

Discussion 18

Everything Creative

MUSICIANS, SAM PAYNE, PETER BREINHOLT AND RYAN SHUPE

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[BEGIN MUSIC]

PRES. DIETER F. UCHTDORF (QUOTE): The desire to create is one of the deepest yearnings of the human soul. We each have an inherent wish to create something that did not exist before. The more you trust and rely upon the Spirit, the greater your capacity to create.

NANCY HANSON (HOST): I'm Nancy Hanson and this is Everything Creative. This program explores a wide range of creative ideas, talents, and experiences through interviews and group discussions. Joining me today are three very dear friends of mine, who are each very successful, talented musicians, singers, songwriters, performers, entrepreneurs, and just all-around very gifted and talented great guys: Peter Breinholt, Ryan Shupe and Sam Payne. Thank you for being here.

[END MUSIC]

SAM PAYNE, PETER BREINHOLT, RYAN SHUPE (TOGETHER): Good to be here – Thanks for having us – Yeah, it's great to be here.

NANCY HANSON: Well, in our discussion today, we want to get into your creative process about songwriting, but first, would each of you just take a few minutes and introduce yourselves and tell us how you got started as a musician?

SAM PAYNE: This is Sam. My dad was a folk musician by trade and made a living for himself. He came from California because he didn't—he wanted to raise a family in Utah Valley. He tried his best to eke out a living as a folk musician. He had a handful of record albums, and he would sell them from door to door. So that's how I grew up: I grew up with a folk-singin' dad, and—

NANCY HANSON: Your dad, Marvin Payne.

SAM PAYNE: Yeah, Marvin Payne is his name, and I, I just kind of fell into doing that. And I go to great *pains*, actually, to sort of maintain that ethos that dad had, you know? It's kind of heritage for me. And so that's kind of how I got started doing things. I didn't come into writing and recording and making music until I was an adult.

NANCY HANSON: And talk to us about that, how that started.

SAM PAYNE: I had just moved to a new place. I had been asked to speak in a fireside and brought to the table a song that I had written. It was the first song I had written in years and years and years. I mean, I wrote a couple of songs when I was in high school, you know, for girls, [LAUGHTER] and it didn't go so well—neither the relationships nor the songs—but as an adult, I had written a song that I was to present at this fireside, and a guy in my ward happened to be a drummer, and he came up afterwards and said, “Hey, do you have more songs like that?” And I didn't, so, of course, I said, “Yeah, I have plenty.” [GIGGLING] And so we just kind of started rehearsing songs in his garage, and that's how kind of a band was born in that way and introduced me to writing songs.

NANCY HANSON: And you have since recorded several albums.

SAM PAYNE: Yeah, yeah, and that has grown to be sort of at the center of what I do professionally, and all of that stuff, you know. But it wasn't always so.

NANCY HANSON: Right. Peter.

PETER BREINHOLT: Well, I sort of had the typical story of being, as a kid, just a big music fanatic, and had posters on my wall and listened to lots of music, and daydreamed of having a band and doing music for a living.

MAN: Long flowing hair. [LAUGHTER] Madison Square Garden.

PETER BREINHOLT: [LAUGHING] The inside jokes don't work here, but—um [LAUGHTER]—so I used to, you know, listen, and I used to, just sort of dream about it. And then as I became a teenager, I started putting bands together with my friends, and we were writing songs. And—but at a certain point I remember I put the dream aside because I had read enough books and biographies about some of the heroes I had—the musical heroes—and it scared me a little bit, frankly, because whereas they were brilliant creatively, there was often dysfunction in their personal lives, and I just wanted a normal life, and so I remember I just put it aside and assumed I would do something very conventional with my life. And I went and served a mission in South America, came home, and then in college— still had the dream put away and was studying political science and Spanish— something started to kind of reawaken the dream. I started having people ask for versions of songs I had recorded. I started playing, just in small, little settings. And the feedback and the reaction was so positive that I started to sort of rethink it, and to see whether there was a way to do what I really felt like was the one thing in my life that I did naturally and was just very passionate about. I had one friend in particular who was a few years ahead of me, who I had gone to high school with—a pianist named Jon Schmidt—who was doing it: was combining the two worlds of being creative and making a living as a musician, but also having a good family life, and so that helped. So I sort of pulled the hobby back out and within a few months, I had enough encouragement that I recorded an album. And it just really got legs of its own at that point. There wasn't a lot of marketing or business sense behind it; it was just me doing what I know how to do.

NANCY HANSON: Was this when you were in college?

PETER BREINHOLT: Yeah, this was, that part of it—of coming back to music—came probably my second year of college, I think, or third year.

NANCY HANSON: And you just thought, “Okay, this is working, this is what I’m gonna pursue”?

PETER BREINHOLT: Yeah. I mean, I thought of it in terms of—I thought very small at first. You know, if I could learn a repertoire of songs, enough to play in the corner of this restaurant, or if I could have enough songs, original songs, to do an album. And with each step, the audience got bigger and the feedback got more encouraging for me. You know, I’m just, I think—you know, some people, I think, are gifted and they just say, “This is what I wanna do with my life,” and do it. They have thick skin, and any discouragement that comes along the way, they just brush it off. I’m not one of those people. I think in my case, I needed enough positive feedback that I would go forward with it, and I got it, and it just continued to grow and grow. And then people have a strange way of coming into your life when you need them. And that happened for me; I had people—at a certain point, somebody who knew about sound engineering walked into my life, and somebody who knew about recording, and, you know, my dad was always a help with just the business stuff. That all sort of helped the story unfold for me. I just don’t think that I could have mapped it out on my own. It seemed to me like something was pulling me, sometimes kicking and screaming—not to say I didn’t want to be a musician, but—

NANCY HANSON: It didn’t make sense.

PETER BREINHOLT: But there were times when I didn’t. And here I am, and it’s been sixteen years now, and so far, so good.

NANCY HANSON: Thanks. Ryan, tell us your story.

