

GETTING STARTED:

"We start with the concept, the theme of the song, what it is going to be about."

- Feleti Strickson-Pua (Nesian Mystic)

"I tend to start with a guide bass (line), I usually spend a couple of hours just mucking around improvising. One song I had a drum pattern, a bass line, and a chord progression and an idea of a melody for the chorus long before I wrote the lyrics."

- Sean Donnelly-SJD (Making Music)

"I muck around on guitar a lot... I'll just play around with noises so it's a good idea to get myself away from the TV, distractions and people and find a space where no one will interrupt me. You've got to get into the 'zone'... but then I'll just come across a melody and it starts repeating and it "feels" strong. It starts to have its own life and once that starts to happen I'll follow it as far as I can."

- Lindon Puffin

'STARTER' IDEAS TO TRY:

Pick a colour, e.g. red

Pick an emotion that suits, e.g. love/anger

Pick a texture/temperature, e.g. crunchy/burning

Pick a season/time, e.g. summer/dawn

Write a sentence about what each of these things means to you.

You will end up with 4 sentences, your first verse!

- Huia Hamon

To explore contrasting melodies and for fun, find a famous song you like and write new words to it. (There are copyright laws protecting existing melodies so you won't be able to claim this as your own.) Change the chords and try to use the melody shape from the famous song to write your own.

Use the chords from a song you don't know to write your melody.

Nobody can copyright a chord progression.

Start by choosing a title first... then write the Chorus
(you won't need many lyrics - use repetition).

Now, write the verses.

Useful and free NZ song writing websites:

www.theset.co.nz www.nzmusic.org.nz www.musesmuse.com/res-beginners

International sites:

Full song writing processes and exercises available for free download:

www.robinfrederick.com/write

Useful tips and interesting short articles on everything about song writing and performing your own songs: www.irenejackson.com/tips

NZMC wish to thank these great NZ song writers (many of whom are also musicians mentoring in schools) for their contribution here. THE 'MAKING MUSIC' DVD of 40 NZ artists was produced by NZMC for the MŌE in 2005 and distributed to all NZ secondary schools.



Victoria Girling-Butcher



Shona Laing



Feleti Strickson-Pua

SONGWRITING TIPS FROM NEW ZEALAND SONGWRITERS



LYRICS: WHAT TO WRITE ABOUT?

"Write from your own experiences."
- **Wayne Mason**

"It (rapping) is best achieved by using witty lines, punch lines, double meanings, metaphors."
- **Mareko - Decepticonz (Making Music)**

"Write about what you know. If you don't know anything about space travel and riding a unicycle - it probably wouldn't speak truthfully in a song you are singing."
- **Jeremy Mayall aka One Fat Man.**

"Be realistic. There are no guns, we are not niggers, and we're Pacific Islanders, Maoris, and Kiwis. None of that gangster stuff going on."
- **Savage - Decepticonz (Making Music)**

"My rules are: stick to one idea, focus sharply on a time or place, be personal not vague, use short words rather than long, be particular not vague... Writing about your own place is the easiest thing because it's what you know best."
- **Don McGlashan**

"I look for words that have atmosphere and create good images to fire the imagination."
- **Neil Finn**

"Obscure lyrics are just that. Obscure. Not clever. Not even interesting!"
- **Charlotte Yates**

"There are no rules in song writing, if it feels right stick with it."
- **John Michaelz.**



Godfrey DeGrut



Wayne Mason



Charlotte Yates

ON KEEPING A JOURNAL:

"Keep your lyrics in a book along with song titles, chord sequences and other ideas."
- **Greg Johnson**

"I write the words down as they come - on old paper bags, anything."
- **Hera**

"I keep a journal every day. I like to know what I want to say first. Writing down your dreams and everything that passes through you, what ever 'sticks' write it down, don't judge it, just write it down and keep it. Most of my core ideas for songs have come from the journal."
- **Don McGlashan**

"Keep pumping out some word pictures and images whether they be emotional, romantic, political or whatever. I like the idea of lyrics being poetic without you noticing they are."
- **Dave Dobbyn**

"I record into a Dictaphone but if I can't remember it the next day, it's not a very good song."
- **Jordan Luck (Making Music)**

"Don't edit! Just write - write variations and versions in a big A3 journal non-stop! Fill the pages. After you have exhausted yourself writing without looking back THEN you can revisit what you have done. Circle the sentences or phrases that work..."
- **Hannah Howes**

COPY THE GREAT SONG WRITERS:

"Keep an open mind and be aware of the music that has come before you."
- **Godfrey de Grut.**

"By studying other songs I discovered it's better to keep the words really short. eg. trying to put 'Kaleidoscope' in is quite hard."
- **The Black Seeds. (Making Music)**

"If you're really serious and have a real passion for this hip hop music, best would be to research, listen to as many people as you can, read and absorb everything that relates to your craft, build your vocab and watch the Discovery channel."
- **Mareko - Decepticonz (Making Music)**

"Read lots and lots...different types of books... get a feel for different styles of writing then put into practice... melodies will find their own way in."
- **Mark Vanilau**

"I love all music, from Metallica to Beethoven to indigenous music and the Wiggles. To make a good hip-hop track, people cannot close their minds to a specific genre. You can develop any music into hip-hop."
- **King Kapisi**

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT:

"Don't let good ideas escape, when they arrive, spend time with them."
- **Wayne Mason**

"When you start writing a song, the first ideas, try to finish it in the moment or as quick as you can. It's so easy to let ideas lie around and then you can lose 'contact' with them..."
- **David Kilgour.**

"Embrace your weirdness. It is the things you do differently that people remember and enjoy!"
- **Jeremy Mayall aka One Fat Man**

"It may flow easy for some but it needs some love and attention just like a flower. Your style will start to evolve. There are no wrongs, just different styles."
- **Huia Hamon**

"Write five or six rough lyrics, even when they are not that great. Take advantage of inspiration when it hits."
- **Dianne Swann**

"I always find that the music, words and melody find me when it wants to. It's like it floats around in the air and catches you and makes it yours, I can't switch it on or off. I have to be patient with it and let it arrive when it needs or wants to."
- **Anika Moa**

CHORDS AND MELODY

"I wish I had made more contrast between my choruses and verses earlier."
- **Charlotte Yates**

"Keep it simple - the style comes later."
- **Don McGlashan**

"When I was younger I tried to write songs by putting together a whole lot of different ideas but it sounded too disjointed. It's better to choose just a couple of good ideas and not broaden them out too much, coz' it gives the song more unity and makes it stronger. The verse and chorus relate to each other in some way instead of being completely different."
- **The Black Seeds (Making Music)**

WHAT MAKES A GOOD SONG?

"Pop songs are basically as modular as Lego. The building blocks are the verse, the chorus and the bridge. A 'hook' is considered a critical element for a hit song. A hook is a short instrumental or vocal feature that is easily recognized, often repeated and with luck, unforgettable."
- **Charlotte Yates.**

"There is a pop sensibility and in a Ramones sense, keep it short, keep it concise and if the lyrics suit the melody you may only need seven lines. Essentially you go with your first feeling with lyrics instead of changing them too much."
- **Jordan Luck (Making Music)**

"An emotion, feeling or message always underpins a good song. 'It sounds good' is not enough in my opinion. Ask yourself, 'what am I trying to convey here?' and do what you can to support that feeling or idea in the song."
- **Brent Strathdee, aka D J Definite**