

## SONG DESIGN BASICS

Song Design is about deciding what your song is about. Writing a song can start anywhere – but it's worth giving your subject matter some solid thought before you start getting really down and dirty in your song. These decisions are usually pretty fundamental and affect all kinds of other decisions you make later in your song.

In a nutshell, great songs focus on a single idea. The acid test of whether you've found this yet is whether you can summarize your song's message as a single sentence.

Also: great songs tell great stories. The situation and the people involved are what really draw people in. We're story junkies – we want to know about what's going on in other people's lives. Usually this means coming up with song stories that are both **specific** – specific people and a specific situation – but also **universal** – a specific version of an experience most of us have been through, like falling in love, falling out of love, or other things nothing to do with love.

Often, deciding on your song's story means creating material and ideas you won't actually use in your song directly. But somehow they'll be in there – they'll inform lots of other choices you make. And most of all, once you know what's going on inside your song you'll create with the kind of confidence that makes the rest of us feel like you know what you're talking about. (And that helps a lot.)

Typically, Song Design comes down to four key questions:

- Who is singing?
- Who are they singing to?
- What are they trying to say?
- Why do they want to say it?

You don't have to go knee-deep into Freudian psychoanalysis to find good answers: often the simplest answers are the best. You'll find most great songs have solid and engaging answers to all of these questions – and, importantly, they stick to those answers the whole way through.

There are all kinds of ways of answering these questions in your next song, but overleaf there's a Song Design Cheat Sheet you can use.

Some people find the suggestion of filling in a premade list super patronizing. Some people love the structure a specific list gives them. With a bit of luck, you'll find the questions it asks and the process it suggests helpful either way.

## SONG DESIGN CHEAT SHEET

<b>Here's why this situation is SPECIFIC:</b>	<b>Here's why this situation is UNIVERSAL:</b>
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### **Who is singing?**

Who are they? What kind of person are they?

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### **Who are they singing to?**

What is the relationship between this person (or these people) and the person singing?

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### **What are they trying to say?**

You've struck gold on this when you can summarize it in a single sentence.

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### **Why do they want to say it?**

What happened to make them want to say it? What are they trying to achieve by saying it?