

EPISODE 001

# How to turn your Listeners Into your Fans

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See the show notes at [www.storiesinsongs.com/001](http://www.storiesinsongs.com/001)

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Lyrics: Welcome to the Black Parade © Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC, Blow The Doors Off Chicago

**[00:00:00]** Hello, hello. This is Melanie. Welcome to my very first episode of the stories in songs podcast. I'm so excited being here with you and starting the journey with you to turn the people who occasionally listen to your songs into your fans.

That sounds amazing? Doesn't it?

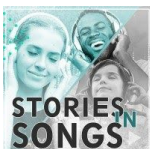
Finally reaching all those people out there who can relate to what your songs are about, who understand the message of what's important to you framed by the music that flows right through your veins.

And let me tell you this, it's not even a secret of how you can turn the casual listener into your fan. A fan, let's define that word for a moment to see the impact that this little three-letter word has: A fan is someone who will order your album even before it is released, who buys tickets to your shows right the moment the ticket sale starts and best of all to whom you become the most trusted person they can turn to because your songs have managed something, sometimes not even their friends or family can achieve: connecting with them on a deeply personal level that they might have not even dared to consciously feel. Through that, you've made their lives better simply by expressing the feelings that they couldn't understand themselves.

**[00:01:19]** Even in this very first episode, I can reveal the secret of turning your audience to fans.

Heck, it's the name of the podcast. So I know you've already figured it out of how to turn listeners into fans – by telling captivating stories in songs. And through building a fanbase you reach even more people because if people love what you do, they'll tell their friends and sometimes, they won't be able to stop talking about you.

It's not a secret at all. It's a craft that you can learn.



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So you guessed right.

**[00:01:54]** This show is for everyone who loves telling stories. Especially if you are in a band, a musician, a songwriter or a topliner OR even when you just love songs that take you right into the moment of memories filled with emotions, inciting events or find some kind of advice when you face a challenge and have no idea how to overcome it.

But well, there's one thing I got to mention.

Even if I tell you that telling stories in your songs is the key to unlocking this amazing world of fans, it's not as simple as that.

**[00:02:29]** As already said, storytelling is a craft.

When you're a writer of a novel, you don't just sit down, pour out those 80.000 words and your first draft is your finished manuscript.

It doesn't work like that, at least not for the majority of writers, who is everyone except of Stephen King.

Every writer who tells stories needs to edit their stories. Because the first draft of a story is not a working draft. It's just there to give you an idea of what you wanted to express with that story. So you need to refine it and work on it until it's the best thing that you can create at that moment in your life.

And as soon as you start telling a story, the audience has an expectation. And it's your responsibility as a storyteller to satisfy or even exceed that expectation. If you don't deliver what you've promised them, they'll turn away.

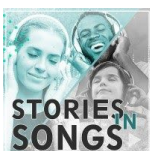
Just think of the last book you've read or the last movie you've seen that you didn't enjoy. Could it have been the reason why you didn't like it because you had higher or different expectations?

The same is valid for musicians.

**[00:03:36]** Just imagine the following scenario: If you're a band who's known for singing love songs, then singing love songs is what your audience expects of you.

Now you have a new album that comes out. Amazing. And they are mostly love songs, too. So your listeners will get what they expect from you: deliver them compelling songs that touch their hearts. BUT you have this one song on that album that's not about love. It might be about the difficulties of growing up or about being true to yourself in a world that's too full of prejudices, but you choose that song as your first single to promote your album.

Now guess what happens?



Two things actually happen:

First, the people who are not fans but who like your music enough because they come to you for listening to great love songs will think that this album is not about love anymore. So they might not buy your record.

Secondly, people who have not actively listened to you before think that your new album is all about finding out about who you are and what's important in life – on a deeply personal and self-focused level. But they get your album and suddenly there are only love songs.

In both cases, expectations that were not satisfied lead to unhappy listeners.

So knowing the expectations that you've set up and satisfying them is not only important for a writer of novels or screenplays, but also for songwriters.

Your true fans will still buy your album but they might worry about which direction you're taking. But they will be the ones you can always count on.

If you're Justin Bieber, then they are your Believers. If you're Taylor Swift, they are the Swifties or if you're My Chemical Romance, they are your Killjoys.

And no matter what you do they will stick with you.

And those people are not only the ones who buy every merchandise you have, who listen only to your albums and nothing else, who watch your videos on YouTube whenever they can or who defend you from anyone who talks bad about you.

There will also be this fan who is not a superfan. But who will give you a chance nonetheless because you share a deep connection with them and they appreciate and support you in everything you do even though they might not really like the new direction you're taking, but they are still committed to you and follow you.

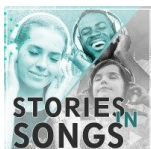
**[00:06:03]** But how can you turn people into your fans?

