

FOR CHRISTINE LAVIN'S SONGWRITING CLASS July 2010 Swannanoa

I asked 30 professional singer/songwriters:

1. What do you consider your best song, and why?
2. What good advice can you pass along to songwriters in 2010?

Some of these are known in the folk and film world, some are theater writers – all are excellent writers and have a lot of good things to share.

What follows are their answers in the order in which I received their emails. Most of them will have a corresponding song on the two disks I put together (with their permission) of their best songs. Some included lyrics; some did not. Some cited specific songs; some did not. I did very little editing – want you to hear their words the way they wrote them. This is something you can spend many many hours with later.

I can email the mp3 files, or you can borrow my disks and make a copy for yourself (just one!)

Chip Mergott	Kristina Olsen
Larry Murante	John Bucchino
Sally Fingerett	Peter Berryman
Andrew Ratshin of "Uncle Bonsai"	Craig Bickhardt
Tom Paxton	Jeff Daniels
Ervin Drake	David Ippolito
Mary Sue Twohy	Babbie Green
Robin Batteau	Jeff Blumenkrantz
Don White	Debi Smith
Susan Werner	Robin Greenstein
D.C. Anderson	Craig Carnelia
Cheryl Wheeler	George Wurzbach
Rob Carlson	Francesca Blumenthal
Annie Bauerlein	Deirdre Flint
Craig Werth	Nancy Moran

CHIP MERGOTT (I interviewed him over the phone – these notes are a bit fragmented – Chip works with songwriters one-on-one, some over the phone)

Different formats for songwriting

Format aaba

Dylan writes aaa

Verse/chorus verse/chorus bridge verse/chorus (or just chorus)

“You’ve got a friend” – perfect song

Three greatest resources are

The Craft of Lyric Writing by Sheila Davis,

filled with great information – taught at Columbia University for a long time.

Inspiration After the Fact – Chip Mergott – get a song rolling, when you get the 2x4’s up you’ll get a blast of inspiration.

When Chip was 40 he read every book he could about songwriting. Within the last couple of years – the 2nd best is called ***Tunesmith*** by Jimmy Webb. Picture of him sitting at the piano - looks like an autobiography – detailed handbook on songwriting, has sheet music inside his book. Writes melodies out of the chord progression – very counter to the traditional method – most of the world’s greatest melody writers write the melody first.

Bert Bachrach said I never go to the piano when I’m writing a song because I don’t want my hands to be trapped by the pretty chords.

Flatliner melody – falling in love with the sound of their guitar --

Jimmy Webb – Just Across The River – new album. Billy Joel sings the 2nd verse of “Wichita Lineman” – Glen Campbell sings the 2nd verse of “By The Time I Get To Phoenix” – Chip says it’s a great album.

Poet Donald Hall said, “Every great poem breaks at least one major rule.”

You can’t have an unsympathetic narrator – no one will want to record that kind of song because it would make them look bad.
 “Short People” is an example.

Randy Newman said in one of his most articulate interview with Paul Zallo, “sometimes you just have to write baby baby I love you.”

3rd resource – Clement Wood Rhyming Dictionary –
 [CHRIS SEZ: Rhymezone.com]

Jimmy Webb said he’s been trying to mount a Broadway show for 20 years. One of the first things they hammered home – we don’t care if you’re a hit songwriter – you can’t use imperfect rhymes. He said on Fresh Air one day – how am I supposed to take that – at every concert the most positive feedback I get in my life and you know what the best line – I need you more than want you/and I want you for all time/and the Wichita lineman is still on the line –

Sheila David loves “By The Time I Get To Phoenix” – unsympathetic narrator?

Jimmy Webb, endorses this: Always work from a title backwards.

Bu The Time I Get To Phoenix
 I Believe for every drop of rain that falls . . .
 Help/I need somebody/Help/Not Just Anybody
 It’s Been A Hard Day’s Night
 Yesterday
 Where Have All The Flowers Gone
 Stars (Janis Ian song)

Hoagy Carmichael says a good song writes itself.

chipannie@comcast.net --

Chip and Liv wrote a song together last year – Liv gave him the title – When Will The Hurt Go Away – Chip wrote 75% of it after Liv gave him the title –

Inspiration always takes precedence over methodology – but most people don't have the inspiration to write more than a couple songs a year –

Work from a chorus backwards – biggest mistake is making the chorus too long – keep it simple

Eleanor Rigby – complicated verses, simple chorus

Nashville songwriter had a song covered 88 times – sent Chip a cassette with every version on it – one time I took about a hundred Billboard and Cashbox magazines and read them all over a weekend. I was looking for some elements that are common to great songs – not minor hits – great songs. At the end of that he had a list:

Beatle songs even if they don't start with a title – We Can Work It Out – Try to see it my way –

Dave Van Ronk had the K I S S Style of songwriting (keep it simple, stupid!)

Sheila Davis says in her book “A song should be personal, but not private”

First day – before you get started – what are your tools? John Steinbeck stood out about how he writes “I get a couple of yellow pads, a #2 pencil, keep them sharpened, turn the phone off.

Own a recorder – Cheryl Wheeler does this – we all have written a song when we didn't have a recorder nearby call an answering machine. Batteries.

What's your favorite way to record a song?

When Chip Mergott started out looking for his methodology based on Fast Folk article by Richard Meyer about writer's block. It changed Chip's life. It showed a method for getting out of writer's block – modified it – take a noun, a concrete noun, then say “chair” put a verb after it – internal editor should not be operating at all – chair is – there's a not a person in the world who can stop themselves from finishing that statement. The chair is broken, chair is magenta, chair is old.

A memorable way – remember those things you had as a kid – a dozen different eyes, noses – this blueprint is for your song – spin the tumblers – I don't like chair anymore – but the sky is maroon – I never heard that before –

The chair is broken

The sky is broken

Now is the beginning of something to stir their creative impulses. If that's the chorus – you're working backwards.

Songwriters and teachers would agree that one of the biggest stumbling blocks is that they think you have to start with the first verse – spinning the tumblers – [I know for me – very often I write the last verse first – not knowing it's the last verse – just works out that way]

Chip doesn't start on the computer – James Taylor said “I've got 10 times more music than I do lyrics”

#1 CLARITY is huge – Chip Mergott – let people know what you're talking about. “Do you have any idea what this song is about?” Chip and Annie used to say to each other at folk shows. How does it feel? To be on your own.

“My Back Pages” – everything makes sense because it leads back to the title.

Every line in the song should be connected and lead to the idea of the title. You don't have that much time in a song to go off into left field. [But that is a rule I tend to break pretty often].

Melodies

A flatliner melody – changing chords – but the melody is too simple

A melody on a page has motion – “Penny Lane” by The Beatles – the epitome of motion.

There is an exception to this rule – if you have a song where the rhythm is so infectious --- “The Wanderer” – it works, it’s great – clear, cool story happening to it. And the rhythm makes it.

“Fields Of Gold” – Eva Cassidy recording – that’s sort of a flatliner melody but the chords make it work. Sting wrote that song.

One of the best things you can do for yourself as a writer is give yourself a reason to write a song. I’m going to write a song for my brother’s birthday, my parents anniversary – **“Rich In Love” [disk 1, track 1]** by Annie Bauerlein and Chip Mergott was written on the way to Annie’s parents 50th wedding anniversary – songs for occasions. Will help increase your productivity when you write songs for a reason.

Annie’s song “Mugsy Is Fine” was written for an open mic. I want to be thankful for living in this country – no big Thanksgiving song. Why not write one? People think every great topic is taken are wrong.