RYAN SHUPE: Well, my name is Ryan Shupe, and my story is this: it started when I was young. I’m actually the fifth generation of fiddlers in my family, so I come from a, you know, long line of music. My grandma had a dance band, and I know that my great-grandpa used to play at dances when they first came out as the Mormon pioneers. There were stories that I’ve heard, read in, you know, different journals, you know. He said: “Well, I just threw my fiddle on my back and jumped on the horse and rode down and played at the dance,” so [GIGGLES] there’s a long line of music in my family. So my dad, he was kind of a sports guy, and so, you know, he played all this basketball. I think he played all these sports, and then he started thinking, “Well, gosh, I’m getting old, you know, I can’t keep playing.” So he decided, in his kids, he was gonna make them learn music. So he got us up to practice every morning about two hours before school when I was a little kid.

NANCY HANSON: Wow.

RYAN SHUPE: I don’t really know if I could do that myself for my own kids, but—so I owe a lot to him.

NANCY HANSON: What are your memories of that? Do you remember just fighting it and thinking, [IN A COMPLAINING VOICE] “I don’t want to do this anymore!” You know—

RYAN SHUPE: Oh, I just thought that was normal I guess—

NANCY HANSON: You just got up and did it. “Everybody’s practicing at 4 in the morning.”

RYAN SHUPE: Yeah, when you're a kid, you just don't know. Dad just says, "Alright, it's time to practice," and you think, "Huh, I guess, like, does everybody else do something that early in the morning?" [LAUGHTER] I think it kind of stunted my growth. [MORE LAUGHTER] I might have been like a foot taller if I wouldn't have gotten up that early, if I would have gotten good sleep. Maybe I would have my hair still, I don't know. [GIGGLING]

MAN: But I've heard families who say music is their version of getting up and milking the cows and doing chores; that they see that same sort of work ethic.

RYAN SHUPE: Yeah, maybe that's how I viewed it. It was just—I just got up. I remember my dad pulling the covers off, and I remember, you know, I would try and crawl over and hide under the couch and curl up over the heating vent, you know? He's like, "Ryan, where are you?" [LAUGHTER] Then he, you know—but then as I got a little older, he kind of found some other kid musicians, and we organized a band, and—

NANCY HANSON: So this was fiddle that you were playing. Did he kind of choose that instrument for you then?

RYAN SHUPE: This was fiddle. I think, yeah, I think, just—violin just was kind of running in our family. I think my uncle played violin, and he was, he was in the, you know, the Utah Symphony, and he also started this, the Utah Old-Time Fiddlers, so he kind of did both. And all of his kids played violin. And so I think my dad just kind of—

NANCY HANSON: That's what we're doing.

RYAN SHUPE: Naturally followed in that footstep, you know, because it just came from the fifth generation of violin player, I think just—

NANCY HANSON: That's just what the Shupes do.

RYAN SHUPE: That's just what they do. [LAUGHTER] And so we just—he thought, "Well, you know, the best way to have this kid of mine learn is just to put him in a band with, you know, other people." So we found some other kids and we formed a little band and performed all over, and we, you know, my dad just had a motor home and we just jumped in the motor home and traveled around and played shows and just had a grand old time. As a little kid, that was, you know, tons of fun. And then, I was probably at—well, then as I got a little older, I played in another—you know, when I was in high school, I played in a—I wasn't the rock star, necessarily, in high school that Pete was. [GIGGLING] But, you know, because, violin isn't so rock star-ish, but I played in some acoustic bands, some kind of, some folk, kind of pop, you know. And, they were all, you know, kind of older guys than I was, but for me, it worked out great because I could just go, you know, play a little show and make a little money and, uh, it freed up the rest of my time so I could, you know, go swimming or whatever, you know, [LAUGHTER] whatever you want to do when you're in high school—

NANCY HANSON: So how did this—

RYAN SHUPE: I'm getting off the subject. Then after I went on a mission, then I just kind of thought, well, you know, that's—I was kind of similar to Peter, maybe, maybe Sam, I didn't really ever think, "Oh yeah, I just want to be a musician." I just, I just, I went to college and I just got a degree in public relations and I was kind of planning that I would maybe do, you know, advertising or, you know, just something, something creative, 'cause I've always felt like I was kind of creative. But it was on, kind of on my mission I started writing songs. That was—some of the first songs I had written were, you know, kind of, just like ideas that I just had, well, after we came back, you know, from a long day's work. I'd just sit around and think of different song ideas, and then, when I came back in college, then, you know, the natural thing is, you know, you need to have a band in college, so I started a band.

NANCY HANSON: That's the natural thing.

RYAN SHUPE: That's the natural thing, you know— [LAUGHTER]

MAN: Everybody does that.

RYAN SHUPE: Everybody does that. So it just kind of started perpetuating itself, you know. I was in one band, we were kind of a bluegrass band, and we did really good, and then after that we, I just, you know, started this Ryan Shupe and the RubberBand and just kind of played at random events and parties and it just kind of kept growing like, you know, just from the, the feedback we got. I didn't really start out thinking that that's what I would eventually do. I'm not convinced that I will still be doing it, you know, in five years from now. It just seems to be going that way and having a lot of fun, and so that's kind of how, how I got to—

NANCY HANSON: You've seen some, some real success with that as far as, you've signed to a major label, your band has, has travelled and, you know, experienced that kind of little bit of outside-Utah fame, and had a bit of a taste of that. Is there something you're still pursuing?

RYAN SHUPE: Oh yeah, we have the Elkinator.

NANCY HANSON: What is the Elkinator?

RYAN SHUPE: It's a big van with a big huge grill on the front [LAUGHTER] and, you know, so deer don't demolish the van if we happen to run into one, and, but it was so big that it got dubbed that it was actually strong enough to take out an elk or two, so the Elkinator. [LAUGHTER]

NANCY HANSON: Very nice.

RYAN SHUPE: We're not intending to do that, we don't want to harm any animals in the travels of our musical journeys.

SAM PAYNE: The phone lines are lighting up. [LAUGHTER] He's harming elk! He's hurting elk! [LAUGHTER]

RYAN SHUPE: Yeah, well, we travel around. We went up to Nashville and started looking around for different labels and eventually signed to Capitol records, and it was a really fun

experience, and it was really fun to be an all-LDS band on a label. And, you know, I always say this, anywhere east of Colorado they think we're Amish, you know. [LAUGHTER] So they would be like, "What!?! You guys have a band and you're Mormon? That doesn't even make sense! How can you do that?" And so they would, you know, they would watch us and, you know, they just didn't know. It was interesting to see their interactions but, you know, they just, they didn't really know, they just—but you know, as time came along, you know, they just realized, "Oh yeah, well, okay, they can have a band, right? These Mormons, they're all right." So that was fun to experience. And we had a—when we went in there, we talked as a band and just decided that we would set some boundaries, because they'll always ask you to do as much as you—you know, they'll just keep asking you to do more and more stuff, so we just decided, you know, let's just tell them we don't want to, you know, go play shows on Sunday, and, you know, they were fine with that, you know. Uh, you know, just random— [LAUGHTER] just random things.

