



PHOTOS BY CAROL HUTCHISON

# The Gift of Music

*Composer and lyricist captures life's moments in song*

Carlie Burdett waited in her car at the red light, tapping her fingers against the steering wheel in time with the melody in her head. Soon she found herself humming along with the refrain. She had spent the morning working on this song, while sorting laundry and preparing for a dental appointment, but she had not been able to think of a chorus. Then, just as the traffic light turned green, the words and the music came.

"The choir director at our church asked me to come up with something for a Thanksgiving service," said Carlie, a pianist, composer, and lyricist, who lives with her husband Tom in Sun City. "I thought of a piece I had started a few years back, called 'The Empty Chair,' which speaks of a chair left empty, perhaps by death or divorce or distance, that only the Lord can fill."

The evening before, Carlie had written a couple of verses for the song, but the chorus had re-

mained elusive. "Sometimes when I'm working on a piece, I get to the point that no good ideas are coming," she explained. "When that happens, I keep the music out for a while, and sometimes a fresh start becomes productive."

With "The Empty Chair," Carlie found her fresh start. When the traffic light switched to green, she quickly maneuvered her car off the road and jotted down the words and the music for the chorus on her to-do list. The finished song became a favorite with her church and has since been performed every Thanksgiving.

"Usually something emotional triggers inspiration for me," said Carlie. "The night before working on that song, my husband and I had watched the television in shock as the reports aired of the atrocious shootings at Fort Hood. Good writing, I think, comes from truth, and sometimes it takes an emotional experience to uncover that truth."

Carlie spends anywhere from a few hours to several months ar-

ranging, editing, and notating the music she writes. She may then commit several years to compiling, copyrighting, and recording the finished work. All of this, though, begins with that initial moment of inspiration, which can strike at any time.

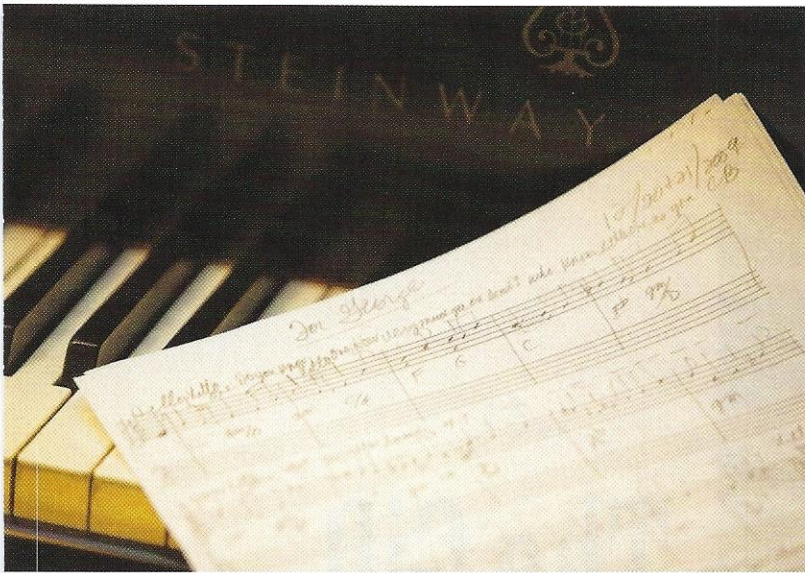
"Sometimes I wake up in the early morning hours with a phrase going through my head," she said. "Sometimes a melody starts to form while I'm driving, and I'll jot it down in scale degree numbers on the back of my to-do list or church bulletin. Sometimes the ▶

**BY**  
CHRISTINE  
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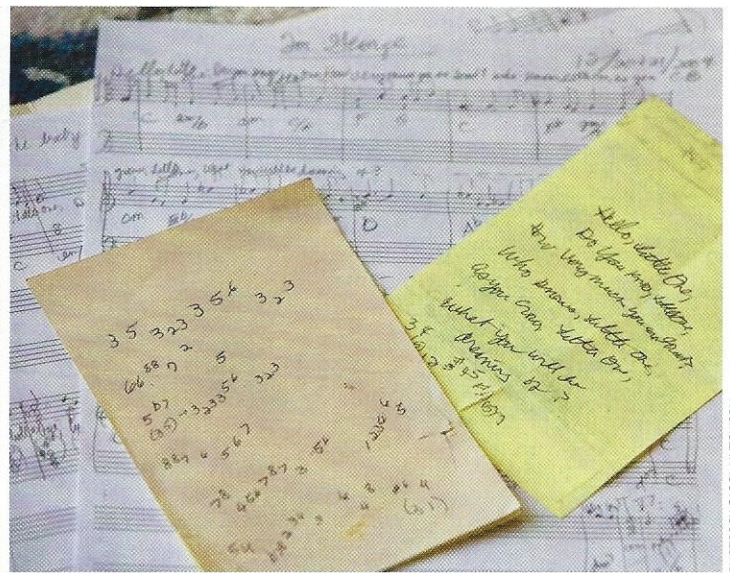
**Carlie Burdett Music**  
<http://carlieburdettmusic.com/>