How can a story told in a song achieve that?

Let me tell you a story about myself and what I mean by having those kinds of fans that support you because they share that connection with you that has given them already so much so that they keep on supporting you just to continue having you in their lives.

And it's not about my fans. I hope you as a listener of my podcast will turn into a fan, but this story is actually about me becoming a fan and how that still plays a big part in my life.

It was in September 2006. I had just finished high school and I went to New Zealand to enjoy one year of freedom and to find out what's out there beyond the borders of the small village I came from. All my life to that point, at least since I was eleven years old I wanted to get



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away from home. Not because I had an unhappy childhood. I had the best, but because I knew that a part of me was out there waiting to be discovered. Something I didn't consciously think about. I wanted to see the world. That was what I would have told you if you asked me why I wanted to travel to the end of the world. At least from where I'm from. But on the inside, there was so much more going on. But I had just turned 18. What did I really know about who I was or what I subconsciously needed?

So I flew to New Zealand all by myself. I found a new friend on the plane from Seoul to Auckland, we worked and traveled together, experienced hardships and a strange town where everyone was high and smoking pot, except for us, until we stayed in an old shed on an apple orchard in the middle of nowhere, outside of Napier.

I can still remember we had this old TV hanging from the ceiling. Up there like in 2 meters. And we were just cooking noodles, the cheapest food for a backpacker because it was all about saving money. And if you've ever watched TV in New Zealand, well, you know they only had four channels.

So we always had that music channel on. Something to listen to in the times when you didn't have smartphones and wireless connections everywhere.

I had just put ketchup on my noodles and walked over to the table, as I heard those light played piano keys. Soft and slow. As I looked up to the TV there was this black and white video with a guy inside of a TV and another man lying in a hospital bed.

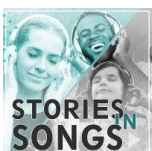
And it was so strange.

I was standing in front of that 2 meters high TV looking up. The man in the hospital bed looked at that TV inside my TV and the blonde singer of that song, he looked up too - to another place. We all just looked up and he started singing by saying: »When I was a young boy.«

Right then and there, my subconsciousness knew I was going to be told a story.

If you start a song with a narrative, you immediately have the attention of our audience. Stories are in our DNA and we pay attention to stories because that's how humanity survived. Even in prehistoric times, the cavemen told stories to each other. They were cautionary tales about what better to avoid in order to survive: Like don't fight a sabertooth tiger all by yourself or you get torn apart and eaten. And they had prescriptive tales as well: If you want to survive, better run as fast as you can or hide.

Stories make us human and we can't ignore someone who's starting to tell us a story. We're curious and want to find out more about what he has to say because we can possibly learn something from it.



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So right at that moment in that old shed, I was thrown back into the boy's life when his father took him to see a marching band. If we analyze the storytelling in the song, then that's the incident that disrupts the normal life of the boy. He's not at home playing with his toy soldiers or reading his books. He's about to witness something that he doesn't see every day. That's the inciting incident of the story.

Right in that first verse, we are introduced to more storytelling tropes. If you are familiar with Joseph Campbell's ›The Hero's Journey‹, you know there are stages the hero moves through from the beginning of the story to its ending. And those stages are similar to every culture on earth – from Greece to Egypt to Indians in South America. It's the most common layout of a story that we're most familiar with.

I'll talk about the Hero's Journey another time, but what's important for this song is, that one of those stages is called: The Call to Adventure.

That's right in the beginning after the hero was introduced in the ordinary world. He then receives a task. It's what you know from stories like ›The Lord of the Rings‹. Frodo has to bring the One Ring to Rivendell. Or it's Harry Potter who receives all those letters from Hogwarts. Or it's Luke Skywalker in Star Wars who is told by Obi-Wan Kenobi that he has to learn the ways of the force after they received Princess Leia's message from R2.

The character of the father in the song seems very sophisticated. How else could he burden his son with the importance of this task? He says: »Son, when you grow up would you be the savior of the broken, the beaten, and the damned?«

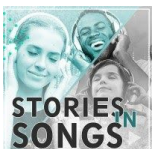
So the father not only introduces the call to adventure, but he's taking on the role of the mentor as well. The mentor is an archetype figure in stories that provides guidance for the hero. It's someone like Gandalf, Dumbledore or Obi-Wan Kenobi. Or Morpheus in Matrix.

And now we're still in the first verse, and we're introduced to another role key to the Hero's Journey. The father tells his son: »Because one day, I'll leave you a phantom to lead you in the summer to join the black parade.«

The phantom is the threshold guardian. It's the character that you'll find when the hero crosses the threshold from his ordinary world to the unknown or extraordinary world. Usually, this role is there to mark an important border of some kind.

In Harry Potter, it's Hagrid who takes Harry to Diagon Alley where he first enters the world of wizards and witches.

