

## Online Course at Berklee: Learning From the Masters

By Zane Kuchera ([www.zanekuchera.com](http://www.zanekuchera.com))

Hi BSW folks,

I'm a third of the way through my first [berkleemusic.com](http://berkleemusic.com) on-line course and I thought I'd share my thoughts and insights with you about the experience so far.

This first in a series of three classes is part of the Specialist Certificates called "Lyric Writing: Tools and Strategies". All of the books are written by the very talented Pat Pattison, a professor at Berklee College of Music. When I attended the college last year, his name and classes would pop

up every few days in conversation as "must take" classes for songwriting, so I was thrilled to have the opportunity to learn from a master - even while sitting at home in my PJs. No commuting, no bother, no fuss. Ah, telecommuting.

Pat Pattison isn't actually teaching the online course, but the class is using his books and his teaching methods. A brilliant lyricist from Nashville, Andrea Stolpe, directs the online course, providing daily feedback on assignments - virtually. There are twenty

students from all over the planet that execute the daily written assignments, review and comment on one another's work, and meet once each week for an online chat. I am impressed by the fact that there is more class interaction and student feedback online than I experienced while physically present in the classrooms at Berklee. Perhaps part of the reason is the maturity of the class online, and the grading scheme which is partly based on responding to postings by classmates.

(See *Online*, p. 2)

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## Little Things Mean a Lot

By Danny Arena and Sara Light

(Editor's Note: This article is one of two articles by Danny Arena and Sara Light; go to [www.craftofsongwriting.com/Column8.htm](http://www.craftofsongwriting.com/Column8.htm) to learn more.)

When you listen to a song, you probably notice that the music contains certain phrases or ideas which repeat themselves throughout the song. We call these musical phrases motifs or themes. They may be as short as a few notes (like the first four notes of "America the Beautiful") or several measures in length. A motif may be melodic, rhythmic, harmonic, or a combination of these. But every time you hear the motif in the song, it registers in your brain as something you've heard before and that makes the song easier to remember.

One problem you face as a songwriter is constantly striving to

achieve the perfect balance between repetition and change. Too much repetition and the music becomes boring. Too little repetition and the music isn't easily remembered. A songwriting trick often employed by composers to help achieve this balance is called "variation." A variation is simply a subtle change in the motif when repeating it. The variation may be a change of only one or two notes but it is a very important change. Let's look at how variation works in a hit song.

Songwriter Hall of Fame nominees, Billy Edd Wheeler and Roger Bowling wrote the Kenny Rogers classic, "Coward Of The County." I recently spoke with Billy Edd about his use of variation and he said he likes to make subtle changes to the melody because it helps to keep it interesting and less predictable. Here's the four-measure chorus motif: (Please refer to web site to view the sample.)

By itself, the above four measures do not make up a motif. It becomes a motif or musical theme when repeated either in whole or part of its original form. Watch what happens a little later in the chorus: From "Coward Of The County" © 1978 Sleepy Hollow Music/Roger Bowling Music. Used by permission. (Please refer to web site to view the example.)

These four measures are essentially a repeat of the first four measures, establishing it as a musical motif. Here the melody and rhythms are essentially the same as the first four measures. However, there are several songwriting variations that take place. Notice the additional notes at the start of the motif in example 1b. Two syllables ("It won't") replace the one syllable ("Prom"). In the second measure there is a slight rhythmic variation between "...if you turn..." and "...not to do...". There's also a melodic variation in the third measure of the motif. In example 1b, the melody dips down to the note F before approaching the note G, whereas in example 1a, the note G is approached from above by the note A.

