

Songwriting Workshop - Wattle Day.

Further notes. Chris Lazzaro

SONG STRUCTURES

GUIDELINES

Verse Chorus Verse Chorus - VCVC - ABAB (Most but not all folk songs)

Verse Chorus Verse Chorus Bridge Chorus - VCVCBC - ABABCB

LESS COMMON

Verse Verse Bridge Verse - VVBV (Imagine - John Lennon)

Sometimes I start with a chorus

Sometimes there's no chorus VVVV (Shelter - Eric Bogle)

Sometimes there's one repeated line at the end of each verse
(When the rain tumbles down in July - which in this case is also the title)

Sometimes that line is full of nonsense words - da da dade dada da

Sometimes there's a coda at the end. Coda is Italian for tail. It brings everything to a conclusion.

LYRICS

In Both The Music and the Lyrics The 3 R's are very important. Rhythm, Rhyme and Repetition.

However with lyrics, if there's a competition **between saying what you want to say** and **a perfect rhyme** that doesn't quite say it, **drop the rhyme every time!** Come back to it later.

Imperfect rhymes often work better than perfect rhymes.

Sometimes just rhyme the vowel. Sometimes, don't rhyme. You might be able to make a pattern of some with rhyming and non rhyming lines. Trial and error. Use every resource you can find.

Keep it conversational.

One clear concept of what you're trying to say. (This may end up as your chorus or title)

Point of View

Who is speaking? To whom are you speaking?

Show before you tell. Use verbs and adjectives. Paint a picture with your words

Once you have an idea, map it out. Use circles and arrows and pictures to help.

Avoid overused clichés

Use of metaphors/ similes.

Metaphors are stronger. Eg I'm a volcano exploding v I'm like a volcano exploding.

Describe what you see, hear, touch, smell or taste if applicable.

Describe how you are feeling at the moment in the story.

Sometimes it's good to have a section that contrasts from painting a picture and just makes a statement.

Everything depends on the type of song you want to write.

MELODY

A good contemporary folk song melody is usually *easy to sing* and **doesn't have too many notes**. Often it's the *rhythm, phrasing* or the occasional *surprise* that works well.

Start with the lyrics' natural rhythm.

Say the words out loud. Which words need emphasis? Where do you breathe? Which syllables do you stretch? Where is the emotional weight? (Crying over you)

Choose a small melodic range.

5 - 7 notes max. A narrow range gives you somewhere to go for emotional emphasis.

Try making a melody initially without an instrument.

If you're a musician stick initially with notes in your chords and then try the occasional note/s outside the chord. (What If?)

In your verse, It's good to have patterns and shape in your melody

Some patterns might be -

Line 1. Has a shape of rises and falls

Line 2. **Roughly** follows the pattern

Line 3. Totally different

Line 4. Brings it home

Line 1. A shape of rises and falls

Line 2. Slight variation

Line 3 Repeat first line

Line 4 Totally different and leads you up into the chorus.

The main thing is to have a **repeatable pattern**. That's what helps the listener **remember** and adds to their **enjoyment** of the song.

- Would you like to make your melody more interesting? ***What if*** you tried some of these ideas? (Usually after you already have a basic melody)
- An unexpected leap
- Repeated notes or note
- A descending phrase
- A rhythmic pattern
- A note that arrives slightly late
- A phrase that resolves in an unexpected way
- A syllable or several that you might stretch or shrink

Don't have too many ideas happening at the same time. ONE simple memorable idea repeated, is usually the best way to go.

CHORDS

As a starting point look to use 3 or 4 basic chords. If playing guitar, Use a capo if needed to suit your vocal range. You have the opportunity to polish this in the editing process. You can look at chord inversions, playing the chords in different shapes up the neck or using partial chords. On keyboards, perhaps using inversions to create flowing basslines.

Just a note on Keys for songs. Generally people use minor keys for sad songs and major keys for positive uplifting songs but this too is not set in concrete.

For me, it is really important initially, to write freely, no judgement at all. Get totally lost in what I am writing. There is no wrong song!

THEN WORK ON TURNING IT INTO A SONG

Then take every element of a song that I have written, (Lyrics, Melody, chords) and with the overall goal of wanting my song to express what I want to say in the best way I can, I ask myself,

WHAT IF? WHAT IF? WHAT IF?

What if I varied the melody here? Changed the lyric or phrase here? Found an unusual/different chord that contained the note I'm singing. What if I tried this out in front of someone and got some feedback? And many more 'What ifs' until I'm satisfied with the song.

HAPPY SONGWRITING!