NANCY HANSON: Well, you had to establish, "These are our standards and this is what we're gonna do," and do you feel like that maybe closed some doors, in a way?

RYAN SHUPE: I don't know, I had this conversation with one of the guys in our band. We—I don't know. It's possible I guess. We, we had—I had a conversation once with our manager and he said, "So you don't want to play shows on Sunday?" I said, "Uh, no." He says, "Okay, well, done and done. I won't ask you about it ever again, and I'm not even gonna tell you what comes in." I don't know if anything came in, but he just said, "Fine, that's great. If that's what you wanna do, I'm not even gonna—there's no need for me to call you every day and say, 'Hey, we got this.'" So I don't know. I mean, I'm sure in some ways it probably didn't benefit our business side but, you know, I mean, surely it benefited, you know, my spiritual side. I don't—for me, it really wasn't worth it to be gone and doing—you know, I—

NANCY HANSON: Right.

RYAN SHUPE: I need that time and it's set aside for that—you know, that day, Sunday, is set aside for that, you know, to go to church and worship and stuff. I just, I just needed that for myself, so I don't really know, for me it wasn't really a big question of, "Well, should we do that?" It was just—

NANCY HANSON: Ryan, what an example that is for you to just say, "Okay, these are the rules and this is what we're doing, and whether that closes doors for us or not doesn't matter, because this is who we are and this is what we stand for," so—

RYAN SHUPE: Well, that's what we decided. You just have to make your decisions. There's always gonna be something else that comes along. You just have to say, "Oh, this is what I'm willing to do and this is what I'm not willing to do, and let the chips fall where they may." You have to be the one that answers to yourself, and—

NANCY HANSON: Right.

RYAN SHUPE: And it's really between you and, you know, and God. So we just made those decisions and just decided that that's what we decided to do.

NANCY HANSON: Right.

SAM PAYNE: I'll tell you—you know, as you talk about that, I think what a blessing to have a manager, what a blessing to have a booking agent who reacts in that way and says, "Alright, I'll consider that a made decision, and I'm just not going to bring Sunday stuff—I'm not even gonna put Sunday stuff on the table for you." I think, what a blessing that is.

RYAN SHUPE: Yeah, it was actually really nice to, to just have them be so understanding. They just, they didn't mind.

SAM PAYNE: Yeah. And I—you know, as Peter talks about, I mean I, I really felt a lot of—I really connect when you talk about looking hard for an example of the kind of musician who, who was successful in making music for a living and who also seemed to have their life together, because we are—I mean, there's—the example of the musician that doesn't have his life together is, I mean, it's ubiquitous, it's everywhere, you know, and what a blessing to be able to look—what a blessing to be able to see Jon Schmidt and say, I mean, there's a—Jon may not know that he served that useful a role to you, you know, but I know that there are people in my life like that—'cause I, 'cause you, you look around, there are a lot of misgivings as you enter into a long-term venture like trying to make music in a serious way, you know, because you do see that all over the place.

RYAN SHUPE: Well, we've had this conversation, which leads us to why we're here about being creative. We've had this conversation outside of this, you know, is it possible to be creative, you know, I've heard this even debated amongst musicians who I've read about in magazines. They say, can I be creative and not be this—you know—drug-induced, you know, guy who has to party and, you know, be at the bottom of my sorrows to write, [LAUGHTER] you know, the best song ever, or can you just have a nice, happy family and a minivan [LAUGHTER] and, you know, and still come up with something, you know, relevant to people and creative and artistic, you know? So we kind of—and I think the answer is yes, I don't think you need to have—

PETER BREINHOLT: I think the answer is yes, too, but I—as we're talking, I find myself just feeling a lot of thankfulness. I mean, just sitting here behind the microphone, I find myself feeling a lot of thankfulness for, uh, for those Jon Schmidts in my life, for those people who have righteously facilitated the righteous exercise of that creative impulse, you know? I don't know that—I don't know that I could have done it on my own, you know, I don't know that I would have trusted myself to beat those odds, you know?

RYAN SHUPE: Right. It's good to see there's a Peter Breinholt out there. [LAUGHTER] He's able to, uh—and a Sam Payne, who's able to be, you know—

PETER BREINHOLT: But a lot of it, too, is, you know, I don't think it's a matter of taking the pain out of the creative process because that—

SAM PAYNE: The Sam?

PETER BREINHOLT: Oh, the Payne. Gotcha. The P-A-I-N, because it is, it is still, it is hard to be creative and it is a laborious process, but it's—I think maybe the trick is learning when to step back from it. It doesn't mean, you know, writing is always pleasant, joyous—I mean, it's

work, just like writing, you know, a book is, and studying for a final exam in college. But there is a sense for me, because of other things in my life that are bigger than music, when to step back and say, alright, you gotta be with the family, you've got to, you gotta give yourself to something else for a while. And that helps, having that in my life, something telling me that.

SAM PAYNE: Yeah, I think a lot about that idea of things being bigger than music in your life, you know, and at first, when you're first—or at least in my experience, when I first started writing, it was, it was kind of an exercise to make sense of those bigger things, you know, it was an exercise to sort of order my thoughts about those bigger things. But it was never, it was never in question, the degree to which those bigger things were, in fact, bigger than music. I mean, that was just never in question. But as the phone starts ringing and as you start, and as the music starts finding an audience, and as you find, you find yourself kind of driven along by that, and you find the satisfaction in the creativity starts to come and again, that sort of public interface starts to take shape, and then the key phrase for me is one that Peter used to use, he said: "Music is a jealous hobby," he told me that one time, he said, "Music is a jealous hobby. It wants everything. It wants all of that time." And so you find yourself—or at least I found myself—having to ask and answer that question in a more concerted way, you know, because the music was vying for a lot. The creative energy was vying for a lot, you know, a lot of my time, a lot of my energy. You really do have to draw the line between what things are real [GIGGLE] and what things are just me saying things about real things, you know?