Gaucha had 17 verses Steeley Dan

Be observant – every day there are things that happen to everybody

I think you might appreciate this: tonight I had one of those banal background music gigs that come my way every once in a while. it was a party for new jersey's Hunterdon county farmland preservation group- a worthy cause. as I expected the first set was a snoozefest, they were talking so loud that virtually nobody was listening, I could have played a blues version of "Mary had a little lamb" or whatever, and years ago I might have done that. But nowadays I keep a smile on my face and I generally just give my best no matter what. then at break time the people wanted to use my PA for a guest speaker so I set it up for them, set up the mic at the right height, etc and made it

sound good. so the nice red haired hostess of the event gets up and says some nice things and then introduces one of their biggest backers who lives in Frenchtown which is one minute away: and It's ELIZABETH GILBERT who was really funny and nice and then reads this great chapter about pizza from her monumental book "Eat, Love, Pray," soon to be starring Julia Roberts. Later i give her one of my ukulele cds and she- get this- hugs and kisses me! When people see this, all the schmoozer's come up and start asking for my card, etc. Always do your best kids, i heard it from Christine Lavin, chip ps Elizabeth Gilbert was totally sweet, down to earth, funny and pretty in a very "you need to take a closer look" way.

CHIP MERGOTT

www.notebookrecords.com

LARRY MURANTE

Several things. One thing I always try to do is use perfect rhymes. I don't always succeed, but I always try.

One thing I always liked about John Gorka is that he a master at taking a normal everyday cliché and putting an interesting twist to it that makes it sound brand new.

Another thing I always try to do is give the chorus a new meaning after every verse. Make each verse set up the chorus's meaning in a different way.

I felt like I did this in my song, "More Than He Knows."

Disk 1, track 2:

More Than He Knows

Sergeant was a backyard mechanic
Three or more people in the same room

made him panic
There wasn't a car he couldn't fix;
eight or four cylinders,
straight or slant six,
German made, British, Japanese,
just take your pick

He was a voc-tech school scholar
After high school he went to college,
flunked out and joined the Army in a snit
But he served this country well
in that southeast Asian hell
Brought back a bum knee
and a big ole piece of Ho Chi Minh shrapnel

He carries it with him
wherever he goes
He carries it with him
more than he knows

His father died in '75
the same year that the war ended
from a failed heart they say Sergeant never knew
But he missed him all the same
and one day when his own heart gave way,
on a bar stool at the Bath Hotel,
he grabbed his chest and saw his old man's face

He carries it with him
wherever he goes
He carries it with him
more than he knows

Well, he dreamed
he was flyin' up near the clouds
high above a canyon
A redtailed hawk
floating on a thermal wind

and then diving down
Diving down

Well, his doctors intervened
and postponed his next reincarnation
and after a couple of weeks
he was on his back underneath a Chevy sedan

He looked up past the firewall,
through the manifolds
and the vacuum lines and saw
a little blue patch of sky
And it made him smile
and a tear welled in his eye
He was so damn glad to be alive

He carries it with him
wherever he goes
He carries it with him
more than he knows

<http://larrymurante.com>
See Larry's Videos on Youtube

Sally Fingerett of THE FOUR BITCHIN' BABES.
www.fourbitchinbabes.com

"Treat your art like a business, and your business like an art"

Make appointments to write.
Speak to business associates creatively.

Andrew Ratshin of "UNCLE BONSAI"
www.unclebonsai.com

I have two pieces of advice I've given people . . .

1. If you're writing "diary songs," make sure people would want to read your diary.
2. If you need to use cliché, find a way to make it "original cliché." I've used the example of how MANY MANY songs have "I want you, I need you, I love you" in them. The Beatles . . . Elvis Presley . . . Cheap Trick . . . and endless number of movies and plays . . . DON'T USE THAT TYPE OF PHRASE UNLESS YOU CAN MAKE IT DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT. Meat Loaf did it perfectly. "I want you, I need you, but there ain't no way I'm ever gonna love you. Now don't be sad. 'Cause two out of three ain't bad!"

Tom Paxton

Hi, Chris

I'm in Rostrevor, County Down, for a show tonight.

In teaching the verse/chorus form I like to point out that the verse's normal task is to provide information (a narrative, say) and the chorus is all emotion--basically, a reaction to that information. It's rather like the drama or an operatic libretto where the action moves in real time and then stops dead for the aria or soliloquy which comments feelingly on what's gone before. This is also why the melody in a great chorus is generally higher than the verse melody. I hope this is useful.

Ervin Drake

It was a song called "JUST FOR TODAY" that was sung by Leslie Uggams as Cleopatra in the Broadway musical HER FIRST ROMAN. I'll try to dig one up and send it to you so you'll see why I evaluate it so highly.

Ervin

p.s. from Chris – couldn't find that song at iTunes. Ervin wrote "It Was A Very Good Year," my all time favorite song. He wrote it for The Kingston Trio. It was their recording Frank Sinatra heard driving near LA – pulled into a gas station, called the radio station, the rest is history.

Ervin also wrote "Good Morning Heartache" and "I Believe."

Disk 1, track 3 is "It Was A Very Good Year" by the Kingston Trio followed by Frank Sinatra – same key!

Mary Sue Twohy

The Risk Involved - song

Hard to compliment one's own song - akin to saying "I have absolutely gorgeous hair, don't you agree?"

Why I like The Risk Involved - there is poetry evident and vivid and visceral poetry at that. It activates the senses - but the song is stripped down enough that it is, I believe, a touchstone to the listener's experience. It is not overstimulating and transportive but a door into one's own mind and heart. And I do like singing it - it is an emotional release. (overdramatic? don't know)

Disk 1, track 4

SIDEBAR:

HOW TO GET ON THE RADIO:

(Mary Sue is xm 15 "The Village")

1. Melody! Having a melody line that develops in the verse, changes in the chorus and a bridge is a bonus
2. The words need to be well crafted – poetic approach, rhyming, dramatic structure, solid story– and it has to be beyond excellent if it is a breakup song – too many of them out there...I like story songs that document the myths and realities of our wild and rich planet.
3. Touring artists get first listen in my pile – I want to support the

working musician. If this is your first CD, not on a label or given to me by an artist and you are not currently touring, it will take me longer to listen to the CD. I hope you understand.

4. A professional presentation draws me in – the unlabeled burned CD with a note handwritten does not draw me in.

5. If you want to be on the radio quicker – go topical - shelf life is shorter but it may gain you entry where doors were not previously open.

Robin Batteau

Write so it makes you cry. Whenever I write a song and it makes me cry, I know it's good. The moment I finished "Guinevere," I was crying like a baby. If it moves you, it will move the world.

XOX,
Robin

www.buskinandbatteau.com

“Guinevere” is Disk 1, track 5

Don White

My only rule for teaching songwriting is "Cause no pain." Songs are the Writer's children and NO ONE has an ugly baby.

I would argue that there are no absolutes as to what is good and what is not. There are only the opinions of people and there are as many opinions about what is a good song and what is not as there are people in the world.

Ultimately, there are only two questions for the writer: Are you happy with the song you wrote? Is there anyone else in the world who likes it?

I always try to remember that there are millions and millions of people who love songs that cause me to go into epilepsy when I hear them. My opinion is just that, my opinion. It's value is proportional to your opinion of my ability.

I suggest that aspiring writers:

Study songs that you don't like and identify what it is that you don't like about these songs and write your songs without those characteristics.

Listen to what writers that you admire have to say about songwriting but keep in mind that there are as many ways to write a song as there are songwriters in the world. Nothing is gospel. Take what suits you and disregard the rest. And beware of absolutes from ANYONE no matter how accomplished they are. The real joy of writing is in the actual writing. Arbitrary absolutes have a way of popping up in the middle of your process and stealing the joy of these magical creative moments from you. (It took me a week to get Ervin Drake's voice out of my head after he said that all rhymes have to be exact and that assonance was the son of Satan.) I love rhyming vowel sounds and I'd rather be considered a bad writer than to have to squeeze my thoughts into rhymes that you can see coming from a hundred miles away.

