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At the age of 18, California native Michelle Berlin made the move to Music City, USA. “I grew up loving country music, so it was kind of obvious to move to Nashville to pursue that,” she explains. While at Vanderbilt University, Michelle got her foot in the door through internships at RCA and Arista Records, where she was exposed to the world of music publishing. “I learned music publishers got to work with the songwriters in the creation of music,” she recalls, “and that was exactly what I wanted to do.” After nine years at BMG Music Publishing, Michelle is in the middle of her first year with independent music publisher, Cherry Lane, and graciously took time from her busy schedule to fill us in on her brand new gig.

Michelle Berlin

Creative Director, Cherry Lane Music Publishing

How did you become a country music fan?

My grandpa—he was my hero growing up—taught me all these old cowboy songs. So that’s how I became enamored with the West and country music. I love how the music is easy to relate to, and I love the lyrics.

What do you do at Cherry Lane?

My main responsibility now is launching their Nashville office. Cherry Lane has been a brilliant publishing company since 1960, but they’ve never had a presence in Nashville. When they decided to expand the company, they sought me out. My current goal is to acquire a couple of song catalogs and sign a few writers, and then take the songs we publish and get them recorded.

Describe how you work with the songwriters.

Music publishing in Nashville is unique in that we have writers’ rooms where songwriters come in every day to write. By the end of the week, they’ll have four or five songs done and maybe one or two will be worth pursuing. We talk about which songs to demo, where songs can be placed, and what direction they should aim for. Most importantly, I try to create a comfortable environment to facilitate their creative process.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

I love working with the songwriters because they are the people that create the music, but I also enjoy working

with the A&R reps, artists, producers, and managers when I’m trying to place songs.

Is there anything you find difficult to do?

I don’t like being the bearer of bad news. A lot of times songs will get recorded and not make an album and that’s always disappointing. Having to call a writer and say that it’s not going to happen is hard.

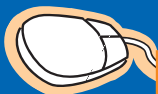
What do you think makes you good at your job?

I’m really passionate about my songwriters—they’re my family. When I sign somebody and they write for me, I want to make them successful as much as I want to be successful. I work that way, and that’s why I’ve been able to generate cuts for a lot of my writers.

Can you offer any advice for aspiring music publishers or country songwriters?

Get in the middle of it. I went to a school that doesn’t have a music business program, but when I wanted to work in the music business I got an internship at a record label. Then, I went to every show and function, and met as many people as I could. If you want to be a country music songwriter, it helps to be in Nashville and surround yourself with other songwriters to learn from. But it’s extremely competitive. Knowing that’s the level of competition, you’ll have to rise to that and beat it.

—VERONICA DOMINGUEZ-GARCIA



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