RYAN SHUPE: Yeah, I think it's important as Latter-day Saints that, I mean, I think we do have, or at least, we've come to know that there's, there's things that are greater than just our job or however much success we have in music, and that was kind of where it comes back down to us going into the label and saying, "Well, these things are important to us because we've, you know, grown up with this, this idea, or this truth that, you know, all these things don't matter as much as the bigger picture and the gospel side of life. So that's—I think it's important what Pete's saying is that, you know, you gotta sometimes just step back and say, "Hey, my family's the most important thing, not whether I—" although you know, it's nice to write a good song and make some money to feed your family, but, [GIGGLING] you know, ultimately, you know, your family and the gospel and all these things are more important than, you know, being a rock star. That's—hence, my statement, I don't know, maybe I won't be doing this in five years. I mean, if I, all of a sudden, I kind of feel like I'm supposed to be doing music, I mean, but I wouldn't be doing this if I didn't feel guided to be in this situation. I felt like I was guided to do music. So, just as easily as that might come, I could also be guided to—

NANCY HANSON: Change directions.

RYAN SHUPE: Not play music. You know, I'm sure I'll always play music, but maybe I'll be guided to go work for Sam Payne. [LAUGHTER] I don't know what that would be, but I am just looking at you across, and that's the first thing that came to my mind. But I—what I'm discovering, and just the comments of the three of us, is that the sort of constant, the sort of self-questioning and the constant sort of, you know, going back to those important questions, having to re-answer them again, it's common to us. I mean, I think I hear us saying that we all experience it, you know.

NANCY HANSON: Great. Well, you're listening to Everything Creative on the Mormon Channel, talking today with Peter Breinholt, Sam Payne and Ryan Shupe. Let's talk for a bit about that whole creative process of songwriting and how that works for you.

RYAN SHUPE: Let's not fail to mention our wonderful host, Nancy Hanson. [LAUGHTER]

NANCY HANSON: Thank you, Ryan Shupe. And so our listeners will know, I actually am really good friends with all of these guys, and I'm pointing at them, trying to make sure that they don't say anything bad about me. [LAUGHTER] But, part of the—

SAM PAYNE, PETER BREINHOLT AND RYAN SHUPE TOGETHER: We have shared stages—We've all shared stages with Nancy Hanson, and that's where we're going. [LAUGHTER]. Yeah, if that's where we're going, let's start—

NANCY HANSON: No, no, no, no, no.

MAN: Where's the dirt? Oh, just kidding—

NANCY HANSON: No, just to say that you're all being—

MAN: Not stages of life. Actual stages.

NANCY HANSON: Actual stages.

MAN: Actual stages, yes. [LAUGHTER]

NANCY HANSON: Over many, many years, and so it's interesting to sit with you guys and to talk about this, 'cause I do feel like I know you so well and I've seen that road and walked much of that road with you. But you all come from such different places and you're, you bring so much to the music from those places that you come. And I just wonder: I'm sure we all have a different songwriting process, and I'm always curious about that, and I've felt torn in my own life because when I was writing more songs was when I was single and didn't have a family and didn't have those other things pulling me away like you talked about. How do you guys find balance and time—especially since this is your career—to kind of, I don't know, know when you gotta put it down and go back to your real life? How do you separate that?

PETER BREINHOLT: You have to, I've found that you have to carve out time now, to write. Whereas for me, as a college student, I would just pick up the guitar when I wanted to play and I'd play and I'd stay up as late as I wanted writing songs.

NANCY HANSON: Exactly. I think that's, when we all met, I think that's what we were all doing. And that is what—you'd wake up and pick up your guitar.

RYAN SHUPE: I've got a song. Let's just sit down and write it.

NANCY HANSON: Yeah.

MAN: You know, there's no kids, "Hey dad, I want a sippy cup." [LAUGHTER]

PETER BREINHOLT: So you do have to, and you know, and the trick about that is, you know, it's like saying, "Okay. Lightning strike now."

NANCY HANSON: Right.

PETER BREINHOLT: I've carved, I've got two hours.

NANCY HANSON: So come on, bring it.

PETER BREINHOLT: So I want some, you know, I want something to happen.

NANCY HANSON: Right. Right.

PETER BREINHOLT: And unfortunately, it doesn't always work that way. And so that's the biggest challenge, I think, about it. But I think we have all learned different ways of coping with that and continuing to write, just making it happen. I found certain times a day are more fruitful for me than others and, you know, little things like that have helped.

SAM PAYNE: Whether I am making time to write songs becomes a barometer in my life for balance, you know. I mean, I find that there are lots of little measuring sticks you can use, and two of my favorite measuring sticks to use are whether I have time to read books or whether I have time to write songs. If I'm making time to read books and write songs, than that's an indicator that things—

NANCY HANSON: Life is good.

SAM PAYNE: Yeah, then I'm healthy. But, you know, there was a time when—or for me at least—when the songwriting becomes a career. Suddenly in some ways you treat it like a job, you know, in some ways the muse doesn't—I mean in any other profession, you can't just go to work when the muse strikes, you know, you can't just go do your job when the muse is with you, you know, you just gotta go do your job.

NANCY HANSON: Right.

SAM PAYNE: I found that to be true of songwriting. I mean it's easy to write a song under the influence of the muse. You know, there are songs—we've all had the experience of songs that write themselves, you know, and you feel just, you feel empowered by that and you feel wonderful to have been a part of that process. When the muse isn't striking, what do you do? You can't just quit writing songs. You're a songwriter. That's what you are, you know. And so you have to employ kind of a more workday process to it. You sit down and you put the rhymes on a page and you do what you do.

NANCY HANSON: Sam, it's good to hear you say that because I feel like songs just probably are floating around in the air in your head and they just come right down. I mean it seems like you write so easily and that there is just so much in there but surely you worked at it.

SAM PAYNE: Yeah, it's like Peter said, you know, it's work. It's work, and a lot of songwriters have exercises that they do, you know, one of mine is, I call it album in an hour, where I sit down with a blank piece of paper and I allow myself six minutes per song and I wind up at the end of an hour with, I don't know, do the math for me, you know, five minutes per

song, you wind up with 12 songs at the end, and they're all lousy, I mean, they're all, you know, but it is kind of a little, it is just again, it's just kind of this little thermometer for, well, where's my head today? What can I produce today on demand? If somebody pointed a gun at me and said, "Write!" [GIGGLING] well, here's 12 little—and you know, some of those grow up to be songs, you know, some of those grow up to be songs. That exercise doesn't yield 12 good songs every day—

NANCY HANSON: But it makes you write.