The first verse is repeated with more force and marks that the time has finally come the father had prepared his son for. The video is supporting the song so well because all the images we've seen before with that patient in the hospital bed supported the overall idea that the marching band is the final memory of the patient before he dies. And it's done so well



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with the marching band sound right in the song. Every sense you have as a listener transports you right to that moment in the story.

But what truly hooked me was the question the father asked the son. He said: »Will you defeat them, your demons and all the non-believers? The plans that they have made?«

The noodles on the plate in my hand got cold. I had forgotten everything around me. This singer had spoken directly to me. At least this was what it felt like. And I looked up to him. So ready to let him take me with him to join the black parade.

And he did.

Because I believed in his cause. The father had seen the world in all its shades of grey. He knew what was out there and what the world needed. And he thought that his son had the potential to become that one person the world needed. By referring to 'your demons' the father is telling the son that there will not only be external opposing forces (non-believers), but also internal forces that the son will have to defeat in order to achieve some form of victory. By referring to the non-believers, we are introduced to the antagonist – who represents the villain of the story.

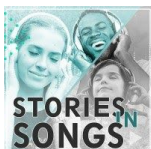
And then, I'm still standing motionless in front of the TV, and I see the black parade approaching on that float while everything around them, an old city, had fallen to dust.

The music gets faster. The drums louder. The guitars more aggressive to show that the moment has finally come.

And I'm standing there, having crossed the threshold with the patient who's death comes in the form of the marching band. And I just can't wait to know how the story continues.

And the story I was promised in the beginning goes on. In the second verse (the one after the first one was repeated) we get a glimpse of how reluctant the hero was to accept the call to adventure. »Sometimes I get the feelin' she's watchin' over me and other times I feel like I should go.« No hero, not Frodo, Harry Potter or Luke jumps to accept the call to adventure because they wanna stay in the life that they know. They don't want to face the dangers out there in a world that they do not know.

But this is no story yet. It's only the beginning and there needs to happen something that makes the hero accept the call to adventure. In the song, it's said: »And through it all, the rise and fall, The bodies in the streets.« This description reveals the turning point for the protagonist. He has seen the destructive force of the villain who wants to destroy society. And the main character of the story has no other choice as to accept the call to adventure. He has to fight the villain.



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In the chorus, the hero shows how ready he is to carry on his father's legacy even though he's not with them anymore.

But of course, this song is not only done so great when you look at the masterful way of storytelling. The music resonated with me as well. I am a punk rock fan, so of course, I was also hooked by the great guitar playing and the drums and even that theatrical performance.

But more so it were the lyrics that caught my attention.

I was not an emo - the audience or era My Chemical Romance is most associated with. But they still managed to get my attention because they had this amazing, powerful statement in their song – no matter what happens, we'll carry on.

Right at that moment I knew their music was exactly the kind of music I always longed to listen to. But I hadn't known that until that very moment I heard them for the very first time. And it was because of the lyrics that I was just in another world as long as I looked up to that TV and the song was on.

And once again, it was the storytelling that made this experience so unforgettable for me. And every story comes to an end. And there's this huge declaration starting with ›Do or die, you'll never make me because the world will never take my heart‹.

That declaration follows on all is lost moment when the hero had to realize he has to change his approach to salvage some form of victory.

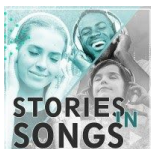
And what's even worse for the character in the song, he's been captured. He's at the mercy of the villain. That's the core event of every action story. You know that moment when Harry Potter has to face Voldemort, or John McClane sits on that chair all tied up in front of Hans Gruber, or Katniss Everdeen stands with Peeta together and President Snow could kill them both in the game.

And in order to overpower or outwit the villain, the hero needs to release his gift.

I know this sounds very abstract because we're just starting to learn about the craft of storytelling. Consider that moment as something the entire story and all the challenges the hero faces boil down to. It's the final battle. The big performance. The most important decision and task that shows clearly what's at stake if the hero fails.

And My Chemical Romance delivered that moment in their song ›Welcome to the Black Parade‹ – the one I am talking about the whole time.

It's the moment when the hero accepts who he is. And he's making one last stand by declaring: ›Give a cheer for all the broken. Listen here, because it's who we are.‹ By



accepting that he's broken too, he's able to become ›the savior of the broken, the beaten and the damned.« He's grown up now. It's a Worldview-Revelation Story.

This genre of the story has a protagonist/ a hero with a well-developed will but who's lacking in essential facts. He experiences doubt about his circumstances which leads to a revelation of a shocking truth about himself. As said, he recognizes that he's broken too. And through that revelation, he can make wise and appropriate decisions. He's becoming the savior and the leader of that united force and through that, they are able to go on fighting. To carry on because the villain can go and try, but he'll never break them again. And it's just so well done in combining the climax of the music in the song with the climax of the story.