Here is a link to a song called the MTV Love Song. I wrote it when I was ready to quit the music business. I had been in the studio for months with a record producer who kept saying things to me like: Don't bore us, get to the chor - us.

I was so pissed off and disgusted that I decided to write a song that broke every rule I could think of. At first i wanted to write a song with only one note in it. That proved to be too hard. So I came up with this song that has no bridge, no chorus, two simple chords and three versus with three different emotional agendas. It's probably the most unmarketable song ever written. But lots of people like it and the actual writing of it was damn near orgasmic. **[this is on the internet, not on disk]:**

<http://www.youtube.com/lumperboy16#p/u/16/pr25PzzxMvA>

SUSAN WERNER

i don't know if it's my best writing ever - this recording isn't my best singing ever - but there's something about what happens to the audience when they hear "i can't be new" that tells me it works.

couple things i think are good about it -

it does not give itself away right up front - so it avoids the sin of obviousness.

it is specific yet general in the details and language - so everybody can get with it, but the language is fun, not everyday conversation, it has some play in it -

and best of all, it sounds like what it's talking about. its a torch song, in subject matter and in sound. the music matches the message.

re: advice - if you overhear somebody saying something you've thought yourself, then THATs a good song idea, because you have thought it and you know others have, too. if it's just you talking to you, well, thats nice for you... and if you write something that somebody else said, thinking "oh everyone must think that, even if i don't" you'll write something phony. go from a consensus of you and somebody else - and you probably have a winner on your hands.

www.susanwerner.com

"I Can't Be New" Disk 1, Track 6

D.C. ANDERSON

Hi. I was reading a newspaper in Rochester NY and a guy in the paper mentioned he had been on jury duty and had a crush on a

fellow juror. I took it from there. DC

'Jury Duty Girlfriend'

The room is all of thirty feet square
 with a restroom in the back
 There's a fountain on the side wall –
 and I'm planning my attack
 There's a sight-for-sore-eyes beauty
 with a notebook and a pen
 And she's got me feeling like I
 'm all of seventeen again
 She's my

Jury Duty Girlfriend
 Skin of alabaster white
 Hair of gold like waving wheatfields
 Eyes of blue like moonlit night
 She's my
 Jury Duty Girlfriend
 I'm her buck and she'd my doe
 And I think I might get lucky
 I mean, where's she gonna go?

The case is fairly open and shut
 there are witnesses galore
 There are photographs to prove it,
 but I'm holding out for more
 'Cause this sight-for-sore-eyes beauty
 with a notebook and a pen
 Has me hoping that we discuss this case
 a year, or two, or TEN!
 She's my:

Jury Duty Girlfriend
 Skin of alabaster white
 Hair of gold like waving wheatfields
 Eyes of blue like moonlit night
 She's my:
 Jury Duty Girlfriend

And we're stuck inside this room
 And I think I might get lucky
 Before our normal lives resume!

Jury Duty Girlfriend
 How long can she resist?
 I'm the only man that's single
 Let's turn this trial into a tryst
 She's my:
 Jury Duty Girlfriend
 To my mind we're on a date
 And in hers, I grow more handsome
 The longer we deliberate!

If you catch me - in a year or two
 And I can't hide a grin
 It's 'cause the jury's still out -
 And I'm IN!!

D.C. Anderson and Ritt Henn davecamson music - ASCAP box of
 stuff music – BMI

“Jury Duty Girlfriend” disk 1, track 7

The best advice I ever got was - "Not a good idea to finish a song and have the audience thinking, 'Now what was THAT all about' - They should know what 'happened' - it's OK to leave them conflicted about it's effect on them - however."

Bad advice? 'it's all about the 'hook'.' (I know that there are a good many fantastic songwriters who will tell you that this is the BEST advice they've ever gotten... and maybe I'd be better if a 'hook' was a concern but

CHERYL WHEELER

Here's my 2 cents: If I had to pick a song I guess it would be *Arrow*. The why would be because it came so fast. I wrote it early in the

morning, just got out of bed and sat there next to the bed and started singing it, with the dream and all the feelings it evoked still just right there. I think the best songs are the ones that come fast like that. I am among the many, many songwriters who feel that getting out of the way of a song is a huge part of the battle.

The advice I have given to budding songwriters the few times I've been in a position to do so is this: Your tendency is your gift. My tendency, the thing which comes easiest to me, is to write melodic ballads and my favorite keys on the guitar are G and D (hand positions, regardless of capo). In my 20s and 30s I was somewhat dismissive of those songs *, because they seemed so simple and easy to write. Somehow I felt there should be some struggle involved. I guess that's where getting out of the way comes in. If you're struggling, you're probably in the way. If the muse's easiest gate to you is through a simple 1-4-5, trust that. I have come to feel now that all of the time I've spent playing around in G and D has been a sort of practice, that I'm learning, over time, how to really speak in those two languages.

* After I reread that I remembered that *Arrow* was one of the songs I really did dismiss (back in 1981 when I wrote it) because it was just so fast and easy to write. I played it a few times at gigs and then dropped it. For years after that people would ask about the "TV light song" but I still believed it wasn't much of a song since it had required so little of me. When I was getting ready to do my first record, putting together a cassette of songs to send to the producer, Jonathan Edwards. Patsy Davis suggested that I include *Arrow*. I said - no way, there's nothing to that song. Patsy kept bugging me about it so, just to show her that I was the musician here, I was the one who knew a good song, I included it on the cassette. John called after he'd listened to the cassette and said there was lots of stuff he liked, "but my favorite is that *Arrow* song, I really love that".

www.cherylwheeler.com

“Arrow” is Disk 1 track 8

ROB CARLSON

Attached is an MP3 of a new song which I really like. I've just published a novel based on a ghost ship legend from Block Island which is about a woman who was known as a witch and healer there in the 18th century. The song is based on scenes from the book where she goes into a trance and flies back to Europe to visit her long dead father. The song is called "Fly" and is from the father's point of view. It takes you a lot of places on 3 minutes.

I write different kinds of songs different ways. Funny songs generally start with the words, serious songs with the melody. As far as advice to songwriters I'd say "practice". The better you get on your instrument the better you'll write. Then free yourself from the instrument. Don't try to make your vocal melody fit a pre-conceived guitar or piano part, try to make your words and your melody one interrelated flow, and keep it singer friendly. Try writing in the car, completely in your head, then go back and work it further with the instrument, and vice versa.

Hope this fits the bill. And I hope we'll cross paths again soon. In the mean time you can find me at <http://www.RobCarlsonMusic.com>.

"Fly" is Disk 1, track 9

ANNIE BAUERLEIN

Okay my best song in my opinion is Blueberry Pancakes, I feel, because 1.) It sandwiches together nicely, beginning the way it ends 2.) It *shows* not *tells* how my family was - using concrete imagery 3.) It's from the heart.

Chip says he likes it because "it's small and big at the same time".

Let's see....okay, the *best* advice I've ever gotten as a songwriter is "Write about what you know!" which is good, because when you are familiar with your subject you can make it come alive.....but "Write about what you know!" also happens to be the *worst* advice I've ever gotten as a songwriter because when you're as warped a person as I am and know as many twisted people as I do, what might come out in

a song is SCARY stuff, for instance:

My dog once ate then threw up my hunter green Catholic school sock
 My brother once dropped a heavy tin pail of nails on his wart and it
 popped the wart right off
 I used to streak frequently in the 70s
 I sucked my thumb until I was in 7th grade
 My best friend and I were once cleaning a house together and we
 were having an intimate conversation in the baby's room, and
 realized only later the baby monitor was on, and the lady of the house
 was downstairs and heard the whole thing
 I once wiped my butt on my own song lyric after pooping outside in
 the dark, and i was not drinking at the time. or doing drugs. The song
 was called "Temper Temper" about me having temper tantrums when
 I was young, and boy did I ever have a tantrum when I found out what
 I did to myself with my own song!