SAM PAYNE: But it makes you write and it makes you sit down and it makes you put some things on paper.

PETER BREINHOLT: Well, and you know, what I found, too, is songwriting is different from a lot of jobs. And the main thing for me is that it comes—I mean, this is only my experience, and you guys can tell me if yours is different, but it's almost like I have to tap into another part of me that is less analytical, less cerebral and a little more intuitive and, you know, a lot of the world today, those who go and spend 9-5 at their jobs, you know, I maybe can do it from that part of the brain but I kind of have to find a groove or a flow or I have to go to a place where it's not me just thinking about the song but actually something's coming out of me that's more intuitive. I don't know if that makes sense, I don't know if there's another way to say that but the best songs I've written have not been songs that I was expecting. They just happened. And it's almost like a dream, you know, that state between being asleep and being awake that you have these dreams that, just these very creative dreams you don't think—it doesn't seem like they came from you at all and I think there's a part of us deeper down that makes us better songwriters or authors or filmmakers or whatever and I think some of my job at least is even if it's three in the afternoon on a Wednesday in the middle of the day when the rest of the world is, you know, chattering about, and there's all this stuff going on, just somehow get in that place where I can tap into something a little deeper than what my left brain is telling me or whatever part of my brain it is, does that make sense?

NANCY HANSON: Yeah, and I think that's what's hard is allowing those times to happen but like you said, almost hoping or wishing or planning or hoping there's some way that you can make them come when you're sitting there ready to receive them. You know, and being open to when they are coming to being able to kind of drop everything in a way and respond to that.

RYAN SHUPE: Yeah, it's kind of like—I would say that's another reason why I say, I don't know if I'll be doing this because I do feel like—and I think everybody here would say the same thing, I think it kind of isn't only me—it's like me but then there's something else, you know, you get inspiration, you know, I would say, and probably we would all say, you know, like Heavenly Father inspires us or gives us these gifts so for me, you know, I think, well, I mean it's possible that I could just never write a song again and so I kind of think when stuff comes, then I, you know, am thankful for it 'cause I know that it is a blessing that I've been blessed with but I think going to the other place that he was talking about, it's kind of like a daydream and that's why when you have kids, you know, or whatever, you just kind of daydream and, yeah, for me it's kind of like a, it's a little bit of you're putting yourself in someone else's shoes, you know, like, you're empathizing

with them, you know, maybe I'll just read a news report in the newspaper about someone that went through something or I see a show or, you know, I'll be at church and I'll hear a story and then I think, oh, what would that be like to be there and you're just kind of thinking about that and daydreaming about that and that's why when you're just not sitting at your house with, you know, single, with your guitar, you can just daydream all day, [GIGGLING] you know, but when you have, you know—so for me, that's one thing that for me is creating, you know. I've explained that to my wife, "Hey, you know, if I close the door, then just let me just daydream in there." And so then she's really good about this, saying, oh yeah, well, you know, he's got his door closed.

NANCY HANSON: Looks like you're taking a nap but I guess you're writing songs. [LAUGHTER]

RYAN SHUPE I'm daydreaming. I'm writing songs. That's right. Or sometimes I'll just take a trip up to, you know, the ski resort or something for a little bit or just go on a mountain bike ride, just something that I'm like, don't have my phone. No one can call me, nothing can interrupt me, my brain will just flow with whatever ideas that I have and that's kind of one thing that helps me be creative.

PETER BREINHOLT: And that's interesting. As I listen to Ryan talk and, you know, he talks about reading a story in the paper and getting in the shoes of that person, and telling their story and interestingly enough, I don't do it that way. We have different styles and Sam has another style and you have another style. So I'd like to hear our differences right here because—

NANCY HANSON: Right.

PETER BREINHOLT: There is different genres; there is country music, which tells stories, real storytelling genre, and then you've got folk music which is a little more abstract, and then you have classical, all these different kinds, and I just have this hunch that there's as many different ways of writing songs as there are songwriters out there.

NANCY HANSON: Right.

PETER BREINHOLT: And so I found that interesting. You said that. I've heard other songwriters say the same or they'll say, I saw this story in the news and it, or I had this thought about this part of life and I decided—I had this theme come to mind so I sat down and I wrote a song about courage or whatever. I never do it that way. Mine is a lot, mine's backwards. And I bet Sam has a whole different way of doing it, too. Some people start with the lyrics, some people start with the music, some people say, I don't start, I just do them both at the same time, and it would be interesting to hear how you guys do it.

NANCY HANSON: Well, let's talk about that. Don't you feel though that you look at life differently because you are a songwriter? Isn't there kind of a song in lots of things that you look around and see?

SAM PAYNE: Yeah, but I'll tell you. I guess if I were to count my virtues as a songwriter, I would count among those virtues that when a story, when an image, when something with just the right story quality comes across my radar, I've learned to recognize the stories that I can tell, and I've learned to recognize the stories that I can't tell, and all the time, I mean, and you guys have surely experienced the same thing, how many times has somebody come

up and said, “That’ll make a great song,” you know, a story or something will have a... that’ll make a great song. You ought to write a song about that [LAUGHTER], that’ll be a great song, [LAUGHTER] and one in a hundred of those or fewer is actually something that I feel like I could tell well and when I found myself doing that in my head, you know, people will say, listen, you ought to write a song about this and I go, well, somebody ought to write a song about that—

NANCY HANSON: Yeah.

MAN: Like a corndog, you could never write that. [LAUGHTER] You ought to write a song about a corndog.

MAN: Somebody ought to write a song about a corndog.

RYAN SHUPE: There already is one.

NANCY HANSON: Ryan did it.

SAM PAYNE: Yeah. I found myself saying, I mean that just sort of internal reaction is what I have a lot, yes, somebody ought to write a song about that, but I—that’s a story I couldn’t tell.

NANCY HANSON: Yeah. I understand.

