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# SONGWRITER'S HANDY GUIDE

## SELLING YOUR SONGS — Part 3

A course in three books for Songwriters: Melody Writing, Lyric Writing and Selling Your Songs. A practical, fact-filled series that will aid the amateur and the professional songwriter.

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## PERFORMANCE RIGHTS

Money paid to songwriters and publishers for radio and television performances come from the performing rights organizations: ASCAP, BMI and SESAC. ASCAP (*American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers*) was founded in 1914, and is the oldest of the organizations. It was originally controlled by writers and publishers of standards, operettas and Broadway shows. In those days ASCAP frowned on blues and country music. ASCAP is paid a percentage of the gross income of radio stations. In 1940, ASCAP sought a rate increase. The broadcasters retaliated by founding BMI (*Broadcast Music Inc.*), opening the doors to country and blues writers. When rock and roll became important in the middle 50s BMI spear-headed rock and many of the important pop writers were BMI members. BMI is still owned by the broadcasters, although it is not a profit-making organization. SESAC (*Society of European Stage, Authors and Composers*) was founded in 1931, and is a privately owned, profit-making organization. Today all of the performing rights societies cheerfully accept writers of any style of music.

Each of the performing rights societies operates in a different way. ASCAP charges \$10 membership dues. It employs people who travel from one city to another, tape recording radio programs, and taking them back to New York City for analysis with the help of a massive tune index. BMI logs radio stations about once a year. During a one week period the disc jockeys write down the names of all songs played during that week, with writer's and publisher's names as well. SESAC is a much smaller company, and relies mostly upon the charts in music trade papers to log activity of a song.

None of the methods discussed is necessarily foolproof. The ASCAP system works least when the disc jockey does not announce a song correctly. In such a case the correct logging of the song is the responsibility of a not-too well paid ASCAP employee as to how deeply they want to dig to find the correct song. The BMI system relies on the disc jockey to program exactly as he normally does, as if the logging were not taking place. If he is a writer, or has friends and relatives who write, this reliance may not be justified. The SESAC system assumes the accuracy of the trade paper charts, and may not include songs that are called "turn-