

EPISODE 011

Three Lyric Writing Mistakes That Could Cost You Your Audience's Engagement

See the show notes at storiesinsongs.com/podcast/episode-011

[00:00:00] Hey, welcome back, everybody. This is Melanie Naumann, and you are listening to the Stories in Songs Podcast.

Let me ask you a quick question:

Are you struggling with creating an emotional connection with your audience?

And you don't know how to go about learning some more songwriting techniques?

Well, today, this is about to change.

In this episode, you will learn how to engage your listeners ...

And putting them in your song's character's shoes ...

AND I will show you exactly what you need to include in your lyrics so that your listeners root for your character, Especially by avoiding three lyric writing mistakes that could cost you your audience's engagement.

Sound good to you?

Then let's get started.

Recap

[00:01:18] Last episode we started to analyze the song "Sold (The Grundy County Auction Incident)" by John Michael Montgomery that refers to one of the most famous moments in love stories: The Lovers Meet Scene or, as we know it from Hollywood: The Meet-Cute Scene.



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If you haven't listened to this episode, episode 10 already, please go back to it now and listen to it. This episode gives you a recap about what a love story is, how we define the lover's meet scene, and provides you with all the details you need to follow along in the next episodes. So check it out if you haven't done so already. It's essential to be able to continue.

And as I've announced already this season, we will study the storytelling aspect in the lyrics of love songs. But we will not only look at the upside of falling or being in love, but we will also study the lyrics of songs that are about tragic and dramatic love situations.

But for now, we stay with the Lovers Meet Scene and dissect the lyrics of another example of this love story moment.

The way we do this is by using the S.O.N.G. framework that I've developed. Check out the last episode if you aren't familiar with it.

Basically, we study the lyrics of a song by looking at four different aspects: Summary - observer - Narration - Gist.

That means:

1. at first, we will find out what the song is about,
2. then we dive deeper to find out more about the person who is the central character in that song,
3. after that, we analyze the narration
4. Lastly, we get to the gist of the song to find out the big takeaway for the listener.

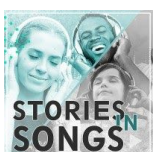
All those aspects will give us a fantastic overview to find out how much a song uses the craft of storytelling to engage its listeners. And the more it does, the stronger the song's lyrics are.

And if you can write strong lyrics that create an emotional connection with your audience, then you got them hooked and invested in your song.

If that song is your single release, your listeners might even be tempted to buy your album because they consider you to be ...

- Someone who speaks from their heart.
- Someone who can put things in words they can't even express themselves.
- Someone who understands them.

And if you become that person, they will become your fans.



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What you'll learn in this episode

[00:03:39] To make it easier for you to learn and apply what we're going to talk about in the next 20 minutes, I will include an exercise at the end of this episode.

This exercise will use the song we have just studied and take out its abstract core elements. You can consider those like the inspirational impulses or building blocks to write your own song about that specific topic. If the song's lyrics had flaws considering the storytelling aspect, I would give you hints for the exercise to avoid them.

Does this sound great?

Okay, then let's get started with learning how to write a captivating love-at-first-sight moment in your song's lyrics.

Are you excited?

So am I!

"Ain't No Other Man" by Christina Aguilera.

[00:04:22] The song we are going to analyze is "Ain't No Other Man" by Christina Aguilera. It's another song about falling in love at first sight. Still, it will provide you with a different view of how you can pull off writing about the Lovers Meet Scene compared to "Sold (The Grundy County Auction Incident)" by John Michael Montgomery we analyzed in the last episode.

"Ain't No Other Man" is from Christina Aguilera's fifth studio album, "Back to Basics," released in 2006. Aguilera co-wrote the song with Kara DioGuardi, Charles Martin Roane, Harold Beatty, and producer DJ Premier.

Okay, are you ready?

Perfect.

So I'm going to read the lyrics to you so that you know what the song is about.

[[Video]]

<https://www.youtube-nocookie.com/embed/8x7Ta89QLo4>



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Ain't No Other Man lyrics © Kobalt Music Publishing Ltd., Universal Music Publishing Group, BMG Rights Management, Reach Music Publishing

Hey!

Do your thang, honey!