SAM PAYNE: And then something will come across, you know, something will come across the radar and I’ll say, “That one’s for me.” And away I’ll go, you know, but I have a very different approach to songwriting now than I did five years ago, and five years ago, I was—sort of one of the key little phrases that I remember, that I will always remember about songwriting is my mom. We were listening, I think, to a Bob Dylan album in the car and my mom just looked at me and said, “You know, songwriters are the medicine men, aren’t they?” I said—I remember that, I mean that kind of went deep. Well, she said folk singers. “Folk singers are the medicine men,” you know, and I thought, well five years ago, the medicine was all for me, you know. I mean, songwriting was the process by which I worked stuff out, and you could see it in the writing. The lyrics were all, were very nebulous, they weren’t terribly transparent, and a lot of people left a Sam Payne show not really knowing what they had heard, you know, and my reaction was kind of like, that’s their bad. If they didn’t get it, then shame on them. And it all changed for me. I had a real sort of epiphany, a real sort of moment, when my son was 12 years old and I wanted to write a song for him about getting the priesthood, about getting the Aaronic Priesthood, and I found myself writing this song, I found myself starting out writing a song that was esoteric and nebulous and all of the same ways and it had images in it that were meaningful—really primarily to me, you know—, it was love for my audience that drove me to write a different song. It was love for my audience being my son, my 12-year-old son Skyler. I found myself with just a great desire to write a song that he would understand, that would be dear to him, you know, and I found myself writing a much simpler song, I found myself writing a song that was much more transparent, lyrics were a lot more demonstrative, and it worked, I think, the song works. It filled me with kind of a need to be useful to an audience that I had never felt before.

NANCY HANSON: What made that song more accessible to other people, it goes beyond just your experience and maybe they can share in that.

SAM PAYNE: And it was as if I had awakened and looked around and realized that it wasn't just me in the room, that there was an audience, and they needed to do more than tap their toes, there needed to be something for them to understand, but I found myself desiring to be useful to them. That changed everything.

PETER BREINHOLT: I think there are two versions of that, too, and I had that same experience where it was as soon as—it was with my own son as well. As soon as I put him, I started thinking about this being a song for him, the love for him came forth and kind of carried the song right in it and I wrote it differently. What doesn't work for me is if I try to think in terms of what song is going to appeal to a mass audience. If I think that way or if I think, what song will do or what's popular now and what should I make my song sound like today, if I do that, it poisons the whole process and my antidote to that—I've told you this before, Sam—it helps me every once in a while to stoop everything back and just say, what album would I buy, what album is not out there now because nobody else has written it that I wanna hear desperately and think in terms of myself as the fan again and saying, what would I like to hear? And would I buy this? That helps, that sort of for me is a clarifier, and it kind of gets me back to my own tastes and my own instincts and so forth, not getting lost in the maze of, you know, what's gonna sell or what's gonna strike a chord with people, what are people gonna respond to.

RYAN SHUPE: Well, I think that that's an interesting, what you're saying about, you know, writing and not being so, well, you know, not thinking about it too much, just kind of letting things flow. I think if people are listening, you know, trying to be more creative, I think that that's a key for me. A lot of times, if I get kind of in a slump or stuck, I'm writing something and I just go, ah, no, no, no, no, no, that's not a cool enough word. Let me try this. Well, that doesn't tell the story good enough, but then sometimes I'll sit back and I'll just go, wait, wait, wait, I'm just gonna write, I don't care if it's bad or good or weird or—you know, some of the best songs I've written, I think, are just an idea that I thought this is never gonna fly, you know, [LAUGHTER], and then a song about corndogs— [LAUGHTER]

MAN: I heard a natural songwriter say once that she'll write and write and write, and just when she'll get to a point where she'll think, this is just, this is just too over the top, sentimental, sappy drivel, and just when she's about to crinkle up the paper, she realizes she's got it just right, you know, [LAUGHTER] it's right then that she's got it just right.

RYAN SHUPE: That's funny. Yeah. Well, yeah, so you know, you can't throw out an idea. If you're writing something, a lot of times I'll find, no, no, no, no, you know, you scratch that out, but if you just kind of like just write and write and, you know, eventually something will come out. So it's just kind of letting go that, you know, what are people gonna think if they hear this? You know, you just kind of gotta let that stuff go for a while while you're, you know, creating.

SAM PAYNE: Yeah, I struggled for a long time for the balance between—because you don't wanna be guilty of pandering to an audience, you don't wanna be guilty of, you don't wanna feel

guilty of writing to a market, you wanna feel like you're being true to yourself, and you know, and some clarity on that issue came for me when I was sort of listening in on a conversation between some writers. They were talking with such disdain about their readers. They were talking with such disdain about the people who read their stuff or who didn't read their stuff, you know, they were trying to find an audience and—but their conversation was just full of—

MAN: Full of contempt for their audience.

SAM PAYNE: Full of contempt for their audience, yeah, "I'm gonna write something that's gonna wake these idiots up," was sort of how it went, and I—suddenly it impacted me with a lot of force that no, the only tool that you have is love for your audience, you know, I mean, disdain for an audience doesn't win any battles.

RYAN SHUPE: Didn't you tell me about your relationship with the audience here or was that not you?

PETER BREINHOLT: If it's the one I'm thinking of, well, first with Sam's point, I feel that way too. I think artists have to, once they do have an audience, they need to feel like they are there to serve the audience and I think it's easier once you find success, too, to get an inflated sense of the importance and the role of your music or your literature or whatever and I think at that point, as the great author said, you begin to fall out of love with the thing that inspired the music in the first place—the light, the goodness of life, joy—and you fall into love—

MAN: What you're saying about it.

PETER BREINHOLT: With your own voice, yeah, the process of talking about the goodness. Not the goodness anymore. It's so great, it's the goodness. Or it's the process of writing about the goodness, and I think that is—people who have audiences, I think, are susceptible to that and I think what you're saying, Shupe, is there's this balance you have to find where I heard somebody once compare it to the boyfriend [GIGGLING] who says to the girl, on the one hand he'll say, "I'll be anything you want me to be if you'll like me." You don't wanna be that kind of artist, 'cause she may like you for two weeks but then she'll lose respect for you. But then there's the other boyfriend, the other kind of boyfriend, who says "I gotta be me and I am what I am and I'm not even taking notice of your needs" and I do think as an artist or as a performer, you need to be somewhere in the middle there, you don't wanna be the either extreme too much or I think you lose touch—

NANCY HANSON: Right, well—

PETER BREINHOLT: With both your artistic instincts, you know, what the audience has come in hungering for.

