

# SHAWN THOMAS STUDIOS (STS)

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RECORDING & PRODUCTION

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## **"MY MUSIC IS UNIQUE" – NO IT'S NOT, AND THAT'S A GOOD THING!**

(by Shawn Thomas – [www.shawnthomasonline.com](http://www.shawnthomasonline.com))

My high school English teacher used to challenge her students' assumptions by making the statement, "There is no such thing as a new or original or unique plot." At which point all the creative writer types would raise their hand in protest and try to come up with the most bizarre and unusual plots they could. To their surprise, all of their "unique" ideas were actually just plot development such as characters, setting, conflict, theme, and so on. The plots in each of their stories were far from unique or original, and in fact were often the same plot just with different characters and settings.

The same is true of music and songwriting. I hate to be the one to break it to you, but there's no such thing as a completely original or unique song or style of music. Yes, I can see your hands raised in protest from here. It's okay. You're still an amazing musician and songwriter – just not unique. I'm sorry to say that you're not the only one who's ever written a song or come up with a style like yours. What makes you *seem* unique, is the way that you choose from all the variations of rhythm, melody, tempo, syncopation, instrumentation, and harmony, and then combine those to make "your style". But the core of the style or song (i.e. the plot) is not original. It's the elements you use and the way you use them (i.e. the plot development) that might be original.

I realize it may seem I'm just arguing semantics, but stay with me, cuz there's a point in here somewhere.

Usually when artists are asked to describe their music or style, they very intentionally avoid comparing themselves with anyone else. I was actually *taught* to do that in college during one of my music industry classes. We were told that it was a bad thing to allow ourselves to be compared to a top selling artist because there's already one of them, and why would anyone want to buy our music if we're just like "so-n-so"? The principle sounds solid, and plus it feeds the ego part of us that says we're better than them anyway. Unfortunately, the value of not being like anyone else is not very high in the world of marketing your music.

Here's what happens: Someone finds out you're in a band and wants to find out more. Maybe they might even want to buy one of your latest CDs. So they ask you, "What's your music like?" You reply, "Oh, well, we don't really sound like anyone else. See, we kinda got our own style and

it's really hard to describe it. It's amazing though, but you really have to hear it to understand it." Think they're gonna be motivated to buy your CD? Probably not. Why? Because they don't know what they would be spending their money on, so they don't want to risk the ten bucks.

Here's another scenario: Someone asks, "Can you tell me about your music?" and you say, "Sure! We're like a cross between Twisted Sister and The Monkees." Now all the images and thoughts that are going through your mind about that crazy combination are also what would be going through the person's mind who just asked you about your music – and one of two things would happen: They will either think, "Wow, I gotta hear this!", or "Hmm, that's a little out there for me." Yes, you could get turned down and they don't like you. But on the other hand, they may say, "OMG, I loved the Monkees! How much are your CDs? Can I get one for my twisted sister too?"

Identify yourself, your music, and your style. How? By comparing yourself to artists and music that people know so that they have a frame of reference – at which point, they'll either be interested, or they won't be. Plus, you never know, they might have a friend or think of a perfect gift idea months from now, and they remember your music, even if they didn't like it, because of the cool description you gave. It's better than the alternative of obscure non-description that's pretty much forgotten as soon as they walk away from you.

So the next time you're signing up on the best indie band page in the world and they ask you to list artists you sound like, don't leave it blank! Don't be afraid to be who you are and let everyone know exactly what your music is about. You're not going to be able to con anyone into buying your music, so you might as well be big and bold so that the people who will like you can find you easily. If you're as good as you say you are, what have you got to lose?

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SHAWN THOMAS is a contemporary Christian singer/songwriter and worship leader whose ministry includes an outreach to the GLBT community. He is also the owner/operator of "Shawn Thomas Studios" in West Palm Beach, FL providing audio recording, production, and mastering services to independent artists, songwriters, and bands and he is a member in good standing with the National Academy of Recording Arts, and Sciences (Grammy.com).