These are but some of the distorted things I have experienced, and
 they might not necessarily go over that big in a song, ya know???

Now aren't you glad you asked??? tee hee!

www.anniebauerlein.com

“Blueberry Pancakes” Disk 1, track 10

CRAIG WERTH

I choose "The Spokes Man" as an example of some of my best
 writing, for the following reasons.

First of all, "The Spokes Man" fully meets my multiple goals for writing
 it. It exceeds them, in fact. It's inspired by a real person -- a retired
 night watchman who spends his waking hours fixing up bicycles and
 giving them away to children. I wanted it to tell an interesting and
 inspirational story and uphold a value of community service, and to
 be broadly accessible to strangers -- all without being heavy-handed.
 Not too obvious, not too cryptic -- just right in the telling. I chose to
 take on the main character and write it in the first person and I think it

works well this way. More potent in this case to be The Spokes Man than to tell about him as an observer.

The accompaniment serves without getting in the way of the melody or lyrics. It's supportive of the story but is crafted to be unobtrusive and convey the feel of summer and the rhythmic wheel-turning of the bicycle theme. The musical parts help paint the picture without pushing or pulling you away from it.

There's repetition for comfort and emphasis, but interest is held by the unfolding story and the small twists in the structure, which is not a standard arrangement of verse, chorus, and bridge parts. There's a somewhat satisfying one-time-only "list" section toward the end to maintain interest. This might serve as a bridge of a sort, but with new words listed in series and the unexpected repetition of the familiar musical phrase. A rule breaker that seems to work. I like those.

The number one reason it's among my best works is that it passed the listening and sharing tests with flying colors. "The Spokes Man" was field-tested extensively before I recorded it. I began and mostly finished it at a single writers' retreat. I sang it for friends before it was finalized. I "workshopped" it in multiple stages at the retreat. I sang it for 4 years in concert, at open-mics, in friends' living rooms. It seems to stir reactions of silent, focused attention, comments and questions. People often tell me a related story of their own after hearing it. I have heard testimony that it has opened minds and affected hearts.

It does some good in the world, which is not a requirement of a "good song" for me, but wonderful when it happens. It honors a good person, and gives wing to a tiny but important and real story, and, especially, it offers up another face of "America" at a time when we may need that most.

The best advice I got while writing this song came in the form of a question. I sang a two-verse draft for my friend, Guy, pleased with my work, anticipating a joyous cheer of congratulations for what I'd achieved. Instead, he said, "it's a strong start, but how did this man become The Spokes Man? Why is he doing this?" Verse three came to me right after he asked me that. It implies a motivation without

knocking you over the head with it. Funny thing is, I invented the motivation, but I found out years later that it turned out to be true. It was already true for me, though. It was an invention based on my first hand knowledge of human nature. It felt real from the start.

BEST songwriting advice

1) "It can take a village to complete a song." Actively seek and hold yourself open to honest reaction and input. After a stingy start, in recent years I've let others into my songwriting process -- at least in the final draft phase - especially my wife, Liz; and a few of my writer and non-writer friends. I solicit their reactions. Of course, I don't always incorporate their feedback into my writing, but I've stopped being resistant or fearful of this sort of engagement. Before recording a song (an act that finalizes it in a profound if not permanent way), the next step for me is to bring it to acquaintances and strangers at shows and local open-mics or living rooms and collect their reactions -- their words of feedback, but also their faces, their sounds and silences. Sometimes the right sort of silence is the highest praise. Of course, workshops and retreats are great for this. I try to go to one a year if I can. In addition to "The Spokes Man," several of my other best songs were started and/or developed at a writing retreat. Strangers (new friends) can be at least as helpful as longtime pals in helping you hone your craft. At the very least this process of sharing the work forces me to challenge and justify my choices -- to keep them honest.

2) "Write what you know." At first, I took this to mean, write from my own perspective -- write true, real things I have personally and literally experienced. It has grown to mean for me "writing from my own heart and from what I believe to be true in the world." I have a song titled "Good Old Dog" that has a totally fictional story in it, but the emotions -- the qualities of and the empathy for the human character, and the affection and admiration for his canine, come from my own relational and emotional experience. Certainly, a song can be fictional AND genuine if the ideas and emotions behind it are real to you and to your audience.

3) "Kill (or Murder) Your (Precious) Darlings" -- attributed to a number of famous people over the years. Some take this to mean: remove from your writing single bits that stand out from the rest as particularly good. I prefer a modified interpretation: examine your best bits, your most clever parts, and make certain that they serve the song and your goals for writing it. Also watch for clunkers -- forced rhymes or word choices that don't feel or sound right, that interrupt the flow -- are a bump in the road - attention stealers. Be willing to honestly examine, and, if necessary, twist, tear, or crush these things in some way that serves the song and its mission, or -- remove them altogether.

WORST Songwriting Advice:

Any advice that dictates a formula without consideration for the goals of the writer is, in my opinion, bad advice.

"A good song has a formula that ought to be adhered to -- a proper recipe of verses, chorus/refrain and bridge." Maybe it does, maybe it doesn't. "A good song is around 3 minutes long." Maybe it is and maybe it isn't. I don't limit my writing to a formula. I use whatever form or format I feel will serve my song. This may well exclude me from certain audiences or markets at times, and that's OK, given my goals for writing most of the time.

That said, it's surely a good idea to understand standard structure and the value and role of all these components, so you are better equipped to use them effectively when and where you choose to.

I hold these truths to be flexible and heartfelt at the time of this writing.

- Craig Werth

"The Spokes Man"
words and music by Craig Werth

I'm the Spokes Man -- well that's the joke,

I don't make speeches and I don't blow smoke,
I build these bikes, out of parts I find,
I build them well, and I make them shine.

With the Spokes Man, your ride is free
Put your pennies in your pocket, this one's on me,
You can give a smile, when your bike is done,
I'll build a bike, for anyone.

I'm always workin' at my home,
you'll find me here, don't you come alone,
bring all your friends, Grandma, Pop,
everybody's welcome in my shop.

I'm the Spokes Man, I don't get much sleep,
Got a lot to do, I've got a pledge to keep,
But I'll get back, more than I put in,
When I watch you fly, when I catch your grin.

I'm always workin' at my home,
you'll find me here, don't you come alone,
bring all your friends, Grandma, Pop,
everybody's welcome in my shop.

I'm the Spokes Man... I'm the Spokes Man...

A long ways back, I was eight or nine
Sat on those steps in the warm sunshine,
And I watched the boys, go rolling by,
I was just like them, if I closed my eyes.

Now I'm always workin' at my home,
you'll find me here, don't you come alone,
bring all your friends, Grandma, Pop,
everybody's welcome in my shop.

Handlebars, frame, tubes and tires,
Grease, ball-bearings, chain and wires,
Red reflector, bell and seat,
Soon you're pedaling down the street.

I'm the Spokes Man... I'm the Spokes Man...

www.craigwerth.com

“The SpokesMan” is Disk 1 track 11

KRISTINA OLSEN

Thank you for this wonderful opportunity! Hard to pick one song, I like some things in each, there isn't one song that represents everything I like in songwriting, but I'll send Dangerous, because I love plot songs and don't hear enough of them. You are a master of plot songs! Yea!