And after that declaration, the lines ›We carry on‹ are repeated. But this time, they do not sound that much like that fight declaration from before, but they are a resolution – an acceptance of knowing what's left to do now. Or what their way of life is.

But what makes the song work so well and why it was probably the one song that turned so many people into fans of MCR is that this song gave us a promise in the beginning. When you start telling a story, you're always giving your audience a promise. You set expectations.

MCR did this by introducing us to a story that is all about a boy growing up who got this enormous task of becoming the chosen one. And it's paired with an action story because the life and death stakes are clearly defined too.

And the song delivers what it had promised. And it exceeds expectations because it includes all that we look for in a powerful story and combines it with this amazing marching band sound that turns into an anthem for life itself.

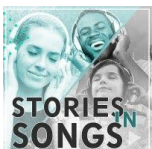
And it's my personal anthem since 2006, too.

I was always someone who treasured Green Day's song ›Minority‹ because that was me.

»Stepped out of the line like a sheep runs from the herd. Marching out of time to my own beat now.«

I never liked doing things that were expected of me. I wanted to follow my own path. And even though Green Day managed to connect with me through their songs as well, it was My Chemical Romance who truly resonated with me because through them I had found out why I never wanted to follow what everyone else was doing. I found my purpose, my strength, my beliefs, and even meaning. It was just a powerful impact.

That moment in New Zealand was the first time I ever heard a song of My Chemical Romance. And it only took one song to turn me into a fan.





And still, after 14 years, whenever I listen to that song and especially when I see that music video, there are so many emotions and memories coming up like a crackling fire that ignites little things that are me but that I might have forgotten over time. That song just affects me on so many levels like they open a door right to my soul and heart.

So to this day, I'm grateful for having this band in my life.

And of course, I was sad as MCR split in 2013 but they had still left their legacy behind. Songs I could always listen to whenever I wanted to.

Then my all-time favorite band reunited.

Amazing. The news came right at the moment after I had listened to their albums for months again because I just needed to have them back with me and remind me of all the things that were me. Reigniting. That was their purpose.

And I'm not a raving fan anymore. Or ever was. Yes, I've done typical superfan things before. Like sleeping in front of the concert hall just to be the first in line – and that in the middle of a cold and rainy November.

I did that.

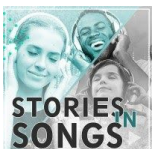
I don't know what they are all about now with that witchcraft videos and strange announcements. They've changed as a band. Probably. And they should. It's just human nature. Change is good.

But did I still buy tickets to see them live? Even though I knew they are not the band back from 2006? Of course, I did.

Because I still share that deep connection with them through their songs. They've become a part of my life. So of course, even though they set different expectations now as to what their music or songs will be like, I will still go to their concert just to feel that energy again of all the people, like me, who are so grateful for having that band back in their lives. And this is my story.

**[00:23:28]** I am a fan. And that's something good.

Because by being a fan of someone, you have found a connection with something that's really important to you. And that connection follows being part of a community. People who understand you. And with whom you can talk to about your favorite things. It gives you a sense of belonging and strength.



And that's what a fan base is all about. It's not just for you as a band or singer to have someone who attends your concerts or buys your CDs. It's much stronger than that.

A fan base is for the people.

And if you want to build one, you need to write a song that engages and hooks your listeners and through which they can connect with you because everything you say resonates with how they feel. Consciously or Subconsciously. And if they connect with you, they find people and new friends who share that connection.

So don't let anyone fool you.

Lyrics play an important role in connecting with people.

**[00:24:27]** And in this podcast, I show you how you can turn your audience into fans by learning how to tell captivating stories.

And stories are the best way to get the attention of your listeners. Storytelling is rooted deep in our DNA. We're used to listening to stories because there's always a takeaway. Something to learn from or something to be aware of. A cautionary tale or a prescriptive one.

And there's so much to cover on this topic of storytelling in songwriting. But let's stop here for now and in the next episode, we'll talk about how important it is to include a message in a song. Does it help? Does it have an impact?

It's another big clue on how to turn your audience into fans.

I hope you enjoyed this episode. This is my very first episode. And if you liked what you heard and you want to hear more, just hit subscribe.

If you want to look at my complete analysis of My Chemical Romance's song: ›Welcome to the Black Parade‹ check out my website of [storiesinsongs.com](http://storiesinsongs.com). You'll find the lyrics to this song as well as my notes to the lyrics considering the amazing craft of the storytelling as well as a complete analysis of the global story. Much more than I have covered in this episode.

So I look forward to being with you in future episodes and talking all things about the craft of telling stories in songs and how you can reach more people through your songs.

Thank you, Melanie!  
See you next time.

