible to hit the milestone but notes that the hard work has paid off.

“In the first, I’d say five to 10 years — no,” Gray laughed. “It was just kind of intimidating at the time to actually run my own business. I thought that maybe I was on my way to working in this capacity with somebody else or with another company at some point. But, as time went on and just kept chomping away at it, kept working at it — I realized that being in control of my productions and the way they sounded was part of what people were buying.”

Born and raised in Owensboro, Gray didn’t grow up with grand plans of starting his own business but was fond of music early on — playing music all throughout childhood since the age of 5 in church, orchestra, and attended many summer camps in Maple Mount, where he was introduced to Jim and Julie White, whom Gray notes “...have been very instrumental with music education around here forever.”



“I would say the pivotal moment was probably when I was about 15 years old,” Gray said. “The church was already starting to kind of give me a little bit of spending money to show up and play every week. At that moment, I kind of thought .... you know what, I can see myself doing this for the rest of my life.”

Around this time, Gray notes that an unfortunate event convinced him even more to not give up on something he truly loved.

“I had a really good friend that got killed in a motorcycle accident,” Gray said. “He was a really, really good guitar player. When he passed away, of course it was devastating and shocking and everything, and I think he was going to go into music. He was a few years older than I was and I was like, ‘I’m a musician. I have been my whole life. I think I can probably pick this up and do something with it.’ ... This was the only thing I knew the best.”

After high school, Gray enrolled in Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green, where he studied broadcasting and minored in music composition.

While Gray admits that he enjoyed television production, he was “always drawn” to the audio and music side of things, which led to his internship at a jingle production company in Nashville working as a back-up engineer.

Gray fondly recalls the experience, where he worked with producers and writers on jingles and would clock in close to 14-hour days.

“It was the dream — it was wonderful,” Gray said. “Every day I drove down there (to) go to work and wasn’t even getting paid for it, I was like, ‘This is awesome. I can do this for the rest of my life.’ And there were long days — these guys were writing jingles for Taco Bell, Budweiser, McDonalds — all the national jingles back when jingles were big on national (television).

“That’s when I realized I really wanted to do something with audio and music for the rest of my life, for my career, and not necessarily television or being on the backside of the camera type of thing.”

After graduation, Gray founded Gray Sky Music in 1996. Soon enough, Gray found initial success creating jingles for local entities such as Owensboro Body Shop and Welborn Floral before getting a national opportunity with the Catholic pro-life education organization American Life League (ALL).

While the jingle business is everywhere, many folks tend to have less than favorable stereotypes about the genre, which Gray said are not accurate — stating that jingles have been very prominent in helping businesses gain attention and success.

“(People may) think jingles are not real pieces of music — that they’re kind of parodies, or funny, or people that are kind of second-rate musicians or singers or artists are the ones that create jingles, and that’s simply not true,” Gray said. “There’s so many jingles out there that have been produced without any seriousness to them, which has kind of tainted the system a little bit. ...But, there was a time when the jingle was one of the most powerful tools that you heard on the radio going back to the 30s and 40s to advertise things because there was a lot of talk radio back then. A lot of the commercials were done live ... and if you could interject a piece of music to advertise a company, business, or product — that stood out.”

Gray said that creating jingles is more intensive than one would think and it requires serious work and planning.

“...You hear these things and they get stuck in your head, but you don’t know where they come from,” Gray said. “Especially in today’s world, there’s so much electronic music that people think any kid in their bedroom can just pull up the tracks and put them together and make a song out of it, which they can. But, there’s a whole other skill that it takes to write a jingle — to actually know the business and to know, more importantly, the personality of the business, and the customers and the potential customers of that business. What are they going to like? What is it that is going to perk their ears up and glue them to that business and get that branding? ...I’ve got a skill for that and I can put those words together (and) put that music together to where it sounds like ... it was written just for that business. It’s not just something they pick off the shelf...”

Gray notes that jingles can take about eight to 10 people to complete, while Gray does all of that work by himself.

“It’s pretty interesting that people don’t know what goes into it,” Gray said.

Gray has not let the public typecasting of jingles get in his way by creating “impressive pieces of music and melodies that make the words get stuck in your head.”

“They’re serious too,” Gray said. “Likened to a soundtrack to a movie or a TV show.”

But, Gray offers more than jingles by honing his music skills to work with artists and songwriters on producing songs, playing most of the instruments himself, and utilizing a rolodex of musicians to help out if needed. Additionally, Gray offers audio services to videographers needing dialogue and voiceover material balanced out and recorded.

Just recently, Gray was commissioned to compose the theme music for an upcoming cooking and style show on WISH-TV in Indianapolis.

Beyond that, Gray has worked with well known musicians, offering his services and expertise to Jerry Gaskill’s, drummer for the Missouri progressive metal band King’s X, second solo album “Love and Scars.”

“I’m kind of doing what I wanted to do — just in small pockets throughout the country,” Gray said. “You may not hear my stuff on ABC nationally, but my stuff is all over the country in different places.”

With a little under three decades under his belt, Gray doesn’t plan on slowing down anytime soon.

“(What keeps) me going is determination (and) never giving up,” Gray said. “... I just (want to) keep it going and never give up because it’s where my heart is. I couldn’t imagine not doing music for a living. That will probably take me through.”