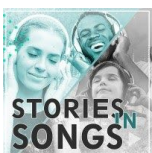
*I could feel it from the start
Couldn't stand to be apart
Something 'bout ya caught my eye
Something moved me deep inside
Don't know what ya did, boy, but you had it
And I've been hooked ever since
Told my mother, my brother, my sister, and my friends
Told the others, my lovers, both past and present tense
That every time I see you everything starts making sense*

Do your thang honey!

*Ain't no other man that can stand up next to you
Ain't no other man on the planet does what you do
You're the kinda guy a girl finds in a blue moon
You got soul, you got class, you got style, you're badass
Ain't no other man, it's true (Alright)
Ain't no other man but you!*

*Never thought I'd be alright, no, no, no
Till you came and changed my life, yeah, yeah, yeah!
What was cloudy now is clear, yeah, yeah!
You're the light that I needed, yeah, uh!
You got what I want, boy, and I want it!
So keep on giving it up!
So tell your mother, your brother, your sister, and your friends
Tell the others, your lovers, better not be present tense
'Cause I want everyone to know that you are mine and no one else's! (Oh, oh, ah)*

*Ain't no other man that can stand up next to you
Ain't no other man on the planet does what you do
You're the kinda guy a girl finds in a blue moon
You got soul, you got class, you got style, you're badass
Ain't no other man, it's true (Alright)*



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Ain't no other man but you!

*Ain't no other, ain't, ain't no other other
Ain't no other, ain't, ain't no other lover!
Ain't no other, I, I, I need no other
Ain't no other man but you! Oh*

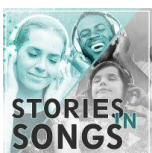
*You are there when I'm a mess
Talk me down from every ledge
Give me strength, boy, you're the best!
You're the only one who's ever passed every test!
Ain't no other man that can stand up next to you
Ain't no other man on the planet does what you do
You're the kinda guy a girl finds in a blue moon
You got soul, you got class, you got style, you're badass
Ain't no other man, it's true (Alright)
Ain't no other man but you!*

*And I won't tell 'em you said
Ain't no other man but you
Ain't no other man that can stand up next to you
Ain't no other man on the planet does what you do
You're the kinda guy a girl finds in a blue moon
You got soul, you got class, you got style, you're bad ass
Ain't no other man, it's true (Alright)
Ain't no other man but you!*

Now that we have read through the lyrics let's start dissecting them to study this song's storytelling craft.

Just a reminder: You might feel overwhelmed when we go through the four-step framework. And that is totally okay. It's a lot to cover, but I promise you, the more often you analyze a song this way, the more it will come naturally to you. Feeling overwhelmed just means that you are learning some new stuff, and that is awesome. So embrace that feeling knowing that this is the beginning of another level of your songwriting.

So are you ready?



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Let's begin.

1. Summary (About)

[00:07:37] The first step of the S.O.N.G. Framework for analyzing the lyrics' storytelling aspect is called: Summary. So we answer questions that give us a bird's eye view of the song.

The first question is:

1. What is the song generally about?

Since the title already gives us a good idea of what the song will be about, and the lyrics are to the point as well, we have no trouble to figure out that the singer is telling us about a man she met and who changed her life right then and there because she immediately knew that he was the one for her.

The next question is:

2. Do the first lines of the song set the expectations of what the song will be about? Is it a promise to what kind of story moment the audience can expect?

Here's a reminder, the first line of the song is:

*I could feel it from the start
Couldn't stand to be apart*

Right from the first line of the song, we are hooked. We want to know: What did she feel from the start? Why couldn't she stay away?

The great thing about the beginning of the song is that we do not only get an idea of the emotions the song will touch - which is expressed by including the verb "to feel" but also of the strong close connection that this feeling led to. So we know the result this feeling has caused, and we stay intrigued because we want to see the cause for this feeling.

Furthermore, referring to "the start" – "I could feel it from the start" gives us the promise that this song will be about the start of something – like the start of a relationship, and so it does refer to the moment of the lovers first meet scene.

So we can conclude by saying that the song gives us a promise to what it will be about, sets up a question as well as expectations in the audience's mind.



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And those expectations lead right to the next question, which is:

3. If the song was a scene taken out of a movie, under what genre would you promote the movie? What is the story's genre?

Now, if we consider the entire song, then we can say with absolute certainty that if they shot a movie that includes that moment, it would be a love story because love is clearly at stake for this girl who wants that man.

