

## On Songwriting

by Rick Lang

### ***Introduction:***

Each songwriter, over time, develops their own individual style and approach to songwriting. This process is affected, in part, by past and present musical influences and individual tastes. There are no absolute “rights or wrongs” in songwriting. There is no “one way” to do it. However there are some basic elements of writing good songs that apply to all songwriters of any musical genre. Like a carpenter has a box full of tools for his trade, so does the songwriter. It’s been said that songwriting, in simple terms, can be summed up as “Figure out what you want to say, then figure out how you want to say it” (the same way you communicate your thoughts into words and sentences - to impart to the listener). The goal of songwriting is to write the very best song you can, using various songwriting techniques at your disposal. Below are some elements of songwriting that you may find useful.

1. **Be a student of songwriting.** Listen to the greats - your own favorite songs & songwriters. Study and gain an understanding of **why** they are great - why they “move you”. Identify important elements of these songs that you can apply to your own writing.
2. **Tools of the trade:** pen/paper/tape player. Have them with you wherever you go. A lot of good ideas come at very inconvenient times!
3. **Write down and save your ideas!**
4. **Songwriting habits.** Set some songwriting time aside as a part of your daily routine.
5. **Starting point.** The beginning of a song could be anything: an emotion, a feeling, a conversation, a title, a word, a line, a scene, a dream, a melody, a guitar riff, etc.
6. **Song concept.** Songs need a point. What is the song about? Like taking a journey, you need to establish a destination. Know where you are going.
7. **Memorable titles.** Try and find a title that “says it all.”
8. **Strong start & strong finish.** The first few lines of the song should draw you right in and get your point across.
9. **Melody.** Needs to be memorable and sing-able.
10. **Song chorus.** The chorus should carry the message of the song.
11. **Musical setting.** The mood/feel should be appropriate for the topic. Try & find different voicings on your instrument to accommodate this.
12. **Song form/structure.** Don’t be afraid to mix it up (every song doesn’t have to be verse-chorus-verse-chorus-verse-chorus, etc.)
13. **Power of suggestion.** Lyric can suggest music - and music can suggest lyric.
14. **Emotional connection.** You need to be emotionally connected to the song and be able to identify with it.

15. **Point of view.** Establish an angle from your own perspective.
16. **Person.** You need to establish 1st person, 3rd person etc.
17. **Originality.** Develop your own style and your own identity as a songwriter.
18. **Visual imagery.** Paint a picture with words.
19. **Detail in a song.** Try to avoid being vague and abstract.
20. **The five senses:** see/hear/smell/feel/taste. Try and use these elements in your song as the listener can relate to them.
21. **Write what you are familiar with.** Be yourself.
22. **Write from your own personal experiences...** or others.
23. **Write from your feelings.** Write what you feel and feel what you write.
24. **Be conversational.** Write as you speak.
25. **Slang.** Don't be afraid to use the word "ain't" if appropriate. Good songs do not have to be grammatically correct or poetic.
26. **Use of hooks & clichés.** Try to avoid them (search for alternate lines).
27. **Avoid repetition** - saying the same thing over within the same song (in different ways).
28. **Be concise.** Less is more. Use fewer words that say more (but carry greater meaning).
29. **Keep it simple.** Some of the greatest songs have only three chords...a chorus and a couple of verses.
30. **Find sources of inspiration:** people/places/other writers.
31. **Song ideas and titles.** Always be on the lookout for them.
32. **Tell stories that haven't been told before.**
33. **Do your homework.** Research history of a story song for accuracy & detail (via books and other references).
34. **When is a song is finished?** Don't stop until the song is done.
35. **Songs keep evolving!** Don't be afraid to make changes to your songs (lyrically and musically) after you think they are written. Over time you may come up with new ideas or alternate directions to take your song.
36. **Re-writing.** Keep honing and improving the song until it is complete and the best it can be (like sculpturing a hunk of clay). This requires some patience.
37. **Co-writing.** Don't be afraid to ask for help from other writers.
38. **Critiquing a song.** Constructive criticism is important and can be helpful. Find someone you can trust to offer some input.

**Happy writing!**

***Rick***