

SONGWRITING WITH VICTORIA VOX

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What makes up music or a song?

- Rhythm: a strong, regular, repeated pattern of movement or sound
- Harmony: a combination of simultaneous notes in a chord
- Melody: a sequence of single notes: pitch in rhythm
- Lyrics: words to a song that tell a story or share a feeling
- Song Structure: different sections of a song and how they are arranged

1) Song Structures

1. Verse
2. Verse / Refrain
3. AABA (A=Verse/Refrain)
4. Verse / Chorus
5. Verse / Chorus / Bridge (M8)
6. Verse / Pre-Chorus / Chorus
7. Verse / Pre-Chorus / Chorus w/ a bridge
8. Verse / Pre-Chorus / Chorus w/ modulation

VERSE: *(story song)*

- Boy Named Sue (Shel Silverstein)
- All Along the Watchtower (Bob Dylan)

VERSE / REFRAIN: *(refrain is NOT a chorus, but a repeating line used in each Verse)*

- I Walk the Line (Johnny Cash)
- Don't Think Twice It's All Right (Bob Dylan)

AABA *A=Verse w/ Refrain, B is a new musical part (repeated)*

- Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow (Gerry Goffin / Carole King)
- Dream a Little Dream of Me (Andre Fabian / Kahn Gus / Schwandt Wilbur)
- Yesterday by the Beatles (P. McCartney / J. Lennon)
- Somewhere Over the Rainbow (Harold Arlen / Yip Harburg)
- What a Wonderful World (George David Weiss and Bob Thiele)

VERSE / CHORUS: *Verse (usually no refrain) with repeated Chorus section*

- You Are My Sunshine / This Land is Your Land (same melody)
- Yellow Submarine (the Beatles)
- Cat's in the Hat (Sandy Chapin / Harry Chapin)
- 9 to 5 (Dolly Parton)
- I Can't Make You Love Me (Michael Reid / Allen Shamblin)
- True Colors (Steinberg / Kelly by Cyndi Lauper)

VERSE / CHORUS / with Bridge (M8): *with different section that doesn't repeat*

- Dock of the Bay (Otis Redding / Steve Cropper)
- Riptide (Vance Joy)
- Raspberry Beret (Prince)
- All Night Long (Lionel Richie) – double bridge

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VERSE / PC / CHORUS:

- Dreams (Fleetwood Mac)
- Happy to be Stuck With You (John Hayes / Huey Lewis)
- We are the Champions (Freddie Mercury)

VERSE / PC/ CHORUS / with BRIDGE:

- Someone Like You (Adele / Daniel Wilson)
- A Million Dreams (Benj Pasek / Justin Paul)

VERSE / PC / CHORUS / Bridge / Modulation:

- Man In the Mirror (Garrett / Ballard) sung by Michael Jackson
- Waiting for a Star to Fall (Rubin / Merrill of Boy Meets Girl)
- I Wanna Dance With Somebody (Rubin / Merrill) sung by Whitney Houston

2. Lyric Structure and Rhyming Technique:

Rhyming: aabb / aaaa / abab

aab ccb - closed rhyming

x x x x - open rhyming

Internal rhyming

Accelerated motion

Count your syllables / stresses for cadence

Lyric Writing Tips:

Make the TITLE of a song memorable, and in strong placement.
The TONIC note is a good place to end on a title (feeling at rest).

Important points in the phrase:

- beginning
- end
- highest note / lowest note
- longest / shortest notes
- downbeat
- accented

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3. Melody Writing

There are many ways to break down a melody in a song. Each note plays a role in the piece. A melody is made up of tonality, intervals, rhythm, phrasing, motives (motifs), sequences, and repetition.

Linear intervals (the relationship between two notes, successively)
2^{nds}, 3^{rds}, P4, P5, 6^{ths}, 7^{ths}, and octaves.

Conjunct motion produces a smooth melody line, moving only one tonal step at a time (2^{nds}) (or using notes in a scale-like manner). **Disjunct motion** (can be more difficult to sing) “jumps” around to different intervals (3^{rds} – 7^{ths}). A good melody will use a combination of both.

It’s important to find the **pitch and tonality** of the song (where is DO (a deer, a female deer)?!) When notes are “sung” with the DO in mind, some notes will sound (feel) **stable** and others **unstable**. There are “natural” resolutions for the unstable diatonic tones. **For example: RE goes to DO, FA goes to MI, LA goes to SOL, TI goes to DO.**

The melodies we write don’t always have to resolve. This is what can make a melody sound good, interesting, or maybe even uncomfortable. The unstable notes create **tension** within the melody, and when these unstable notes resolve, we can feel a **cadence** (at home), or at rest (which is a GREAT place for a hook / title!).

Rhythm controls the **phrasing** of each line, and each note’s duration. We can also use **augmentation** and **diminution** to give the feel of “speeding up” or “slowing down”, however, the meter (tempo) doesn’t change. Notes can be sung “on” beat, or “off”, which is also called **syncopation**.

Phrases can be symmetrical (balanced) or asymmetrical (unbalanced) depending on the number and length of the phrases. **Motives** are small units of the musical melody but also are often used as a main building block for the song. A motive is recognized when repeated (both literally or varied). **Repetition** is the most important factor in making a melody memorable. A **sequence** can be made of the motive, which uses the original motive rhythmic and intervallic structure and shifting it’s pitch up or down.

Melody Writing Tips:

- Build a sequence
- Use repetition
- Start on a non-chord tone
- Start on the downbeat
- Use syncopation
- Chorus should contain the title or the hook

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4. Harmony Writing

Major Chord: 1, 3, 5 (do, mi, sol)

Minor Chord: 1, b3, 5 (do, me, sol)

Major 7 Chord: 1, 3, 5, 7 (do, mi, sol, ti)

Minor 7 Chord: 1, b3, 5, b7 (do, me, sol, te)

7 Chord (dominant): 1, 3, 5, b7 (do, mi, so, te)

What Chords do I use? (Diatonic Chord Scales)

I	ii	iii	IV	V	vi	vii° (dim)
Major	minor	minor	major	major	minor	
C	Dm	Em	F	G	Am	B°

The sevenths diatonically take on the quality of the triad. Minor Chord = Minor 7th chord. Major Chord = Major 7th chord. Also, diatonically, the V chord is a MAJOR chord, with a MINOR 7th.

I	ii	iii	IV	V	vi	vii
Imaj7	iim7	iiim7	IVmaj7	V7	vim7	vii°
Major	minor	minor	major	major	minor	half diminished
Cmaj7	Dm7	Em7	Fmaj7	G7	Am7	B

Tips to use in songwriting:

- Repetition (rule of 2)
- Metamorphism – language of compacting and of comparison (this **is** this)
- Idioms – turn of phrase, not literally “flying by the seat of my pants”...
- Alliteration – Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy
- Anadiplosis – last word, first word...
- Use lyrics to represent events in linear TIME
- Music and lyrics should capture something ineffable (beyond explaining in lyrics)
- Music and lyrics are like clay – be flexible, manipulate it
- Musical Emphasis – put the point of the song at the CADENCE (ending of the phrase). The cadence is when the music and lyrics are together at rest.
- Make sure that the verse and chorus differ in melody and rhythm and... HAVE FUN ☺