We have already answered the next question, which is:

4. Is the song referencing a specific moment that we expect to see in the above-determined genre?

We said the song is a love story, and it is about the lovers first meet scene.

But ...

5. Does the song use conventions of the love story genre as well?

Now, how did we define conventions?

Conventions uniquely identify the characters' roles in a particular story or the way the story moves forward.

For the love story, those conventions are having a

- rival
- including helpers and harmers,
- an external need,
- opposing forces,
- secrets,
- rituals
- as well as moral weight.

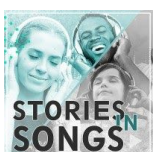
If you need those conventions explained, please return to the last episode. You find the link in the show notes.

Now did you find one of those love story conventions in Christina Aguilera's song "Ain't no other Man"?

In the second verse, she is mentioning a possible rival. She sings:

Tell the others, your lovers, better not be present tense

She is also referring to rituals as she sings:



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*You are there when I'm a mess
Talk me down from every ledge*

Another question we have to ask when studying what a song is generally about is:

6. Is the song's character talking about the distant past, their current state of mind, or an imagined future?

The singer is talking in past tense. That means she is reflecting on that moment when she met that guy who changed her life. That moment is part of a love confession to assure someone it was love at first sight.

Since she is also referring to how he gives her strength, we know that they are a couple.

And the last question of the first step of the S.O.N.G. framework is:

7. Are we hearing someone's inner monologue, someone narrating a story, or a conversation between two or more people?

The singer is talking to her lover. She retells him the story of what she felt when they first met. As the audience, we are the silent observers of this private confession of why it was love at first sight.

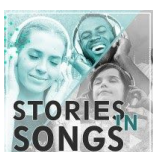
Even though it seems like a dialogue, we actually never get to hear her lover talk. And we do not need to because when she tells him that he is the best for always being there for her, we know that he is present and that they have become a couple. We know their love story ended happily.

The narrative distance to the audience is not as close as in the song "Sold (The Grundy County Auction Incident)" by John Michael Montgomery because Aguilera uses past tense.

That means we are not in the present moment and therefore are not caught up in that particular situation of nervousness and not knowing what to do when we meet the One for the first time – like the narrator was in the auction of Montgomery's song where he was clearly debating in his mind what he should do to get the girl's attention.

Even though Aguilera's song's main character created a sense of intimacy by sharing this private insight into their love life, we do not feel like we are pulled into the story to become a part of it.

Hence, this song might only relate to people, especially women, who have had the same experience.



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Okay, you did a great job of getting an overview of what the lyrics of “Ain't no other Man” are about.

2. Observer

[00:13:08] Now let's move on to the second step in the framework, which is called: the observer. So we will closely look at the main character in the song to better get to know her.

1. What is the role the singer takes on in the song?

The singer is the main character.

2. Is the singer showing her own feelings and thoughts? Or is she talking about those of someone else?

She is talking about her own feelings and thoughts.

3. Is the character in the song using the song to tell their own story or someone else's?

And tells her own story about meeting that one special person.

4. Is the singer referring to another person?

Yes, she refers to her man and encourages him to stay who he is by saying, “Do your thang, honey.”

She also mentions other characters like a possible rival and people who are family and friends who could either be in favor of or against their relationship. But they are only mentioned, so we do not find out if they take on the role of harmers or helpers.

5. What does the main character in the song consciously WANT? What is her goal?

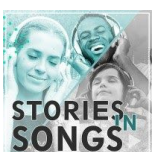
She is singing:

*You got what I want, boy, and I want it!
So keep on giving it up!*

Those lines are not really specific. We don't know what he's got, except for a little later when she sings:

You got soul, you got class, you got style, you're badass

Still, even those are things she likes about him; they do not refer to what she, as the character of this scene, really wants. Of course, she wants him, but when we look at her



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intention to WHY she is telling him all those things about how special he is and how he has changed her life, then her goal gets clearer: She just wants him to know how much he means to her.

So that is what she is after.

But can we root for her so that she gets what she wants?

No, unfortunately not, because she already got what she wants. She got him because she is using past tense.

In comparison, in Montgomery’s song “Sold” that we analyzed last time, he was retelling how he met that special someone as well. But to make us more invested in the song, he started in present tense to put us right into the moment. We did not have any sense of how this story would end. Everything was still on the table. The stakes were high.

