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Musician forms chapter of songwriters group

Musicians usually surround themselves with a variety of tools and equipment — tuners, cords, amplifiers, microphone stands and more. During performances, the focus is on the delivery and the mood. But a musician's real work is often done in quiet rooms with a pad and pencil. The song-writing process is an essential piece of the puzzle; one that's often overlooked.

Gautier singer-songwriter Matt Hoggatt is no stranger to this process. He's one of a cadre of local songwriters who have spent hours staring at a blank page until their foreheads bleed. Some people can craft a catchy tune in minutes. Some can't even write a nursery rhyme.

So for the rest of us, Hoggatt recently formed a local chapter of the Nashville Songwriters Association International.

The NSAI, begun in 1967, is a trade organization that offers advice and education to songwriters. The organization also advocates for copyright protection for published works and recognition for the writers. There are chapters nationwide and Nashville hosts songwriter workshops, consultations and symposiums throughout the year for members.

The key point about NSAI, however, from Hoggatt's perspective, is the chance to have your original songs critiqued by industry professionals.

"I was interested in trying to take my music to another level and get out and pitch it to people in Nashville without having to actually move there,"

Hoggatt said in a recent interview. "It was a pretty good way of getting folks together to share music knowledge and network without having to just get lucky and meet somebody at a bar or a gig one day."

Hoggatt founded the chapter in September. Meetings are the first week of each month, and usually consist of a lesson plan to sharpen the song-writing craft, followed by an open jam session so members can compare songs and get immediate feedback. If you decide to join, annual dues are \$150, which includes a dozen free song critiques a year by anonymous NSAI professionals, networking potential galore and a huge resource base of songwriters to help you hone your skills.

Hoggatt said an NSAI membership plugs the performer directly into a national audience of industry professionals willing to assist the budding songwriter much better than playing bars or coffee shops would. The chapter has a small but growing roster of members and anyone with an interest in song writing is welcome to join. You don't even need to know how to play an instrument. As long as the passion for writing is there, the door is open.

You can learn more about Nashville Songwriters Association International at www.nashvillesongwriters.com. Hoggatt is at 217-6711 or singingriverboy@hotmail.com. The local NSAI chapter can be found online at www.myspace.com/nsaimsgulfcoastchapter.