So, in my opinion, when ever a listener hears a story, they are predicting the outcome, they can't help it, it is human nature. So the trick with a plot song is to predict where the listener is predicting and take them somewhere they didn't predict, but not such a weird place that they are dissatisfied with where you take them to. I also like songs that have many of the senses included, and I like songs that grab the listener with the opening line. I think Dangerous does all these things.

DANGEROUS

words and music
by
Kristina Olsen

Kevin wears his tan like a flasher wears a coat
He's full of wild adventures he's full of anecdotes
He flies medical supplies to inflamed war zones
Jenna never knows if this time he'll make it home
Dangerous

And it's danger that keeps this man alive
Without it there's not a reason to survive

It gives his teeth a grit, it gives his eyes a squint
 It gives his masculinity a shine that doesn't quit

She met him on a plane in 7A
 He sat in 7B Jesus Christ he made her day
 And she fell in love with him before she knew his name
 She knew this man would change her life she'd never be the same
 Dangerous

And it's danger that keeps her love alive
 And it's danger that gives her passion drive
 Each time she says good-bye she's promised not to cry
 And the fear that shimmers through her puts a sparkle in
 her eye

And he's quiet in the telling of a friend who just died
 Another pilot shot down newly married to his bride
 She leans over to him to intently kiss his face
 As if she's memorizing exactly how he tastes
 Dangerous

And when they make love it's like their last
 And in the silence you can hear their voices catch
 And now she's 20 minutes late she races through the door
 She leaves her seat belt dangling never missed his flight
 before

The sunlight hits her windshield she doesn't seem to know
 About the stoplight only four blocks from her home
 Dangerous

And he's standing at the airport he's standing at the gate
 He can't believe she had the nerve today to make him wait
 He barely made it through alive this time

And it was danger that kept their love alive
 But what happens when the wrong one dies

He shakes the doctor angrily he shakes her once again
 He hits the E.R. wall and he cries out her name
 He shakes the doctor angrily he shakes her once again
 He curses all the nurses and he never flies again
 It's dangerous, it's dangerous it's dangerous
www.kristinaolsen.com

“Dangerous” is disk 1, track 12

JOHN BUCCHINO

Could you tell me which ONE of your songs you have come to think of over the years as your best writing, and why?

I don't know if it's my best writing, but my favorite song of mine is "Unexpressed" (on both my Grateful and It's Only Life CDs - I'm attaching an mp3 of the version with a vocal by Adam Guettel.) I feel the sentiments expressed in the lyric so deeply (which, I think, is why others respond to it...) and I'm especially fond of the chord progression and how it elevates the melody and the meaning of the lyric. Plus, there's a six-note section that I unconsciously stole from a Brahms Intermezzo, which is a pretty cool thing from which to steal.

> And any advice you could give to the songwriters?

Don't let your internal editor into the process too early. He will kill what could be the best ideas before they're even born. For me, anyway, the first stage is about dreaming, about letting big chunks of raw material come through unfiltered. I scribble these chunks onto paper freely (usually in bed) and only when enough are collected do I begin to shape them with a critical eye.

> Any advice change your life as a songwriter?

When Stephen Schwartz AND Steve Sondheim both told me I should try writing for the Theatre.

> Ever get any BAD advice?

Part of me wants to give the same answer as to the question above...

But otherwise, no, I can't think of any.

www.johnbucchino.com

“Unexpressed” is Disk 1, track 13

PETER BERRYMAN

The song: Why Am I Painting The Living Room

The reasons (I know, far too much blabbering, but I don't know how to stop myself...)

1. The song develops two characters whose viewpoints are different but are both explained eventually by the same sentence ("Why am I Painting the Living Room")
2. The "Person" of the song (as in first person, second person, etc) is not revealed until the last line of the first verse (after five complete sentence fragments). It is then revealed as a first person song. But this delayed revelation helps increase the tension.
3. This revelation also suddenly paints the scene: the person singing is, in fact, painting the living room! This comes as a surprise. The listeners have to quickly review the first part of the song to place it in this picture. This gives the beginning five lines a new perspective.
4. The specific of "painting the living room" contrasted with the general woes of the larger world mentioned in the first five lines brings in a sense world-weariness but also a sort of embarrassment about how anyone could be doing something as selfish and silly as painting a living room when the whole world is in such crisis.
5. The second character introduces the idea that the world is a glorious fun place, and in that light also ends up asking "why am I painting the living room." So there's a contrast of

perspectives, but like flip sides of the same coin. One person: I should be helping the world, and here I am painting. The other: I should be enjoying the world, and here I am painting.

6. After both characters establish their perspectives, they sing the punch line together a number of times, then re-sing their original verses, which suddenly fit together quite nicely, without blotting out the other, and they both finish together on the "painting" line. So there's almost an agreement made in a way, namely, there's a whole world out there, why are we doing something so stupid? This is sort of the first big climax of the song, however there is a second one on the way.

7. At the end, the first character sings a new verse, ending with a self-deprecating joke, bringing her whole original point surging back into view, but at the same time, suggesting that maybe humor is one way to begin to deal with this existential heaviness.

8. The rhyme scheme is one of my favorites:

A
B
A
B
C
C

...because it strengthens the last line by making the rhyme come unexpectedly soon; twice as soon as the rhymes of the first four lines.

9. The chord structure is actually a 12-bar blues structure, which I've always felt has a powerful effect. But the time signature is a waltz, which often keeps folks from realizing this. The waltz being a powerful time signature, and the blues structure being a powerful chord progression, the whole song is

boosted, in my opinion.

10. A few people have thought this song goes on too long, but then again it really seems to work well as a sing-along, because the refrain ("Why am I painting the living room") is repeated many times.

11. One more point: The whole song is actually a conversation between two people who feel very strongly about the world and their place in it, even if they superficially disagree. They fundamentally agree, and their relationship seems emotionally and politically rich.

12. Really, this is the LAST point: The song should have a different title. We can't announce the song by its title because it gives away the punchline.

So. I'm sure I could go on forever (I almost did, didn't I?). But one of the reasons I like this song is that it DOES have many facets, or "devices".

www.louandpeter.com

“Why Am I Painting The Living Room” is Disk 2, track 1

CRAIG BICKHARDT

Something I heard that has stuck with me...Rodney Crowell was talking about Guy Clark and he said of Guy's work, "Every song is museum quality." I try to write museum quality songs, too, although mine would probably be in a "please touch" museum. I want them sung, handled by others, worn out. I've been very fortunate to have so many great artists sing my songs while I'm still alive. I'd hate to only find found out when I'm sitting somewhere in hell that people were finally singing what I wrote. If I had to pick one of my songs to put in the time capsule it would be "This Old House", co-written with

Thom Schuyler. That song has been embraced by so many people-listeners and singers alike- it's got the patina of a well-loved stuffed bear by now.

My songs have been recorded by: Johnny Cash, Kris Kristofferson, Ray Charles, Alison Krauss, B. B. King, David Wilcox, Art Garfunkle, Kathy Mattea, Tony Rice, Martina McBride...and others but I better stop now or you'll get mad at me!

www.craigbickhardt.com

“This Old House” is disk 2, track 1

JEFF DANIELS

RANDOM THOUGHTS ON SONGWRITING

July 22, 2010

Chelsea, MI

When I made the film, THE SQUID AND THE WHALE, it premiered at the NY Film Festival. Big hall, maybe two thousand people in attendance, a lot of hype on the film, and the Festival organizers paraded us into one of the Royal Boxes, and as we looked down upon the crowd they looked up, applauded us like Kings and Queens, and then promptly turned away as the lights went down and the movie began. In an instant, we longer existed. Perched from above, I watched what was our film become theirs. I watched them take it and it take them. It was no longer mine, no longer something I was making or doing or hoping would work. Like watching your child leave home, I wished it well.