A song Carlie wrote for her grandson



Carlie's notes scribbled on the back of a "to do" list.

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whole song starts coming, melody and words together. When that happens, I pull over."

Carlie began her musical career at the age of four when her maternal grandmother gave her an old black upright piano. "I thought that old piano was wonderful," said Carlie. "I liked playing so much that my parents enrolled me in piano lessons when I was in the second grade. By that time, I was playing by ear

and writing little songs."

Her family further encouraged her love of music. "There was a lot of singing in our family, at church, in the car, or wherever," Carlie explained. "We attended the Church of Christ, which was totally a cappella singing, and my dad and brother led singing and my sister sang alto. Our music services may have left a lot to be desired, but singing a cappella really trains your ear."

Upon graduating from high school, and after a brief stint as a math major at Abilene Christian University, Carlie soon discovered music theory and attended The University of Texas as a music major. She participated in the university's Piano Pedagogy program, studying piano and music theory teaching methods and then leading her own piano and music theory classes.

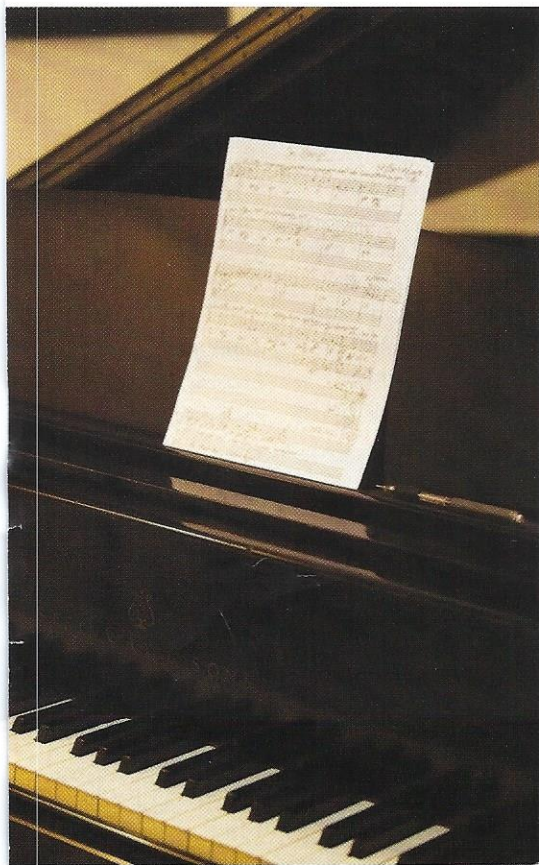
"In that program, I found a career I loved, and I acquired the skills that I would use for the next 20 years," said Carlie. "After my husband finished law school, we moved to Hereford, Texas, where I opened a piano studio. I had between 25 and 35 students, and I loved teaching both the private piano lessons and the keyboard-applied theory."

While teaching music and raising her own family, Carlie continued

studying voice and piano and eventually finished her Bachelor of Music in Theory and Composition at West Texas State University (now West Texas A&M University). At the encouragement of friends, she began to share her compositions with musical groups at her church and in the community.

In recent years, Carlie has recorded two CDs of her music, including *Meditations and Musings: Sixteen Piano Solos for Quiet Times*, and she is working on two more musical collections, as well as a children's book/CD combination entitled *Music for Bird Lovers*.

"When I compose a new piece of music, I hope that someone will enjoy playing it or hearing it someday," Carlie said. "I think that my task as a composer is to find and to bring to life the music that is already there, within the words. For me, this is such satisfying work. That moment when the words and music come together into a new song is amazing." ■



Carlie turns her notes and scribbles into music on her computer.