

## Help! Am I Songwriting or Songwronging?



**Rory Rocket explores the murky waters of songwriting methods and why nobody seems to have a straightforward answer on the best way to write.**

Songwriting is a mysterious part of the music industry. No matter how many writing methods you find online, sometimes you just can't crack the code, and frustration replaces your creativity. The worst part is that the industry hides many songwriters behind artists they deem *marketable*, so where do we turn? Songwriting is a skill like any other, and people in the music industry aren't just born with the ability to create a hit. However, seeing the commercialised success of singer-songwriters like *Taylor Swift* and partnerships like *Billie Eilish and Finneas* begs the question of whether a formula exists to streamline the songwriting process and maximise the chances of a good song.

If particular names keep returning to our charts repeatedly, maybe they're doing something different to the rest of us.

*Rolling Stone* credits *Bob Dylan* as the greatest songwriter of all time, so let's investigate him. An icon of counterculture, Dylan was unafraid of fluidity between folk, rock and blues, but his songwriting's honesty remained at the pinnacle of his recipe. From a collection of his songwriting advice in *American Songwriter*, he always comes back to the idea that writers must go by their instincts, finding what has "resonance" to them.

"It's called songwriting. It has to do with melody and rhythm, and then after that, anything goes. You make everything yours."

According to him, it's best not to get hung up on emulating a specific artist and to stay true to what you feel to achieve an authentic sound. However, there are nuances in everything, and his word shouldn't be taken as gospel just because he's considered the best. Music is always subjective, and what's more, Bob Dylan is just a man raised in Minnesota. If you were raised differently from him, not through the '40s and '50s with a heavy amount of Blues and Rock'n'Roll, what he says may not work for you. He's correct that songwriting is personal, and for his genre of Folk, writing without an aim or structure can lend itself to the style. But a digestible melody and recurring chorus might be better if you're a pop artist wanting to get people dancing.

We can see a similar narrative talking to writers of the present day. Libbie Price, an ACM student and songwriter at the Birmingham campus, says she has "no one way of writing" since she feels it limits her creativity. This angle is freeing, allowing your method to be intuitive and open rather than limiting. However, she highlights that utilising a standard verse-chorus structure is incredibly useful for fleshing out a song and channelling these ideas through an instrument like piano. Price also mentions how she has always listened to a "range of different styles", which is a consistent theme, as displayed earlier by Bob Dylan.

But what does all of this information tell us? Although many songwriters agree on not limiting themselves to a singular method, paying attention to genre and staying true to their intuition are vital parts of the process; the collective mantra is slim: write in the way that feels right. This statement isn't much to go off of, but that might be the point. Aside from the technical aspect, where rhyme, meter and structure are concerned, writing is what you make of it. You're not supposed to be good at it when you first start, and there's no cheat code to being a great writer. Instead of seeing it as something to master, see it as a journey of self-discovery, almost like a journal. Discover your style and what makes your songs unique - it takes time, and that's okay.

Amongst this reflection, it is critical to highlight the value of writing with other people. The likely story is that there are infinite songwriting methods out there. Still, they're all buried inside different people's minds, ready to be discovered by a collaboration. There is much to gain from co-writing, from new methods to new vocabulary. Even if it doesn't go well, you're one step closer to knowing what you like and don't like about different ways of writing. Who knows? You could get lucky and find yourself a *Bernie* to your *Elton*.

To conclude, there isn't a simple way to answer "how to write a song" because there are many ways. Everything depends on your genre, topics, experience, and, most of all, you. In addition, the end product is just as subjective as the method since everyone enjoys different types of music. As long as you like what you write, there will be someone else out there who likes it, too. Songwriting might be futile sometimes, but it's worth it when you get it right.

Any thoughts on the world of songwriting? Let us know at [thebuzz@acm.ac.uk](mailto:thebuzz@acm.ac.uk)

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