It's the same with a good song. You experience it as you write it. You find that moment, that story, that image you want to illuminate. Combined with the right melody, chord structure, and unpredictable yet plausible rolling along of the lyric, you give it away. You hope they take it. A good song is a gift. You're doing something they can't. They are waiting to be transported. All the way back to the Greeks, to the guy at the end of the bar who says, “This one time I was hitchhikin’ through Texas...” to every fairy tale that starts with “once upon a time” - as people, as human beings we are suckers for a good story. Tell

me a story. Tell it with structure, unpredictability, originality, something only you would think of, a point of view only you would have, and when you execute it, we will recognize it as our own, and this shared piece of art, in the end, will change them. They will leave the hearing of your song different. More than they were. Maybe you moved them. Maybe you made them laugh. Maybe you just made them think. But you gave them something only you could give them. And now it's theirs.

I have a few songs that do that. They always land. They're usually from the heart, from something that bothers me, makes me happy, sad, angry, a right I want to wrong, something I honestly - key word - honestly value in my own experience and by sending that feeling through the craft of songwriting - any story well told has an engine full of nuts and bolts and many moving parts underneath its hood - it becomes universal. Every artistic experience, when shared, be it a song, play, novel, painting, film, you name it, they all hope for one thing and that's to shine a light on what it means to be human.

If I had to pick one of my own that does that on a consistent basis, it would probably be GRANDFATHER'S HAT. A song about someone who's no longer here. Someone we miss. Someone in whom we see ourselves. Someone to whom we still remember by wearing something much like they wore. This song came from my wearing this old fedora simply because I liked it, and someone walking up to me and asking, "Is that your Grandfather's hat?" I looked at him and instantly thought, "That's a song."

www.jeffdaniels.com

"My Grandfather's Hat" is Disk 2, track 3

DAVID IPPOLITO (the guitar man of Central Park)

Favorite song I've written. Best writing. I'm probably not the best judge of that. But y'know? I've been asked that question recently and my answer was this...

I love "Crazy on the Same Day" - but it's an attitude.

I love "City Song" (especially the way the lyric works in that Ira-Gershwin-Cole-Porter-way) - but it's a feeling.

So... so far I think the finest song I've written might be "Here Today"... because it's as close as I've come to putting an undeniable "Truth" in a song.

Make sense?
PEACE

- David
www.thatguitarman.com

"Here Today" is Disk 2, track 4

BABBIE GREEN
TWO HOMES

Words and Music by Babbie Green

MOMMY AND ME LIVE AT TWO-THIRTY-THREE
IT'S THAT GREEN CANOPY WITH THE DOORMAN WHO GAVE
ME THIS GUM
WHICH WAS NICE AND THIS REAL DUMB ADVICE
HE SAID I SHOULD BE TWICE AS HAPPY AS SOME KIDS

CUZ I HAVE TWO HOMES
AND FRIEDRICH SAYS TWO HOMES ARE BETTER THAN ONE
AND CUZ HE'S A GROWN-UP HE'S S'POSED TO BE RIGHT
BUT WHEREVER I AM WHEN IT'S TIME FOR GOODNIGHT
IT'S NOT THAT I ALL THAT MUCH CARE
BUT ONE OF THE KISSES I NEED ISN'T THERE

ONE SUNDAY LAST MAY MY FOLKS TOLD ME GO PLAY
WITH MY BEST FRIEND M.J. ...SHE HAD STREP THROAT
SO I WENT TO THE PARK IN MY DRESS...IT WAS NEAR DARK I
GUESS
WHEN I GOT HOME A MESS AND WE ALL GOT DIVORCED

SO NOW I HAVE TWO HOMES
 AND DADDY SAYS TWO HOMES ARE OODLES OF FUN
 WHAT CAN HE BE THINKING OF...SURELY NOT ME
 CUZ WHEREVER I AM BOTH OF THOSE GUYS SHOULD BE
 SO MOMMY SAYS LIFE ISN'T FAIR
 BUT I HATE IT WHEN SOMEONE I LOVE ISN'T THERE

NOW MY DAD HAS A BIG HOUSE WAY OUT IN DULUTH
 WITH A GOLDEN RETRIEVER AND A GIRLFRIEND NAMED RUTH
 SO I FLY THERE FOR VISITS AND TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH I
 GET AIR SICK
 AND EACH TIME I LEAVE DADDY I'M SCARED HE WILL DIE
 AND MOMMY'S SO SAD SHE DOES NOTHING BUT CRY
 SO I STEAL THINGS

AND EACH THURSDAY AT THREE MOMMY MAKES ME GO SEE
 DOCTOR STUPID McGEE...SHE SUCKS BREATHMINTS AND
 WATCHES ME DRAW
 ON THIS PAD LIKE SOME DUMB LAW SAYS BAD KIDS
 ARE SECRETLY MAD WHEN WE ALL KNOW I'M LUCKY

CUZ I HAVE TWO HOMES
 ALTHOUGH IN MY PICTURES I DRAW ONLY ONE
 WELL WHAT ARE THEY...CRAZY?...OH WHY CAN'T THEY SEE
 THAT IF SOMETHING NEEDS FIXING IT SURE ISN'T ME
 THEY'LL REMARRY THEMSELVES IF THEY CARE
 THAT WHEREVER I AM HALF OF ME ISN'T THERE

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Best songwriting advice I ever received - Frank Loesser [wrote the scores for "Guys & Dolls" and "How To Succeed In Business Without Really Trying"] regarding lyrics. A lyric is like a freight train going by when you're stopped at a railroad crossing. Each car has its company name on it. If you have to stop and try to figure out a name you couldn't quite read, you're apt to miss the whole rest of the train.

As I tell the story, choose my images, take the journey, as it were, I ALWAYS hold what I'm doing up to that.

Other best songwriting advice I ever received - from a number of folks - "Don't stop." Really. That's something I always remember as much as the one above.

Bad songwriting advice - To try to write like the stuff on the radio. I did, and it may have been a great exercise on some level...but you've got to write like yourself, whoever that is, with your own voice, and the chips will fall...in the appropriate cookies?

Hope this is useful. Being included has spruced up my day!

www.babbiegreen.com

“Two Homes” is Disk 2, Track 5

JEFF BLUMENKRANTZ

“My Heart Was Set On You”

What happened was, Sutton Foster asked me to write a song for her CD and we sat down to talk about what it might be. I already knew the tone I wanted to strike, i.e. story song in a sort of folksy Bway pop cabaret style, something with a twist, that would take advantage of Sutton's great sense of play and humor but then take a turn. She started telling me about what was going on in her personal life, i.e. she was in the process of going through a bad breakup, and I got the idea of writing the song as an imagined conversation with her ex that might take place a year later. I picked a year because that seemed to me to be the point when she might be able to have a sense of humor about it but still be really present to the pain and disappointment. Some of the specifics are hers, some are made up. The song was a little bit longer (!) when I first pitched it to her, but I was able to trim it a touch. What else can I tell you?

www.jeffblumenkrantz.com

SUTTON FOSTER SAYS: (Tony-winning actress, “Thoroughly Modern Milly,” “The Drowsy Chaperone,” “Little Women,” “Young Frankenstein)

When I am searching for material... I am drawn to the lyrics - and if they speak to me or not. Usually it's about where I am in my life. When I was putting together my album I was going through a huge break up so I found that I was drawn to more melancholy songs... about love, loss and hope for a new beginning/future etc... But it's always a combination of lyric and melody - and a personal connection.

www.suttonfoster.com

“My Heart Was Set On You” is Disk 2, track 6 sung by Sutton Foster

DEBI SMITH

Now there's a workshop we could all attend, that is going to be great! Thanks for asking me! This was a fun question. I had a hard time deciding between two songs, but I think maybe "Bob Dylan's Poetry" on my Soprano CD. My second choice is "Shadow" -- the version that the Babes released on Fax it, Charge it. I'll attach them both, in case you like one better than the other.

