

**THE SONGLAB: MUSIC BUSINESS DEJARGONISED**

# SONG SPLITS



**Understanding the landscape of  
combined ownership of copyrights**

# WHAT ARE SONG SPLITS?

- Song splits relate to how a song's copyright is split between co-creators.
- There are two copyrights that we are talking about here so let's think of them differently.
- Most commonly, song splits relate to the copyright of the songwriting.
- However, there may also be the subject of the copyright of the sound recording which is usually known as the master rights (see [WHAT ARE MASTER RIGHTS? doc](#)).
- It is impossible to industrialise a song's copyright without having agreed % splits in place between the songwriters.
- There is also the potential split of the rights to the recording.
- Let's imagine that a singer collaborates with a producer and they are splitting their song down the middle at 50/50. What are they splitting? This needs to be discussed. Perhaps they have a "clean split" which relates to the songwriting and the master rights. Perhaps they have only split the songwriting and the singer doesn't realise?

# AWKWARD CONVERSATIONS

- Those “awkward conversations” need to take place. In fact, if all parties are transparent and open about the subject then it's more of a simple conversation rather than an awkward one.
- The subject of song splits can be very difficult for bands, especially if one or two people in the band wrote the song. It's common for many non songwriting band members to say they “wrote their part”. If the band members did not contribute to the underlying melodies, harmonies and lyrics then their contribution is not songwriting, it is arrangement and can be identified as a neighbouring right rather than as a songwriting credit. However, many bands like to split the songwriting credit across the band in order to keep morale and peace amongst their collective. That is up to the band to decide.
- The common problems often sound something like this “I wrote this bit and you wrote that bit so therefore we should split this 70/30”. This can lead to many disgruntled conversations after a song has been created.
- It is therefore much easier to agree on song splits before a song has been composed. This way everyone knows where they stand on the copyright as all parties have been identified and designated equality in the collective process before the creative process begins.
- One of the other difficulties here could be the ownership of the master rights. It could be for instance that a producer works with two songwriters. All three parties have a split of the songwriting credit but the producer owns the master rights.
- In any and all cases, it is crucial that there is transparency and honesty between all parties in the process.

# CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

- There are cultures that are attached to genres in the same way that there are cultures attached to countries or territories.
- It is important to absorb and respect different approaches to cultures when navigating through the subject of song splits.
- For instance, the typical Nashville culture is to have even splits across all writers before the songwriting process begins. This leads to a mature and open process where everyone knows where they stand.
- In EDM culture, the track and the song are often viewed as separate entities. However, it could be that the songwriting is split 50/50 with 50% to the producer/s and 50% to the topline writer/s (vocals and lyrics). The difficulty then lies with the master. If the topline vocalist's vocal is kept on the recording and released then they own a portion of the master rights. This is often why singers receive fees in the EDM world as their portion of their master rights is effectively "bought out" by the producer or the label. However, if the singer only represents the song in demo form and the song is then pitched to a label for a different artist then the master rights credit no longer belongs to that original vocalist because their vocal contribution is replaced by that of the artist.
- This is somewhat similar to Hip Hop and its many associated sub genres where there is a distinctly different split approach between the track and the vocal.
- For many commercial songwriters it is standard practice to evenly split the songwriting credit between all parties who contributed to the song. It is also quite common for this split to be decreased when bringing in other writers or producers to contribute to an edit which changes the underlying melody, harmony or lyric to the song.
- The same rule still applies though. Always explore how each song is split between co-creators regardless of the genre or territory. It is never a silly or embarrassing subject to raise and is very common practice for professionals.

# SONG SPLIT SHEETS

- One of the easiest ways to formalise the process of song splits is with the use of a song split sheet.
- This outlines the detail of the collaboration, who is involved and how the copyright split looks on paper.
- Typically song split sheets mention the song title, song length, names of the cowriters (thats the songwriters name in their passport or birth certificate rather than their artistic name if they have one), the details of the music publishers if they have one, the location of the session, the date of the session, which performing rights organisation each writer is linked to and any other information which relates to the registration of the copyright. This information can then be inputted into the databases of the collection societies.
- There is also one other key element and that is the IPI number of each songwriter. IPI stands for Interested Parties Information. It is also referred to as a CAE number by PRS For Music but most commonly referred to as an IPI by most countries. This number acts as a code which is unique to each songwriter and it is given to the songwriter when they register as a member with their performing rights organisation.
- If you are ever in need of third party advice on this subject or you would like a copy of the song split sheet that we use, you can book an online advice clinic session with a SongLab director by emailing [jonny@thesonglab.co.uk](mailto:jonny@thesonglab.co.uk)

# HOW THIS LINKS TO THE COLLECTION SOCIETIES

- A song's existence should be registered with the relevant performing rights organisation/s. In the UK, this would be the PRS For Music.
- Most performing rights organisations use a linked database which allows administrative entries from one performing rights organisation to another providing that the correct IPI numbers are used for each songwriter and music publisher which are connected to the copyright.
- An ISWC code (International Standard Musical Work Code) is generated by PRS For Music once there is activity present on a song (or if the song is registered by a music publisher).
- Any PRS member can register a song whether they are a songwriter or music publisher but be sure to not make unnecessary duplicates as this can lead to needless confusion when it comes to the distribution of royalties.
- An ISRC code (International Standard Recording Code) is the unique code which is linked to the identity of a recording (see WHAT ARE MASTER RIGHTS doc).

# SUMMARY

- It is always encouraged to speak openly and honestly about the subject of song splits regardless of who you are working with, what genre you're in, what country you're in or how established the cowriters are. You are going into business together and will share a copyright for the rest of your lives.
- Think not only about the split of the songwriting, but the split of the master rights. It is always encouraged to speak openly about what rights you hold.