



Songwriting – College or Not?

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POSTED ON JANUARY 15, 2020

POSTED IN HPME, SONGWRITING

Do you have to go to college to learn to be a songwriter?

The answer is 'No', but I suggest you read on to see why this answer may be 'Yes'.

When I went to college, there were no formal songwriting programs. I learned by writing, listening and being overly passionate about writing songs. I started writing songs and became obsessed with the process in my late twenties. I made many many mistakes along the way. I'm not sure if I would want to have learned any other way, but it would have saved me a lot of time if there was a course I could have taken.

Songwriting is an art-form. Songs often tell stories with emotional journeys which are heard and felt by an audience (the listener). Well-written songs can achieve many great things. They *can* be powerful and deliver a world-wide message, make you want to sing along, make you want to dance, lift/inspire/sadden/exalt, evoking any emotion, fill your whole being with a feeling of enormous energy, rage, anger or calm, bring special focus to a particular subject, can have a positive influence on the human consciousness, help to accomplish good things, create that special something that bonds people together, motivate groups of people to work together, help you improve your listening skills, change the way you listen to people, make you laugh, and make you feel good or bad about yourself. Well-written songs are very powerful.

In my years in the music industry, I have observed that there are songwriters who have limited formal songwriting education but have an innate knack for penning an emotion into music and lyric. Their knowledge of how they write songs comes from imitating songs they have heard and through experimentation using the instrument that they play to write songs with. These songwriters write based on their drive and passion to do so. Some are singer-songwriters performing their own songs, others are non-performing songwriters who utilize and rely on instrumentalists and vocalists to help interpret their songs.

I have also seen songwriters with more advanced skillsets who can write a song about almost anything. They may have developed their writing skills by listening and imitating songs in the same way as the songwriter who hasn't had formal training, but they may also have also learned the craft studying the art of songwriting by attending one of the few college/university music departments that offer the subject.

These formal songwriting programs focus on the music, lyric and the business of music. Subjects include: developing melody, harmony and rhythm, song structure, lyric writing, rhyming, the marriage of music and lyric, recording demos, pitching songs, copyright and ownership, and performance rights organizations (PRO).

These programs often provide an environment where a songwriter can play their song for their peers and get objective feedback helping make them a better songwriter. The ability to play one's song in a nurturing environment is invaluable. This unparalleled experience of *song feedback song analytics*, and *song critiques* is most essential to a songwriter.

Songwriters armed with this knowledge may then gain the ability to write in most genres about subjects ranging from an object, or for a background that fits to a dramatic action in a TV/film plot. They may also have gained the ability to create songs on assignment.

There are also songwriters who write for musical theatre. These songwriters have a special skillset to write for an emotional moment in a scene, move the dramatic action forward and paint nuances of the character singing.

With all you can learn about songwriting in a formal songwriting program, you would assume that it is key to becoming a great songwriter. But please remember, these formal learning experiences do not provide the songwriter with the main ingredient that all great songs need to possess, which is passion and truth. These qualities must come from the individual songwriter. What these programs do offer is the opportunity to study and work on the craft of songwriting in a safe and nurturing environment, an environment where you are often pushed outside your comfort zone, where there are peers with whom to work with and co-write songs, and where often there are many experts to ask questions and to receive feedback from throughout the course of study.

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