

On Songwriting

by Rick Lang

Introduction:

Each songwriter, over time, develops their own individual style and approach to the art 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 can prove be helpful to songwriters of any musical genre. Like a carpenter has a box full of tools for his trade, so does the songwriter. 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 basic way you translate your thoughts into words and sentences to communicate with someone. To me, the goal of songwriting is to try to write the very best song you can, using various songwriting techniques at your disposal. Below are some elements of songwriting that have helped me and I hope you may find useful as well.

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 or digital recorder. 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. Make it one of your life’s priorities!
5. **Starting point.** The beginning of a song could be anything: an experience (your own or others) an emotion, a feeling, a conversation, a title, a simple word, a line, a scene from a movie, a dream, a melody, a guitar riff, etc.
6. **Song concept.** Songs need a point. Establish what the song is about?
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. Shoot for a strong finish as well that brings closure to the song.
9. **Melody.** Should 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 song topic. Experiment with different voicings on your instrument of choice.
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.** A good lyric can suggest music - and good music can suggest a lyric.
14. **Emotional connection.** It is helpful to be emotionally connected to the song and be able to identify with it. That same emotion is your connection to the listener.
15. **Point of view.** Establish an angle or point of view in your song.

16. **Person.** You need to establish 1st person, 3rd person etc. the song will be written in.
17. **Originality.** Develop your own style and your own identity as a songwriter. Be an original!
18. **Visual imagery.** Try to paint a picture with words...be descriptive.
19. **Detail in a song.** Try to avoid being vague and abstract. The more detail...the better.
20. **The five senses:** See...hear...smell...feel...taste. Try and use some of these elements in your song.... as the listener can relate to them.
21. **Write what you are familiar with.** Write what you know...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. The great Aretha Franklin once offered her definition of "**Soul**" as "***the ability to make someone else feel what you are feeling***". Now that is something to shoot for as a songwriter!
24. **Be conversational.** Write as you speak...your song will sound more natural.
25. **Slang.** Don't be afraid to use slang, like the word "ain't", if appropriate. Good songs do not necessarily 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 two or three chords...a chorus and a couple of verses.
30. **Find sources of inspiration:** People...places...other writers. Write when you are inspired.
31. **Song ideas and titles.** Always be on the lookout...and write them down.
32. **Tell stories.... that haven't been told before.**
33. **Do your homework.** Research the history of a story song for accuracy & detail (via books & other references).
34. **When is a song is finished?** Don't stop until the song is done...no matter how long it takes!
35. **Songs keep evolving!** Don't be afraid to make changes to your songs (lyrically and musical-ly) even after you think they are complete. Over time you may come up with new & better ideas or alternate directions to take your song.
36. **Re-writing.** Keep honing and improving the song until is the very 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. Some of the very best songs ever written were successful collaborations between two or more writers.
38. **Critiquing a song.** Constructive criticism is important and can be helpful to any writer. Find someone you can trust.... to offer some input.

Happy writing!

Rick

**** When it's all said and done your song has to be **believable....it has to be real.**
The listener will know if it is...or if it is not!***