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HE'S A PLAYER OF NOTE IN NASHVILLE'S MUSIC SCENE

Greg Hill remembers standing in line for concert tickets as a kid.

His children, however, have never been to a concert without laminated passes hanging from their necks. They recently met the Jonas Brothers, and 8-year-old Hayes got to be in the music video for Rodney Atkins' song "It's America."

"They have no concept of how special it is," says Hill, surrounded by framed records and tour posters in his office on Music Row in Nashville, Tenn. "The things my kids are exposed to, I would have given up body parts for."

The Hill kids — Blair, Hayes and Holland — can keep their body parts because Daddy is president of Red Light Management. As such he coordinates the careers of some of country music's leading artists, among them Atkins, Phil Vassar and Heidi Newfield.

Phone calls with famous musicians and jetting off to awards shows are ordinary activities for Hill, a 1991 Furman graduate who is now a major player in Nashville's major industry. "It's almost surreal," he says, keeping one eye on his office's flat-screen television tuned to "Great American Country."

From his Furman days, when he frequently played acoustic rock and folk at Al's Pump House — a bar beside Pete's Restaurant on Poinsett Highway — Hill knew he wanted to be in the music business. He wasn't sure what that meant, however. At the time, he says, "I'm not even sure I knew there was a music business beyond singing and writing songs."

During college he performed throughout the Southeast, both solo and with a band from his hometown of Athens, Ga. Some of his classmates told him he was going to hell for playing in bars, but despite the strict culture and conservative bent of Furman at the time, he says he had plenty of fun in school.

"I wasn't the best student," Hill says, "but I loved it."

After graduation he married Shannon Rhodes '91 and pursued a master's degree in music media and industry at the University of Miami (Florida). Hill was the only person in his master's program who had not majored in music as an undergrad, but he feels his political science degree is an asset in the music business.



Greg Hill (right) with Rodney Atkins, the Academy of Country Music's top new male vocalist of 2006.

"It's always about politics," he says, reflecting on contract negotiations and his roles on the boards of both the Academy of Country Music and Country Music Association. "Just about everything is a people business."

He was working in music publishing at EMI (next door to his current office at Red Light Management) as vice president of writer development when he decided to strike out on his own by starting Greg Hill Management. His success led him eventually to enter into a partnership with Red Light.

Managers are the CEOs of every artist's career — advising and directing, overseeing tours, watching the charts, negotiating with the labels. And Hill chooses the artists he represents carefully. Knowing he has to be ready to answer the phone at 2 or 3 a.m. if there's a bus accident on the road or a problem with a concert venue, he exercises what he calls his "no idiot" rule.

"If I'm going to give up my time or move around my vacation," he says, "I'd better like the person."

As it turns out, there is much to like about the people with whom he works. Nashville is different from New York or Los Angeles, he says, because everyone in the industry works within a square mile

of one another along 16th and 17th avenues, near Vanderbilt University. It's a strong community of colleagues. "Some of my biggest competitors are some of my best friends," Hill says. "It's a friendly competition."

Far beyond mere collegiality, however, his work has brought him opportunities the average person only dreams about. He has socialized with Robert Redford, golfed with Huey Lewis and accompanied artists to the White House when they played at events like the National Christmas Tree Lighting and National Adoption Day. He has stood in the Oval Office and even bowled in the White House bowling alley.

Such events, while exciting, are just part of the job for Hill.

"It gets to be normal," he says. "You get spoiled; you don't even think about it. It's a job you love, but it becomes a job."

— JESSICA MILLER KELLEY

The author, a 2003 Furman graduate, is a book and magazine editor in Nashville.