

Brian Rothschild

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, JOHN LENNON SONGWRITING CONTEST & EDUCATIONAL TOUR BUS

The John Lennon Songwriting Contest “happened by accident,” says executive director, Brian Rothschild. “David Sonenberg, Sanford Ross, and I were talking with Yoko Ono [John Lennon’s widow] about another project, but we had this idea for a contest to help those who didn’t have connections in the music industry, and we blurted it out at the very end. The next day she called and said, ‘I like that idea.’” Since 1997, this international contest has been open to both amateur and professional songwriters in 13 genres. To help promote it, Brian also came up with the idea for a tour bus. But this wasn’t going to be your ordinary bus: Brian jam-packed it with the latest audio and video gear to build two state-of-the-art recording studios on board. Soon, Brian realized its true educational value, and today the bus tours nationwide to expose students to songwriting and multimedia experiences. As last year’s contest wound down, Brian told us how this project has become his life’s work.



By Veronica Dominguez

What did you want to be when you were younger?

I wanted to be in music. My mom was a classical pianist, harpsichordist, and music teacher, so I grew up around music. I played piano starting at 5 years old. When I was about 10, I started playing jazz and getting more into pop music. I learned how to accompany other musicians and vocalists,

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and was the accompanist for my high school choir and theatrical productions. I also started writing music when I was 16 and was really into it.

How did your career start?

I went to Hampshire College, and at that point they had a really good recording studio—that was one of the reasons I wanted to go there. So I started learning more about engineering and multi-tracking. After

college, I was able to break in with some commercials and write jingles. I continued doing that until I became involved in the Lennon project.

What do you do as the project’s executive director?

I oversee everything—where the bus can go, how it can do work better, relationships with the manufacturers, staffing, and development of our curriculum. I make sure the experience people have on the bus is positive. We also join tours, like the Warped Tour. We set up big tents where you can get hands-on with guitars, keyboards, and drums, learn what the bus does, and get tips on songwriting. The bands on the tour sometimes use the bus to create new tracks, too. I also like hooking up celebrity musicians with kids who are in high schools, Boys & Girls Clubs, or after-school programs, and having them participate in what’s going on in the bus.

That’s a lot of work. What keeps you motivated?

Because my mom was a music teacher, I was always aware of the importance of music education. And it’s heart-warming to hear the stories that people tell about how the contest has helped them. One of the most positive things I hear is that it gives writers credibility that many of them need early in their careers.

What do you like best about your job?

I like how creative it enables me to be: I can have ideas for things that keep me involved in music, like a high school “Battle of the Bands” that we’re doing for the 2004–05 school year all across the country. And it’s a privilege to be able to work with John Lennon’s name and the “Imagine” face and use that to inspire young people to be creative. That’s really the best gift. BY A1

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