



Friday Easy Jam Joe Cribbin

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Writing and performing love songs

'If music be the food of love, play on' William Shakespeare

The story of music is littered with thousands of love songs which is probably why whenever you've had your heart broken, every song on the radio is suddenly speaking directly to you. In this handout we will be looking at love songs and at different ways to approach writing them and performing them.

I believe a love song must contain an honest outpouring of the heart, the sincerity of the emotion is vital and as with everything keeping it simple is often the best way.

KIS – Keep it simple

Al Green's song 'Lets stay together' listen to the lyric of the first line in the song. 'I..... I'm so in love with you'. Well he is laying out his stall fairly early there, there is no messing around he is straight in there putting his heart on his sleeve and letting that person know that they love them. It's upfront and personal and clear this person is in love, there's no if's no buts the lyric is clear and precise. Also it's in the first person.

Writing in the first person



If you are writing a love song it can help to write in the first person so you can use 'I' instead of 'they' and address that person directly, you can imagine you are talking to them by whispering in their ear if you like. For example Dolly Parton's 'I will always love you' contains the line 'I will always love you' as the chorus, It's about I and You and no one else is in the picture, it feels like a personal conversation and what's more it's the title of the song too.

Using a line or a hook line from your songs as the title of the song

As mentioned above using your title within the song often as the hook or chorus can help reinforce the message of the song. For example, 'Love will tear us apart' by Manchester's finest post punk party band use this technique. Remember it doesn't have to be the whole line it can just be part of it and this technique can be used in lots of songs not just love songs.



Writing and performing from different perspectives



'Nothing Compare's to You' was written by Prince but made famous by Ireland's favourite daughter Sinead O'Connor.

If you find a song you like you can always represent it, from a female perspective from a male perspective or eliminate gender from the song completely. Try it out on a couple of songs and see if it scans, 'they've got a ticket to ride', 'they're leaving home' by the Beatles ok may need work.

Say it like you mean it



Whatever you are singing or performing if you don't say it like you mean it or write it like you mean it your audience won't be convinced. That is not to say you have to have experienced every single emotion of the protagonist in your song but try to perform it in such a way that your audience is convinced of it. If you haven't already, check out the American recordings by Jonny Cash for a masterclass in song interpretation and delivery.

Break all the above rules/suggestions

There is always room for cynicism and bitterness even in a great love song, Take Amy Winehouse Back to Black this is a song of heart break regret and loneliness.

*We only said goodbye with words
I died a hundred times
You go back to her
And I go back to

Black*

A great love song doesn't have to be all syrupy sweet it can have a sting in the tail, like 'Love will tear us apart' from Joy Division or Sting's 'Every Breeze you take'. This is a song which has been the first dance at many weddings but has a deeply unpleasant undercurrent of bitterness running through it.



Tasks

Write one verse for the opening of your own love song, are your words convincing are they honest and true even if you are essentially making them up? You are a writer after all that is allowed.

Sing along to one of your favourite love songs and try writing an additional verse in the same vein, can you extend the story or add an extra twist to it?

You've been asked to clear out a neighbour's attic and you find a forgotten love letter from 80 years ago amongst their papers. Blow the dust off imagine what the letter says, who it's from and who it is too, write a few verses and put them to song.

Have fun, seriously you can make it funny and cynical too listen to Gram Parsons Dead Flowers here's the chorus:

*you can send me dead flowers every morning
Send me dead flowers by the mail
Send me dead flowers to my wedding
And I won't forget to put roses on your grave*

Write a few verses of your own love song with a twist in the tale.