

# Friday Easy Jam with Joe Cribbin

## Handout No.4 - 16-04-2020

### using Chance Elements in Song writing

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I hope this finds you all well. In this week's worksheet we will be looking at different techniques that use chance elements, it is suitable for both lyricists and musicians. It's ideal if you're stuck in a song writing rut or just want to extend your song writing skills or relieve the monotony of Lockdown. It's meant to be a bit of fun too so drop your inhibitions and dive in. Also I will be including my own random element in the worksheet see if you can spot them.

#### Some Background

Many artforms incorporate elements of chance or random acts. During the 1920's the Dada movement incorporated chance or random elements into their work. Artists like Marcel Deauchamp. *\*I can hear a lamb bleating from my window.* Deauchamp was the godfather of conceptual art and created musical pieces that used chance elements, one piece *Erratum Musical* written for three voices, was eventually published in 1934. Other DADA artists. I can hear a bass line and a motorbike revving. Francis Picabia and Georges Ribemont Dessaignes performed their chance compositions at the festival of DADA in Paris 1920. *\*Birds singing but another motorbike revs past drowning out it's song.*



Hans Arp Untitled

Artists like Hans Arp used collage by dropping cut out pieces of paper on to a card which he would stick down wherever they fell rather than arrange them neatly or 'consciously'.

Other artists like Jackson Pollock are said to have used elements of chance in their drip paintings rather than carefully apply the paint with a brush stroke Jackson Pollock would 'drip' paint on to the canvas. *\*The squeak of the bus brakes is reassuring but the hiss of a water jet unnerves me.*

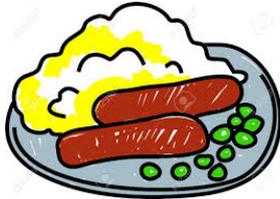
In music using chance elements has been described as '**Aleatoric music**' derived from the Latin 'Alea' meaning dice. Footsteps over a plank of wood. Water being emptied from a bucket. Composers using this musical form include John Cage American composer whose composition *Music of Changes* (1951) has been described as the first composition largely determined by random procedures.

*\*Sweet bird singing, Magpie croaking neighbour laughing.*

## Some Random exercises

The following exercises incorporate random elements, they are meant to prompt you into writing, some are silly others are more complicated but they are all designed to get your creative juices flowing and thinking about music. They are not a magic formula but they should give you something to work with, if not a giggle at least. Have fun and give them a go. \**Young child's footsteps running on concrete.*

- **Sausage(s) and Mash**



This is a fun game designed to help you think about lyric arrangement and phrasing. Lyrics are designed to fit a specific rhythm and observe fairly strong rules so they fit properly. In this exercise choose one of your favourite songs and sing along to it but wherever there is a word beginning with the letter 'S' insert the word Sausage(S) instead and you guessed it, wherever there is a word beginning with the letter 'M' insert the word 'Mash' instead. Listen to how the song phrasing has changed.

For Example here is the Eurythmics classic 'Sweet Dreams'

*'Sausage Dreams are mash of this/ Who am I to disagree?/I travel the world and the sausage sausages,'*

Annie Lennox would be turning in her gravy. Ok silly, yes, try it on other songs and even introduce different food stuffs like eggs or bacon. Think about how the rhythm of the song changes by throwing in a random element, does it still sit rhythmically, or does it destroy the song? Is it the meaning of the word or the rhythm which is important to how the song works?

- **The Spangle Dance**

The history of pop music is littered with songs about dances the mash potato is mentioned in the song 'The Twist' by Chubby Checker. There's so many of them, The Macarena, Gangnam Style, The Time Warp, YMCA. Your task is to write a short song or a few verses based on a new dance craze called '**The Spangle**'.

Devise your own steps and write your own lyrics for this completely new dance craze sweeping the nation of your imagination. Feel free to have your dancers do anything that is ridiculous or super human even. For example sailing in a fridge, hailing down a submarine, holding hands with a mangle etc... hey everybody Lets do the spangle.... This dance can be about anything you want!



A good reference for surreal dances is the lobster Quadrille from Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland

"Will you walk a little faster?" said a whiting to a snail.

"There's a porpoise close behind us, and he's treading on my tail.

See how eagerly the lobsters and the turtles all advance!

They are waiting on the shingle—will you come and join the dance?

## Random Cut and paste



In this exercise we are going to employ chance elements and use them as a starting point for our writing. Find an old newspaper or magazine and turn to one of the pages roughly in the middle. Take the first thing that you read on that page and write it down as one of your lyrics. Next if you have a radio switch on your favourite station and write down the first phrase or part of a song you can hear. Switch on the TV and write down the first phrase you hear on the Television, make sure you have switched off the radio at this point.

Take these different elements write them down on a page together use them as a starting point for writing a few verses. If you like you can repeat this exercise and cut out several phrases from the newspaper and TV to build up and archive of random phrases that you can use as a basis for writing a lyric.

- **Random Chord progression in the Key of C**

**C major scale notes:** C D E F G A B C

- **Major key chord sequence:** Maj min min Maj Maj min dim

Degree	I	ii	iii	IV	V	vi	vii
Chord	Cmaj	Dmin	Emin	Fmaj	Gmaj	Amin	Bdim
7 <sup>th</sup> chords	Cmaj7	Dmin7	Emin7	Fmaj7	G7	Amin7	Bm7b5

Often Musicians get stuck in a rut playing the same chords or chord progressions each time, so it can be useful to introduce an element of chance to shake it up a bit and generate some fresh harmonic ideas.

In the diagram above are the chords for the key of C Major. Make a copy or cut out the chords above, place them in a hat and randomly choose 4 of them and place them on a table in front of you. Play each chord you have randomly selected for one bar each. If you like the sound of it why not include it in your next composition? Repeat the exercise and choose the chord progressions that you like. Remember we are trying to get away from playing what you might typically play so if that's the case repeat until the exercise till you find something new. Try it for different Keys too don't just have to stick with C Major. Have fun Enjoy and Stay Safe.

*\*Plates clanging for dinner birds still singing -*

*\*throughout writing this I have been adding random elements I hear from my window. Have fun enjoy.*