(See *Little Things*, page 2)

***We're on the web:* [www.bostonsongwriters.org](http://www.bostonsongwriters.org)**

*Mark Your Calendar*

**Upcoming BSW Meetings: August 9<sup>th</sup> and September 12<sup>th</sup>**

(Meeting details and directions are on page four)

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This Lyric Writing Tools and Strategies class is designed to help the songwriter generate ideas for the lyric, create imagery, rhythm, rhyme, and effective contrast between sections. One of the daily assignments is to perform "Object Writing". This technique involves sensory writing for just 10 minutes, preferably in the morning, to wake up your inner writer. Sensory Writing is writing about a physical object from sensory memory. These senses are Sight, Sound, Taste, Touch, Smell, Body, and Motion. Writing from sensory memory gives imagery to your writing. Here's an example of what occurs in a typical 10 minute Object Writing session:

The word is "bait". Here's several seconds of sensory writing for that word: "Sticky, slimy inchworms the color of mocha frappuccino slithered in between my fingers. Writhing from the piercing I made with my hook. We sat and gazed at a silent sky, too early in the morning for me to remember whether I had my coffee yet. The boat slowly rocked back and forth, the swashing of the water under the rudder gave a slight swallow as I focused on a patch of cattails in the distance. A faint smell of earth and worm mucus rose from the bucket at the floor of the canoe."

So, how do you relate Object Writing to song lyrics? One gem of information I learned in this class is that all of your 'showing details' are verse material, and all of your 'telling material' is for the chorus. This means that 'telling material' should not provoke an emotion or image. Object Writing is for the verse.

One final bit of wisdom imparted to the class by the professor was to "Write what you believe to be true, not what you think others want to hear".

I highly recommend Berkleemusic.com, especially the songwriting classes. Give one a try! ♪

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Zane has been a member of BSW, NOMTI, BACA, and ASCAP since 2001. He has released 2 CDs, attended Berklee College Of Music, and owns a Project Recording Studio at his home in Waltham where he works with local singer/songwriters to produce their music. Zane also designs websites for individual musicians and performance organizations.

## Give Your Song a "Lift" By Danny Arena and Sara Light

(Editor's Note: This article is one of two articles by Danny Arena and Sara Light; to learn more go to [www.craftofsongwriting.com/Column7.htm](http://www.craftofsongwriting.com/Column7.htm))

Many songs incorporate a distinct section of music that separates the end of the verse from the start of the chorus. This songwriting device, commonly known as a "lift" (also called a climb, pre-chorus, pre-hook, set-up and channel) is used to draw the listener's attention to the start of the chorus. When successfully executed, a lift builds momentum and excitement, and adds to the power of the chorus. In this article, we'll look at two simple techniques that will help to keep the lifts of your song soaring.

### Little Things, Continued from page 1

This is a great example of repetition with variation, making the chorus to "Coward Of The County" both memorable and interesting.

Remember, little changes can add a lot musically to your song. ♪

*Melodic Tension.* Melodically speaking, the verse in a song is usually lower than the chorus. Because higher melodic pitches are more exciting than lower ones, they are saved for the chorus. You can almost think of the lift as being a "melodic escort" that walks the listener from the end of the verse into the exciting chorus. The lift creates a melodic tension that is resolved at the start of the chorus. A great example of a lift that does just this is the Trisha Yearwood song, "She's In Love With The Boy", (songwriter - Ims).

From "She's In Love With The Boy" © 1991 Warner/Elektra/Asylum Music, Rites of Passage Music. Used by permission. (Please refer to web site to view example.)

Notice that the melody at the end of the verse of this song hovers between the notes B and E. As soon as the lift begins, the melody immediately moves into a higher range, concentrating between the notes D and G. When the second half of the lift starts ("But Katie's young..."), the melody shifts upward again, climbing its way toward the start of the chorus. This gradual upward climb in the "lift" builds up a melodic tension gets resolved as soon as we hit the title line in the start of the chorus which is perfect timing.

*Rhythmic Tension.* Another songwriting technique to create tension in the lift is to change the pace of the chords or the rhythms. By quickening the pace at which the notes or chords change, you can create a rhythmic tension which is resolved at the start of the chorus. For example, if the chord changes are once per measure in the verse, change them twice per measure in the lift. If the predominant melodic rhythm in the verse is quarter notes, change to eighth notes in the lift. Let's take a look at the lift from the song, "(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman" (songwriter - King/Goffin/Wexler), which has been on the charts three times for three different artists, most recently with Celine Dion. (Please refer to the web site to view the example.)