Dylan's poetry is a nostalgia piece for me. I really did have a crush on my high school teacher; it was fun to sift through my memories of that time and the music that was popular, and put them both elements into one song. I think other people have had similar experiences, and/or enjoy thinking about that era as well. The 60's and early 70's are a colorful and musical backdrop for a song. The images and nostalgia are fun to work with. And the music was such a powerful part of that era. Regarding melody for this particular song, I used a tinge of the celtic about the melody and guitar fingerings, which I am partial to. I think it works well with nostalgia pieces. And I included a snippet of Blowin' in the Wind by Dylan in the song, to help listeners really go back to a time and place. But I did have to get permission from Dylan to use it, which fortunately he gave to me!

Shadow - well first of all, I chose it because it was on my first CD with the Babes, so it has special meaning to me. Megon McDonough does a beautiful background vocal. I kind of fashioned the song after an image I had in my head of Peter Pan and his shadow -- a shadow

that took on its own personality and could move about separately from Peter. Have you ever had an experience with a friend, boyfriend or person that was so strong that you couldn't get them out of your head? It's almost like their shadow is following you around. I like to get images like that for songs, it helps me write. I capo'd the guitar on the 7th fret for that song, which has a totally different sound. And as for the melody, it ranges pretty high and low -- it's almost like the vocal parts are shadows of each other too. It seemed to work with the guitar sound.

That's it Chris. Have fun in NC - it's a beautiful place. That's where Megan (Smith) and I recorded our first albums together, near Boone, with Doc and Merle. Talk about nostalgia.

p.s. from Chris – I had to choose, chose “Shadow” – you can easily find “Bob Dylan’s Poetry” at iTunes

“Shadow” is Disk 2, track 7

ROBIN GREENSTEIN

I'd say "Slow Burn" is one of my best songs (and most requested); ironically, it's the most personal of my songs, and one I never thought anyone would relate to, since I wrote it about the death of my mother and my relationship with her. Yet when I perform it many people (who've lost loved ones) end up crying and becoming a mess afterwards. I never would have picked this song to be so popular.

This happened once at the Pickin' Party. I was in the round with Kelly from Dave's True Story and she just broke up after I sang it.

I think it's some of my best work because of the structure (internal rhyming) with wordy verses and then a simple refrain, and the content/allegorical chorus. BTW: I lifted Dylan's "You're Gonna Make Me Lonesome When You Go" (same descending bass line) for it. But no one ever says to me "hey! that song sounds like Dylan!"

So you never know which of your songs is going to be the one to connect with people.

The best advice I can give a songwriter is this: (note that my experience is this: most songwriters I know, including myself, write the music easily and then struggle with the words):

Write what you want to say; then look at the lyrics and see if you can figure out another way to say it that isn't cliched or using words that are in every other song on the same topic. As I had written to you previously, I do not ascribe to the strict rhyming standards of Ervin Drake, but it is good if the rhymes are exact. Of course, that can't happen every time. Have you heard Annie Dinerman's work? She is very good with exact rhymes.

Also I'd say study the greats: for me it was Joni, Dylan, Paul Simon, Jimmy Webb, and so many others. We grew up in a sea of great writers. Study Nashville songwriters for their economy of words and craftsmanship; the Tin Pan Alley guys for their elegance; and then check out the the ethereal writers, whose songs don't always make that much sense but are great anyway (Laura Nyro, Steely Dan, later Beatles, etc).

www.robingreenstein.com

“Slow Burn” is Disk 2, track 8

CRAIG CARNELIA

1. I can't say what I consider my "best" song, but I think my favorite is "What You'd Call A Dream." It was the first song I wrote after a great professional disappointment. A year had passed since that time, and though the song was truly intended to be about baseball (which I love, and which was the subject of the Off-Bway review it was written for), the song somehow became interwoven with what I had been going through. I didn't know this at the time, but the song has a beautiful undercurrent because of it.

2. This advice comes from me. Spend the time, get it right, don't lie to yourself, and in twenty years, you'll still love the song you create today.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Craig_Carnelia

“What You’d Call A Dream” is Disk 2, Track 9

GEORGE WURZBACH

I'm not sure if this fits your prescription but I thought I might want to share this anyway.

Kris Kristofferson has a song called “Here Comes That Rainbow Again”. I love this song.

The scene was a small roadside cafe,
The waitress was sweeping the floor.
Two truck drivers drinking their coffee.
And two Okie kids by the door.
"How much are them candies?" they asked her.
"How much have you got?" she replied.
"We've only a penny between us."
"Them's two for a penny," she lied.

And the daylight grew heavy with thunder,
With the smell of the rain on the wind.
Ain't it just like a human.
Here comes that rainbow again.

One truck driver called to the waitress,
After the kids went outside.
"Them candies ain't two for a penny."
"So what's it to you?" she replied.
In silence they finished their coffee,
And got up and nodded goodbye.
She called: "Hey, you left too much money!"
"So what's it to you?" they replied.

And the daylight was heavy with thunder,
With the smell of the rain on the wind.
Ain't it just like a human.

Here comes that rainbow again.

I first heard this song maybe 25 years ago at a KK concert. Walking home I said to my wife that I didn't think I could ever write a story song that would measure up to that powerful and vivid simplicity. She kicked me.

But here's the real kicker. I later found out that the song was a lyric telling of a scene from the film "The Grapes of Wrath". Wham! So that's how it works. A story song is a story AND a song. I had been trying to create two things at once. One cannot build a ladder while they're climbing it. Perhaps everyone knows this. Silly me. But I only realized it then and it changed my approach to story songs.

So I start by capturing just the story. I write it out as prose. No metric consideration, rhyme, or rhyme agents. Just the story as clear, simple and vivid as I can. When I have it, then I start to dig. I look for lyrically interesting words, opening lines, singable sounds, possible rhymes, and maybe even a hook or a title. Then I build the song.

I'm not nearly as successful with this as I would like but I do get lucky now and again. Looking back at these songs I know that I could never have written them by any other means.

The song I have attached was written this way. I found that I wanted to write a song about the rise of National Socialism in 1930's Germany. Yes you read that correctly. KK had as his inspiration "The Grapes of Wrath". I had Lina Wertmuller's "Triumph of the Will" ostensibly a document of the 1934 Nuremberg Nazi Party Rally. How did that rally come to be? How had these thugs gone from thuggery to European domination in six short years. Volumes have been written and the real answers are so beyond the scope of a song that instead I had a beer and went to bed. But I did find my story. I looked down to street level. I fashioned a story-timeline through a series of letters exchanged between two statesmen one a German and the other a Jew. I wrote the letters as prose and later hammered out the rhymes. It's called "Otto and Aaron" or maybe "Trust Me". I haven't decided. It's rough piano/vocal demo. See what you think?

