

Music 100 - Songwriting

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Course Outline/Syllabus

This is a plan for a term of 31 50-minute sessions, in which the class will work on both song analysis and song creation, often simultaneously, and on multiple levels.

Students are accepted in this course at any level of songwriting experience, including none. The only requirements are: **attend, have the required texts,** and **do the work.** Since this is only a 1-unit course, the assignments will not be daunting.

Our textbook is *Beginning Songwriting*. Also required is *The Modern Rhyming Dictionary*. You must have these, and bring them. (If you have your own rhyming dictionary, show it to me. If you want to buy a used one, that's also acceptable.) Highly recommended as a general resource is *The Elements of Style* by Strunk and White. A useful discussion of word painting can be found at <http://www.purrgirl.com/Tutorial.html>.

For those who may want to publish, a useful website is <http://www.taxi.com>.

Should you want to copyright your song or songs, there is also in the bookstore *Basic Information and Government Forms for Copyright Protection of Original Songs*, which includes all the forms you need for that purpose (not a required text).

The goal of this course is to strengthen the cognitive skills of participants, regardless of experience. It is intended to be equally valuable to an experienced musician who has had songs performed or recorded, and a total neophyte with no knowledge of music whatever - hence the multi-level approach, and combining analysis with discussion and laboratory.

About grades: Successful completion of at least one song or song lyric is one measure of success, but not the only one. Class participation can also earn an A. However, everyone is expected to bring work - you don't have to like

it, but you have to bring it. Sometime shortly before the last class, you will be asked for your own assessment of your work (including completed songs) for grade purposes. There are no tests.

Few professional songwriters are likely to emerge from this course. Rather, one goal is to open your "creative synapses," to develop new approaches to problem solving, and to find ways of tapping your cognitive resources.

Another goal is to actively apply lessons of song analysis to your own work, that is, combining "left brain" observation and analysis with "right brain" creation.

Because it operates on many levels, the course welcomes returning students. Those students are not required to do work, although their attendance and participation is necessary. Naturally, laboratory work will be different, because the students will change, as will their songs. In this way, the course is like a music performance class, offering increasingly challenging goals as students progress.

In past sessions of this course, I've tried to use examples of songs, in a wide number of styles, to show how successful (and unsuccessful) songs use the various devices of structure, repetition, alliteration, imagery, interior rhymes, colloquial speech, etc.

Likewise, along with the process of developing songs, you'll be asked to find examples in the popular song literature to illustrate things like strong titles, ear-catching phrases, development of story lines, and emotional build-up, tension, and release. These won't be sterile laboratory dissections, but seeking ways of understanding how songs work charismatically, lyrically, narratively, and how they synthesize an emotional experience that resonates with the listener.

The textbook is a tool in directing the creative process, but we'll take from a variety of sources. We'll attempt to learn how to work both studiously and intuitively, to know how and why something is or isn't "memorable," is or isn't "graceful," does or doesn't "work."

Once we are under way, and individuals have produced working lyrics, we will break up into groups of 3 and 4, to develop tunes and chords to fit the lyrics.

By the way... Somewhere in this term, we will have an opportunity to use the Keyboard Room. When that happens - and it will be unpredictable, because the room is normally in use during this period - there will be a

spontaneous and short *Beginning Tutorial in Basic Music*. I do this mostly for people who are not musicians. It won't be anything like what you would get from **Music 1**, but it will at least provide a non-intimidating introduction to the piano keyboard, and a way to use simple chords and make basic tunes around them. You will not be required to know any of this for purposes of the class, and if you already know it, you can skip it.