NANCY HANSON: Right. And look, nobody's ever going to have—everybody in the world's not gonna love what you do. You know, and I always just say that this is what I do and who I am and I know not everyone is going to love that but at the same time, I'm gonna try to be, to write stuff that is relevant and that's accessible to other people that they can understand, but I'm still just gonna be true to who I am because really, when you do start listening to all

those voices that are like, oh, that's not cool enough or you know, that's already been done, then that just kills the whole creative spirit.

RYAN SHUPE: Yeah, I actually write, I kind of write expecting the song to be heard. I don't know if that makes sense. So I think about it and go, okay—

NANCY HANSON: How's that gonna work? How's that gonna sound?

RYAN SHUPE: If I heard this, how would I react? So you know, that's why a lot of the songs, you know—

SAM PAYNE: You factor in the audience reaction—

RYAN SHUPE: Yeah.

SAM PAYNE: Because you're writing the song.

RYAN SHUPE: Yeah, it is a handful of songs that I write that I'm writing to be heard. It's not like there's this deep, profound truth I'm trying to promulgate by this song, it might be just like, this is gonna be fun for the audience to hear. You know what I mean? So I factor in that fair amount when I'm writing. You know what I mean? So—

NANCY HANSON: Sure.

RYAN SHUPE: Maybe that's some—I think there are some people that just go, no, no, no, no, you know, I got something to say, or you know, the balance, but I just need to communicate. [LAUGHTER] You know what I mean. But on the other hand, I, you know, there's a little difference to it, sometimes I will go back and I'll listen to the first songs I ever wrote. And there's just such an, there is an innocence to them and what I mean by innocence is I remember when I wrote them, I had no concept that anybody would hear them and so I ended up being very, you know, opening myself up and being kind of vulnerable in a sense—

NANCY HANSON: Right.

RYAN SHUPE: Because I didn't see an audience of 5,000 listening to it. It was me in my bedroom with the tape recorder and in some ways, I sort of long to get back to that as a songwriter because there's a, there's a purity about that, there's an openness, I think, as you do become more successful, you become more and more aware of that audience and you start to cover your tooth fillings up a little bit or you adopt some sort of way of saying what you wanna say but incognito.

NANCY HANSON: Right.

RYAN SHUPE: I don't know, personally, I think, my favorite albums are ones that are, where you're just totally exposed and you're being very truthful and very honest. If I go through my first album, I see that a little bit more than I do now so for me part of it is peeling—trying to peel—that away and getting back to being that guy who wrote those songs.

NANCY HANSON: Well, if you figure out how to get back to that vulnerable place, [LAUGHTER] please let us know. [LAUGHTER]

RYAN SHUPE: I think a lot of it is, I mean, I, you know, Nancy, that a few years ago, I had writers' block and I didn't really sit down for a few years and the way I was able to finally get out of the slump was I identified that it was fear. It was fear that I was experiencing that whatever I produced wouldn't be as good as what I'd previously written. And I think that's actually why in the genre that we're in, you get a lot of first albums that do very well for people, and then have what's called the sophomore slump because people become suddenly aware of the audience or they begin trying to be somebody they're not. They want to do something that they're not. Anyway, once I identified that it was a fear and anxiety and maybe a concern that my own ego might be hurt, I was able to, I think, lay it to rest and all of a sudden the songs came pouring out.

NANCY HANSON: So it was just even recognition that that's what it was that kind of opened you up?

RYAN SHUPE: Yeah, I mean there was more to it than that. I figured out how to go through some thought processes that sort of helped me say to myself, you know, for example, one of them was, say to myself or to acknowledge that even if I did write twelve songs and release an album and it was a horrible album and most of my audience walked away from me, even if that happened, then I still have a life. I've got my family, I've got my religion, I've got my friends, I've got a lot of things. You know it's okay. It's the sort of sense—I think that's why a child thrives with the unconditional love of a parent is that even if they mess up and make mistakes, they will always have a place to come home to. And there's something about that that sort of liberates us and frees us from these fears we have of failing with—in my case—new songs.

NANCY HANSON: Uh-huh. So well said. Such a good point. Anybody else wanna weigh in on that?

PETER BREINHOLT: I just wanna hear Sam talk like in his narration voice like "Hello." [LAUGHTER]

NANCY HANSON: Sam wears many hats.

SAM PAYNE: Yeah, yeah, I tell you.

PETER BREINHOLT: Even Irish.

SAM PAYNE: I do. Yeah—

PETER BREINHOLT: Back in the days it was—

SAM PAYNE: Yeah, it's your impression of me that sort of—we talked about my inner leprechaun. [LAUGHTER]

PETER BREINHOLT: Well—

SAM PAYNE: But I'll tell you where all of that—I have this, I have developed again, this kind of storyteller ethos and that's because what I am as a Latter-day Saint and that means that I, I mean, on the one hand that means that I believe in and have faith in the Atonement of Jesus Christ and that means that I know that the Book of Mormon is the word of God

restored to the earth in the latter days and I mean, on the other hand, it means that I'm the great-great-great-grandson of John Brown who came across the plains and I mean I'm a Latter-day Saint with all of the—certainly, all of the fervor for the doctrines of the gospel that that brings but also all of the rich cultural heritage that that brings to the table and that's the deepest well that I have ready access to as a performer and songwriter. And so I find myself writing songs about Latter-day Saints, writing songs about the deepest parts of that heritage that I can get my hands on and I find myself bringing that to the table as a songwriter and a performer and as a storyteller as well, you know, and so I imagine that's what you guys are talking about, a narrator voice, you know, that comes out, the—

RYAN SHUPE: Yeah, okay, well, now we know what you're talking about. Let's hear it. [LAUGHTER] Enough of this explaining stuff, Sam.

SAM PAYNE: I can't do it on demand.

NANCY HANSON: You can't do it on demand. [LAUGHTER] Well, I think none, no one that knows your music would think that you do—that any of you do—LDS music, music that is specifically just for an LDS audience. Yet you are—

RYAN SHUPE: Oh, come on.

NANCY HANSON: Especially you, Ryan. But yet there are—

RYAN SHUPE: I have a song with a Book of Mormon verse in it.