Otto and Aaron

Dear Otto I am worried
 Last night I saw the man
 Who's been causing such a big commotion
 And Otto it was frightening
 How the crowd was driven mad
 So effected by his voice, his motion

Dear Aaron you're a statesman
 I'm surprised by what you think
 That man incites a beer hall mob
 Who've had too much to drink
 The times are hard, he has their ear
 But in a year they'll ask themselves, "Who was he?"
 Trust me Aaron trust me

Dear Otto it's astounding
 How he's gone from rabble rousing
 To the courting of the local gentry
 And Otto he accuses me
 And al the sons of Zion
 For the troubles that besiege our country

Dear Aaron this is politics
 You've heard it all before
 And your people are the scapegoat
 That he's been looking for
 Let him point his angry finger
 Any sane man knows you've been accused unjustly
 Trust me Aaron trust me

Dear Otto they salute him
 Like the Romans hailed their Caesar
 And he fills their hearts with fear and hatred
 Last night they broke my window
 And scrawled upon my wall
 A blood red star of David

Dear Aaron he's a criminal

We'll handle him in time
 Though perhaps for now
 It might be best that you resign
 But there are those of us who'll speak out
 And sure enough we'll stop him as he must be
 Trust me Aaron trust me
 Trust me

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George Wurzbach

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“Otto & Aaron” is Disk 2, track 10

FRANCESCA BLUMENTHAL

It's easier to tell you which song might be my best writing as indicated by its wide-ranging effect--than to tell you which is my favorite. (I have great affection for most of my songs.)

However, I will go along with the performers and listeners on this--Lies Of Handsome Men.

All I can say is I must have hit a nerve that needed hitting. It has been recorded by over 30 singers, including Cleo Laine, Margaret Whiting, Donna McKechnie and Maria Muldaur. It is in two films. And I get e-mails from all over the world requesting the sheet music. Sometimes twice a week. "Lies" was written in 1983, when no one knew I was to be a songwriter. Not even me.

I did write in my long career as a copywriter, sometimes musical

commercials.

But what is most important to me about its success, is that people feel the song is about them. And take comfort from it. One famous singer said: "That's the story of my life!" Another said to me: "How did you KNOW?" And people in the audiences react the same way. In addition to women of all ages who respond this way, I've discovered that many men who have had this experience sing about it without changing a word.

So what I am proud of is more than making a well-written song. I have given a good feeling of being understood to people who needed it.

<http://www.svhamstra.com/CABARETSINGS/CSBlumenthalFrancesca.shtml>

“The Lies Of Handsome Men” is Disk 2, Track 11

DEIRDRE FLINT

My favorite song is the one that seems to have given people the most happiness. Creating art is my way of connecting with people. I'm very much influenced by the audience I play for - I doubt I'll ever take some artistic detour down a path of something experimental or hard to comprehend. I like to write easily accessible songs that make people happy. That's why my favorite song is the song that is the audience favorite – and that's The Boob Fairy.

Technically, it might not be my best writing, but if “best writing” means writing in a way that causes people to say, “hey, I feel that way, too,” or “hey, that person thinks on my wavelength,” then for a moment there's a human connection. And that's what I like most about the artistic process.

Plastic surgery to “fix” what's wrong with your body is practically becoming the norm. If you're small, you need to get your boobs “fixed.” Women who are small chested struggle with knowing that they are attractive just the way they are and being inundated with images of what society considers attractive. This struggle involves a

bit of pain, and a lot of good humor has its roots in the power to laugh at the pain of the human condition. That's why I like this song.

Advice:

I enjoy reading books like this: "Here There and Everywhere. 100 best Beatles songs, even though I'm not a big Beatles fan.

http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/367001.Here_There_and_Everywhere

The authors explain how the Beatles came up with each song and you realize that EVERYONE struggles with : where do the songs come from? Based on how they wrote their songs it was clear they used a VARIETY of techniques. George Harrison did the randomly flipping through a book and forcing himself to write a song based on the page that he flipped to. Sounds like someone was looking for ideas, to me!!

It's comforting to know that you can use organic approaches and forced ones to write a good song.

A songwriting technique I use is I buy a copy of "Post a Secret." I rip out the pages. Everyone gets one. The thoughts on these post a secrets are so raw and honest and poignant, they make for a good song start.

That's what I got! Hope you have a great time!!! Later Gator, Deirdre
www.deirdreflint.com, www.fourbitchinbabes.com

"The Boob Fairy" is Disk 2, track 12

NANCY MORAN

Wow! Thanks for including me in this. I'm so honored! Truly. This is a difficult question to answer, because I love songs--even my own--for so many different reasons. But here's what I came up with...

I'd have to say that "Classified" embodies some of my best writing. It's not my most "commercial" song. It breaks too many rules--like it doesn't have a chorus and it's way too long, commercially speaking. But I think it's one of my best songs BECAUSE it breaks those rules!

Somehow, it works. I know it works because it's my most requested song. And people cry when I sing it. (But they ask for it again...so it must be a "good" cry.)

I can tell you why every single line is in this song. I'm not sure that I can do that with any of my other songs. And yet, they're not contrived. They each fell together and fit like a puzzle. It's an AAAA song format, which is one of my favorites. It's symmetrical - each verse starting the same way, and yet the line changes slightly showing progression.

I also think the song is unpredictable and pretty unique. I know we (songwriters) all like to THINK our songs are "unique" when in fact they aren't...but this one I believe IS. It doesn't sound like other songs. In fact, it doesn't even sound like other songs I'VE written. It's even a little bit quirky. But that's what makes it unique--and what makes it stand out--AND what makes it memorable.

I love the timeline progression it shows...and the way that it does it. (Through the ads.) I love the emotion behind the song.

And it's completely made up! Someone handed me a tiny classified ad from a company newsletter that read: "Wedding dress for sale. Size 8, tea length, ivory, never worn." I changed "worn" to "used" because "worn" doesn't sing well. And the rest was just my morbid imagination! (hahahaha!)

Actually, I think it's some of my best writing because *I* had very little to do with it. This song came from somewhere else. I just got out of the way and wrote down what The Universe handed to me on a silver platter.

It might not ever get "cut." --- But it ALWAYS gets an amazing reaction from my audience. And that's more important to me. :-)

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As far as songwriting advice is concerned...

My advice is to Write, Write, Write and KEEP writing! Write

EVERYTHING...because sometimes you have to write the "bad" ones to get to the really good stuff underneath. So, don't worry about whether it's good or not. There's plenty of time for that later. Just write!

And the best advice I ever heard was from Suzanne Vega, when I interviewed her for American Songwriter magazine. She said:
 "Keep going. Keep all those things that people think are weird about you. Those things that people try to correct. Figure out what works for you. And just keep going for it, even if it takes 10 years or 12 years or 15 years. If you have a vision, then you'll just have to keep going."

I loved that advice! Especially the part about keeping the things that other people think are weird about you! GREAT advice.

And while I don't think I ever deliberately received BAD advice, I think that I got sucked into the "Nashville thing" for quite a while...thinking that there's only ONE way to write a good song. So, to counter that, I'd probably tell someone to listen to LOTS of different styles of music...just to keep your mind open.

"Classified"

by Nancy Moran

Today I placed a classified
 One I never thought that I could do
**SW 5'6" Looking for a man
 to spend some time with me**
 I wondered if I'd get any replies
 I did, and to my wonderful surprise
 I met the most exciting man named John
 He flies me to the moon
 With just his eyes

Today I place a classified
 One that I did not expect so soon
**Moving Sale Sat
 Everything must go!
 I'm moving in with him.
 Bargain prices, No offer refused**

Good cond., hardly ever used
 I woke up in his arms today
 Tonight, I'm cooking dinner just for two
 By candlelight

Today I read a classified
 What a fitting thing for him to do
SM (not for long)
SW, Will you marry me?
Love, John
 We set the date
 I started making plans
 For marrying a military man
 He got his orders Tuesday night
 But promised he'd return before too long
 For our wedding day

Today I placed a classified
 One I never thought I'd have to do
Wedding dress for sale
size 8, tea length, ivory,
& never used
 (never used)
 I wonder what people will think of me
 When they read this
 will they pity me?
 I got the phone call yesterday
 We may have won the war
 But I lost him
 Where's the victory?

Today I placed a classified
 Wedding dress for sale and never used...

"Classified" is Disk 2, track 13

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