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## LIFT, Continued from page 2

The chords only change once every two measures throughout the verse ("Looking out on the morning rain..."). But when the lift starts ("before the day I met you..."), the chords change every measure, thereby building momentum throughout the lift. Also in the verse - some words are split across two measures. But in the last line of the lift ("but your love was the key..."), the rhythmic pattern changes so that more syllables occur per measure. This helps the song build up even more momentum and excitement heading into the start of the chorus where we're immediately hit with the song's hook.

So that's all there is to it. Just remember to make your lift build musically - and then when you hit the chorus, it will really pay off. ♪

*"Both start with an initial flash of inspiration, then take a hell of a lot of work to make it into reality."*



- Every person on earth would solve these problems (both little and big) a little bit differently.
- Even trying to imitate someone else's creation will make your own unique version of it. Imitation is a great way to learn. Humans are imperfect mirrors.
- I resist starting. I'll make 1000 distractions for myself.
- But once I start, and get into it, it's the best thing in the world and I don't want to stop.
- It makes me jump out of bed at 2 AM wanting to try the ideas in my head to see if they work.
- Too much repetition, and it's boring. Not enough repetition, and it's hard to understand. (In programming's case this means the code, not the final product)
- Once you're done you want to show off your creation to the world.
- Some people work best in collaboration like a day job. Others work best all alone, creating late into the night.
- Some like to draw charts on paper, analyze, discuss. Others like to just shut up and do it, letting the creation speak for itself.
- Both start with an initial flash of inspiration, then take a hell of a lot of work to make it into reality.
- Being the programmer in the company is like being the songwriter in the band. You're the one that creates the thing that the rest of the organization is there to promote and support.
- It's best to keep the "suits", the business-folks, away from the creative process, until you have something you're ready to show them.
- Your creation is often judged by how much money it could make, though that's another way of saying "how many people will like it enough to pay money to have it".
- ...though if even a few people's lives are made better by your creation, that's satisfaction enough.
- Most real songwriters and programmers would be doing this even if they never made a dime.
- The sly programmer or musician puts little things in the final product that the general public will never notice, but a few peers in-the-know will catch the subtle trick and laugh out loud in admiration. (Or even if nobody else notices, it's an immense sense of self-satisfaction.)
- Some of your worst songs or programs had a brilliant idea inside, that you can re-use many times. ♪

For more information: <http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/wlq/4984>

## Programming is Like Songwriting

By Derek Sivers

*Derek Sivers is the founder, president, and sole programmer behind CD Baby, independent music distribution.*

From 1988 to 2000 I made my full-time living making music. I used to spend a huge amount of my time writing songs, lyrics, melodies, grooves, tracks, arrangements, etc.

As I get more and more into programming, I'm constantly struck with how similar it feels to songwriting.

I'll name a few ways that come to mind so far, and then maybe some other musician/programmers can contribute some more to the list.

- It starts with a vague concept of something that could/should exist, then is slowly crafted towards that vision, like a sculpture.
- Both songwriting and user-interface design make you constantly put yourself in the audience's shoes - to make sure they understand what you're trying to express. Will they understand your turn of phrase? Will they know where to click to complete the form?
- Both songwriting and user-interface design need to hold the audience's attention all the way through, knowing that one wrong decision might lose them forever.
- One big problem really wraps around dozens of little problems. Finding the right chord, the right query, the right phrase, the right page-layout. These little problems are the addictive potato chips that keep me going.

### NEW ONLINE SUBSCRIPTION SERVICE

The Boston Globe reported a couple of months ago that Yahoo Inc. is launching an online music subscription service which aggressively competes against RealNetworks and Napster with lower pricing. According to the Globe Yahoo is offering an introductory price of \$4.99 per month for an annual subscription. It lets people play tunes from a catalog of more than 1 million songs, transfer tracks to portable devices and share music with friends through Yahoo! Messenger. ♪

