

Songwriting Process & Collaboration when writing with others

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Georgia Middleman- Has written for Faith Hill, Reba McEntire and Keith Urban

The Fundamental Process:

Toughest thing is coming up with ideas for the songs

- If you listen to what people say throughout the course of a day you'll come up with 20 different titles
- Write down everything and keep notebooks
- Harlem Howard (the Dean of Country Songwriters) said "The Idea is Everything"
- Eventually it has to be all about the idea- and it has to be Original or an excitingly new twist on an idea.

Research your ideas

- Google your idea/title and see what's in iTunes. Find out- Has someone else already done this?
- Look up idea to see what information means

Prove yourself by being prepared

- Bring your own fresh original ideas- and titles
- If you're the new writer in the room- don't rely on the established writer to come with the BIG ideas.
- "The funnier the idea, the more clever the idea, the easier the day you'll have"-Gary

North Star

- You should be able to turn the idea of the whole song into ONE Sentence.
- Gary Ex: Write sentence at top of page and double check each line throughout the day while writing to make sure it has everything to do with song
- Keep the North Star in your song

Language is everything

- The stories are often the same, so language is everything
- Look for colorful words, mix it up, flip words around
 - Ex. Blue Clear Sky – George Strait
- Build it like Legos with words, phrases

Gary-Example of Evolution of a song

What matters most"-Ty Herndan

- This song started in two ways- They had an idea for a song and they had a little bit of the music
 - A finger exercise to warm up on the guitar turned into a place to start the music
 - They had an idea based on the "man behind the curtain" in the Wizard of Oz
- Writing a song is like writing a screen play- get the basic idea and create the people
- They thought of multiple ways to write the scene-with the characters.
- It took 1.5 years to write because nothing ever fit with the North Star
- They decided to start over and just keep 1 line-"pay no attention"- to the man behind the curtain
- Next they started focusing on the: Melody
- "I know I know, a whole lot of little things" – is a lyrical 'flavor packet', like a little pop rock favor in the song to catch the listeners ear
- The chorus was set up to recite a list- When writing a list song don't write the easy predictable things.

Georgia-Example of group writing with Striking Matches

- Sat on title for years-"When the right one comes along"
- The cowriter played a melody on guitar and she ran through her list of song titles and "When the right one comes along" fit.
- When the right title, with the right melody, right placement and meter come together it can be beautiful.
- Georgia likes writing story songs, but this was clear that it had to be a "list song"

- Take cliché idea and turn on head-opposite to what people say
- You have to learn the rules before you can break them in songwriting. There were no rhymes in the entire first verse, and the title was used at the end of every verse.

Collaborations

- Initial process: Just because you sing it doesn't mean it's golden- Try singing it several different ways, changing the adjectives, or the melody several times before you decide which is right.
- If it bores your ear, change it- and figure out another way.
- It's your responsibility to internally edit until you find the right fit.
- If it's a great idea it's worth working on and worth finding a great melody for
- Write with people whose instincts you trust

A great Pop or Country Song

- A song has an intro, a verse, a chorus, a bridge and then the final stuff and out.
- Try starting by writing a great chorus. Then flip it and make that the verse, then try writing another section and beat it. Now make that the B sections and try writing another chorus and make it even "Hookier".
- Every part of a song should be so good that it's the best part of some lesser writer's song.
- Every part of the song should aim to be the greatest part.

When you're stumped

- If you are stumped-disconnect flip something around.
 - Examples:
 - If 1st verse summarizes it all, and you have nowhere to go with it, switch it to the 2nd verse.
 - Or throw the first out because it didn't progress your story and start by writing a 2nd verse first.
 - If you have more to say after the 2nd verse, try putting it at the front of the song and line by line unfold the scene that is already taking place.
 - Basically if you are stumped, chances are you might have the verses reversed.
- Again- Don't forget your North Star. If you have a story to tell, don't forget about the point.

Create the world

- "Don't start a scene sooner than you have to"-Don't start a song too early in the story either.
- Feeling disconnected with people in the song? Flip the point of view
 - Write in 1st person or 3rd person
 - Change the narrator-tell about someone or tell it like it's happening to you
- Look for most interesting angle to tell story
- Don't be so sure you know who is telling the story
- Tell the story without telling the story-surprise with clues.
- Animate and inanimate object

Check your work!

- Before you're done with any song- Go to top-check adverbs, adjectives
- Check pronouns
- Go over it and over it and over it
- Is the right person singing it? Is it the right narrator?
- Write the lyrics the way people talk-is that how you would say it?

Stephen King on Writing

- His mentor said- when you write your first draft you write with the door closed. It's for you and you write everything you want to say. When you re-write you write with the door open. Other people should be able to read it and relate to it.

Pop VS Country Writing

- In the world of pop music- someone can ask "what does that line mean?" and in return you can ask them "what does it mean to you?"

- In Country music – If someone asks you that- you missed
- In Country music you have to write the way people talk. Make sure a line means what it says and says it correctly.
- Economy of words-bring to minimal amount
- Make all 20 lines in song count

Old Trick to inspire a new song

- Open a book or magazine, put your finger down on a page, and write about whatever it lands on.
- In this example- He landed on a line that said "In front of the Alamo".
- He thought about everything he knew about the Alamo and realized he can't write a hit song about the history of the Alamo. So instead he decided to write about someone AT the Alamo.

Don't mess with the muse

- You are Stuarts of the songs
- If it wakes you up, get out of bed and record the idea in your phone or notebook

Finding Cowriters

- Write with the people you know and come up together as writers.
- You cannot assume because you have a publishing deal that you can pick all the best writers to write with.
- Learn as you go along, and it's never personal if you don't get the big co-write that you want.
- Use the access you have with your friends to create the magic
- Getting a co-write with someone you don't know is like a blind date.
- If your style or work rhythm is different it may be hard to see the song.
- If you let ego get involved when you don't know what's happening, and you stop the action, sometimes that can mess up the other writers creative process. (Just because they work different than you doesn't mean it's wrong).
- Sometimes you are just the editor and sometimes you are the initiator of the idea.
- Every day with collaborators you can have a diff role-and you should respect that. Even if you are feeling underutilized, next time the roles could be reversed.
- Even if you feel as though you didn't contribute as much, you never know if the song would have been written the way it turned out, without you there.
- Count the heads in the room and that's who worked it-"Nashville rule" 50/50.
- It's always about what's best for the song, not your ego

Editing Process

- Ralph Murphy-3 moving parts in a song/Big hits
- Verse, chorus, chorus
- Verse, chorus, bridge
- Burn Factor-peak interest to keep someone to listening

Collaborating

- It can be vulnerable, which can be scary but always speak up.
- Fight for ideas so you don't get lost in shuffle but also know when to back off because the other writers can have good points too
- Trust your cowriters and you should always be able to settle on the right thing
- If you started as a solo writer, don't lose that sill, because it raises your game.

Repeating the same idea

- Rely on musical sensibility of those you trust to give feedback. If they haven't heard the first version you wrote, let them only hear the 2nd to get their fresh perspective.
- It's your song, your world you are creating
- Whatever you are amazing at, get really good at it, so you are the go to
- Sometimes if you find you're doing the same thing over and over- throw it out and start from scratch.
- Figure out if you're writing something new or re-writing something old.