

“There are just an amazing number of very creative people finding success up here. It’s a vibrant community creatively.”



In addition to teaching English at Union High School, Salmon Creek resident Randy Cate is a songwriter. His tunes have been performed by artists including Ted Nugent and Dionne Warwick, and used as background music on television shows such as “True Blood,” “It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia” and “The Young and the Restless.”

Photos by STEVEN LANE/The Columbian

A SONG IN HIS HEART

Vancouver English teacher has had successful run as a songwriter for Ted Nugent, others



A number of artists have performed songs by Randy Cate over the years, and his work can be heard on popular television shows, as well.

“They published the first thing I wrote, and I thought, this is the life.”

By MARY ANN ALBRIGHT
Columbian staff writer

Union High School freshmen get glimpses into teacher Randy Cate’s other career when they show up for English class. Vinyl records decorate his classroom, and he shows students Ted Nugent’s “Tied Up In Love” music video on YouTube.

Cate, 62, collaborated with Nugent on the song. High schoolers today might not fill their iPod playlists with Nugent hits, but they’re likely familiar with some of the recent television shows on which Cate’s work can be heard, including “True Blood,” “It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia” and “The Young and the Restless.”

Cate tries to impress upon students the importance of good writing, whether it’s a book, a poem or, as has been so central to his life for the past 40 years, song lyrics.

Beginning of a career

Music has long played an important role in Cate’s life.

Born in the South, Cate got his introduction to music by singing in church.

His family moved to Vancouver when Cate was 11, and he continued his involvement with music.

He attended Hudson’s Bay High

School, which is where he met longtime friend Monte Wolverton, now a Battle Ground resident and nationally syndicated editorial cartoonist.

Cate sometimes works with Wolverton on cartoon ideas and captions today, though it was music that initially helped launch their friendship.

Wolverton had a high school garage band called Me and the Rest of Them, and invited Cate to be the lead singer.

“(We had) a terrible PA system and weekly visits from the Vancouver Police Department because we were so loud,” Cate recalled with a laugh.

Cate graduated from Hudson’s Bay in 1966 and, after studying at Central Washington University and Clark College, transferred to Western Washington State College (now Western Washington University), where he majored in English and drama.

During a summer break from college, Cate headed back to his native Tennessee, where a relative connected him with a music publishing company called Tree Publishing. It has since become Sony Tree Publishing.

A summer working at Tree gave



Cate:

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Cate his first taste of success as a songwriter.

"They published the first thing I wrote, and I thought, this is the life," he said.

The song didn't get recorded, but the thrill of selling "Deep Feeling Blues" was enough to keep Cate going.

Making a name

It would be 10 years before he sold a second song, however.

After graduating from college, Cate moved back to Vancouver and worked in restaurants to save up for a move to Los Angeles.

Cate made the move in 1974, and went to work at a music publishing company called Garrett Music Enterprises.

He co-wrote a number of songs while at Garrett, including "Ain't Love Good Tonight," which was used as background music in the 1978 Clint Eastwood film "Every Which Way But Loose."

Cate's first single was "Easy Love," and Dionne Warwick's rendition of it shot to No. 12 on Billboard magazine's adult contemporary chart in 1980. Warwick was actually the second artist to record "Easy Love," the first being French singer Sylvie Vartan.

Cate worked at Garrett for more than eight years before striking out on his own.

After he'd left Garrett, he received a letter from Atlantic Records soliciting songs for five artists, one of whom was Nugent.

Cate, a Nugent fan, offered up an earlier version of "Tied Up In Love." The song was selected as the first track on the 1984 Nugent album "Penetrator."

Nugent later recorded a second song that Cate co-wrote, "When Your Body Talks," that's included on his 1986 album "Little Miss Dangerous."

Despite these successes, in the late '80s Cate started to feel like he needed a more steady job and income stream, since he and his wife, Carol, now had a son. So, he went to the University of Southern California and earned a master's degree in education.

A homecoming

Cate taught in Los Angeles for three years. He and his family moved back to Vancouver around 1990 to be close to his and Carol's parents.

Cate taught in Gresham, Ore., for a year, then moved to Evergreen Public Schools, where he's worked for the past 20 years.

Despite teaching full-time, Cate still writes songs in the bonus room of his Salmon Creek home, and keeps ideas for lyrics in notebooks and on scraps of paper.

He isn't trained in music composition or notation, but he has set some of the lyrics to melodies. The next step is to create demos and shop them around.

Several decades ago, that process would have required Cate to relocate. Because of changes in technology and the entertainment industry's burgeoning Northwest presence, however, it's no longer necessary to live in places such as Los Angeles, New York City or Nashville to find success as a songwriter.

It can and does happen right here in Clark County.

"There are just an amazing number of very creative people finding success up here," Cate said. "It's a vibrant community creatively."

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