NANCY HANSON: That's what I was about to say is, you know, all of you, somehow, that comes out in your music that—how do you feel that you show your belief and your faith through your songs? I mean, there are references but don't people often tell you—

MAN: I think if you—any songwriter's gonna—you're gonna touch into part of their beliefs in the songs that they write, so I think it's for me, for all of us, I'm sure, if you listen to it, you're gonna think, well, this guy is, you know, he believes in better stuff to come. At least, you know, for me. A lot of people will say, well, what's—it seems like your albums are pretty positive, you know? [LAUGHTER] That was the reviews that we got for our albums. Well, these guys, you know, they would say—

MAN: They sure are happy.

MAN: They sure are happy guys [LAUGHTER]. If I were gonna run into a band in an alley, this is the band I'd wanna run into. [LAUGHTER] And you know, but that's just, that just comes out because that's, I think, how I view life. I am positive and, you know, I think we hear those messages from the prophets and, you know, they say, you know, be positive, be, you know, go out and look for brighter things and work hard, you know, we know that, we know that that's true and so that just comes out in the music.

SAM PAYNE: I agree. And I think there may have been a time when there was a temptation to sort of compartmentalize a little bit and maybe even divide songs up into songs that were for the mainstream crowd and songs that were for the Mormon audience, you know. And there may have been a temptation about that at one time but I was broken of that when in a

conversation with Cheryl Call, the song writer that is a friend of all of ours and she— somebody asked her within earshot of me whether she did her very, very overtly faith-promoting music in venues like, you know, the Blueberry Cafe in Nashville, and her reaction was just, “You know, I hesitated to do that stuff but they love that stuff. That’s the stuff, that’s the stuff they love. When I put that stuff in my set, that’s the stuff that goes over really well,” and I just thought, why don’t we just stop worrying about it and so I don’t know that I ever think about it and I think the one time I did, the one time I have really consciously thought about it was preparing a show to play in Sandy here in Utah and I did a song that was very deeply and richly inspired by the book of Hosea in the Bible, you know, but I softened the message. I softened the setup to the song, you know, the pattern to the song, I softened that, turned it into just sort of a more conventional love song. And that’s what got singled out in the review of the show in the paper the next day was, “Great show, the only thing I didn’t like about the show is that he softened the pattern on the one song.”

NANCY HANSON: Hm. Interesting.

SAM PAYNE: And he said, “I wanted to hear about how that song was a song about Sam and God.”

MAN: I think people like it.

SAM PAYNE: That is—

MAN: I think people like it.

SAM PAYNE: Well, yeah, I agree, and we play a lot of festivals and stuff and there is nothing that I get a kick more out of playing for, you know, 2000 dancing hippies to a Book of Mormon verse. [LAUGHTER] You’re just like, these guys really don’t realize what I’m singing.

NANCY HANSON: No idea.

SAM PAYNE: This is pretty funny.

MAN: Yeah. [LAUGHTER]

SAM PAYNE: Now everybody’s gonna think, wow, this guy plays for dancing hippies. That’s not true. That’s not the traditional crowd.

MAN: That’s a title of your next album, 2000 Dancing Hippies.

MAN: No, but I think it’s a question that comes up for artists in our community a lot and I think my only way with going about it is close to what Sam said. I just, I don’t think about it. I am who I am and I write the songs that are patterned after the songs I grew up listening to. I think I’m kind of a private person so I find myself maybe holding back when appropriate in the same way I would in a casual conversation with somebody. There are, there are times, you know, there are songs where you wanna throw it all in and there are times when you—you know, sometimes the most powerful way of speaking about religion is not doing it overtly but doing it in the form of a story or in some other ways. For me personally, the most powerful literature that is religiously deemed is literature where it doesn’t come out and say it in those terms but rather tells a story, and I

wondered sometimes if the authors always knew that the story would unfold the way it did and have so many parallels. I think sometimes it happens on a subconscious level. If we are who we are, if we're true to who we are, it'll come out. So that's my, that's my approach. I didn't really grow up listening to LDS music, frankly, in our house. I grew up listening to other music and so naturally, my music is a little more similar to the music I grew up listening to and that inspired me so much. But I am who I am and I do get people coming up and saying, "Although you don't say it, I know that this is what you're talking about. I think this is what that song's about" or so forth.

MAN: Yeah, I think, I think over all, I mean, that was just kind of a little side joke, but overall, I think you're right. I mean that's—we are LDS and we aren't ashamed of that or we don't hide that but we, I think, as a group between all of us, we just, you know, we write songs, but they're not necessarily, you know, [SINGING] "You must repent, or, you—," you know, but there are life lessons that kind of tie into our LDS lifestyle or the way we live but they're, yeah, they are not necessarily so overtly—

NANCY HANSON: Right.

MAN: Thrown out—

MAN: But if a song comes along where that's what's called for or that's what you know you gotta do, and that's what's supposed to happen—

MAN: Yeah, none of us would be, you know, have a problem with that. But I find myself, if I ever find myself saying, I'm gonna write a song about what people should know, [LAUGHTER] that's a ticket to a lousy song. But a much easier path, a much better path and surer path is, I'm gonna write a song about some things that I think. Some things that I believe.

MAN: I think that is true and I think you guys feel the same way—my wife and I were talking about this—sometimes it's the struggle to be good despite all the setbacks and challenges that is the most inspiring story of all. It's not the final product; it's the struggle to get there and that's a story we can all relate to.

NANCY HANSON: Right. And I think anyone who's been to any of your shows or listened to your music, all of you, you know, they feel something there that's different, that feels good, that feels right, and you all have been, you know, very humble about your successes and about how really great you are and your abilities to write and to perform—

MAN: We are all very humble people. [LAUGHTER]

NANCY HANSON: You are. [LAUGHTER] You are. If any of our listeners wanted to find out more about you, they can visit your respective websites. You've got your instruments with you here today. We'd love it if you play us out.

PETER BREINHOLT: We're gonna do a song that I wrote. This is Peter, and the song is called Jerusalem. We all know it because these two have played this on stage with me quite a bit. And so—

[BEGIN MUSIC: Jerusalem]

[END MUSIC]

NANCY HANSON: Beautiful. Thank you so much, my friends, for being here. Peter Breinholt, Ryan Shupe, Sam Payne. This is Nancy Hanson for Everything Creative on the Mormon Channel.