But in Aguilera’s song, we, unfortunately, know right from the beginning that she is retelling us the story of how she met someone. And everything that is in the past cannot be changed. It has already happened.

So here’s what you need to watch out for: If you want to create suspense in your lyrics so that your audience roots for your character, hoping they get what they want, then use present tense and put your listeners right in the moment with your characters when something happens with or to them.

If you want your lovers’ meet scene to be more of a reassurance that it has been love at first sight and it shall sound more like a confession of love, then you can use past tense.

Does that make sense?

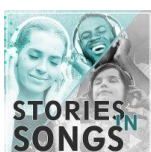
Okay, let’s move on to the next question:

6. What does the main character in the song unconsciously NEED? What is her internal desire?

In this song, the main character lets her special somebody know:

*What was cloudy now is clear, yeah, yeah!
You're the light that I needed, yeah, uh!*

Those lines are a way of saying how she can see things more clearly now. She is able to reflect on her life before him and how he has changed it.



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In love stories, the characters mostly have to evolve in the way they look at the world to be able to embrace fully, commit to, and value the love they've found. There needs to be a form of maturation.

And that kind of growing up and better understanding who they were and who they need to become to be with someone they love – that development has happened in this song.

After all, before she met him, she thought, "*Never thought I'd be alright, no no.*"

And now she is because of him.

The only thing that could have been made better is to get more details about how her life has changed. But more about this later.

The next important question is:

7. Do we like the main character of the song? Does she have positive character traits? Or is it someone we despise and can't consider a role model?

That's a fundamental question we have to answer because if we don't like the main character in the song, we try to keep our distance. We doubt what they are saying and don't think it's valid.

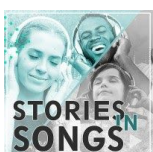
So if we want our song to resonate with our audience, we need to create a character that the audience can like or respect.

So what do you think of the main character in this song?

Before you decide, consider, this is not about Christina Aguilera, although lyrically, the song was inspired by her marriage to Jordan Bratman in 2005. Always remember, your audience might not know you or your backstory, so they can only judge what is being said and how it is said.

So do you like the character in the song?

I like the character in the song for what she is doing. It is super important to remind oneself and your partner of the love you both share. And although we don't know how much time has passed since they met, it's good to see that he is still the one for her and that she tells him that.



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The only thing that could bother someone – but that is only a question of taste – is that the song’s character is very dominant.

She is singing:

*So tell your mother, your brother, your sister, and your friends
Tell the others, your lovers, better not be present tense
'Cause I want everyone to know that you are mine and no one else's! (Oh, oh, ah)*

Claiming that someone is theirs doesn’t really have a positive feel to it. After all, a relationship should not be about “owning” someone. The character seems like a diva, especially when you take the way Aguilera is singing into consideration.

On the other hand, saying that she wants everyone to know that he belongs to her shows how confident she is. And that, after all, is also a good thing.

The last question we need to ask about the character in the song refers to:

8. What is the point of view?

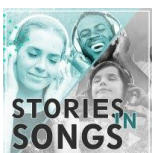
For point of view, I refer to the book “Great Songwriting Techniques” by Jack Perricone because they differ from the point of view options for books.

In “Ain’t no other Man,” the singer uses direct address because the pronouns are “I” and “You.”

Wow, we have come very far already in dissecting the lyrics of this song.
Great job.

Now we have an even better understanding of what the song is about and who its main character is.

Now it’s time to dive deeper and look at the most important elements for telling a working story or a moment of a story in your song.



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3. Narration

[00:19:56] Therefore we move forward to the third step of the S.O.N.G. framework and look at the Narration. This is by far the most comprehensive and detailed look into the storytelling of the lyrics. So remember, if you feel overwhelmed, remind yourself that's a good thing because you are learning something new.

So are you ready to answer some more questions?

Let's slowly move into the storytelling aspect of Aguilera's song "Ain't No Other Man" with the first question:

1. What are the characters literally doing?

The main character is retelling how everything has changed after she had met her partner for the first time.

But let's read between the lines.

2. What is the essential action of what the characters are doing in the scene? What is on their secret agenda? What are they trying to achieve?

As already said, she wants to confess to her lover how much she loves him and reassure him there "Ain't no other Man" but him.

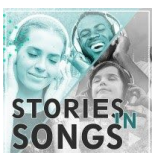
Unfortunately, there is nothing in the way of letting the main character reach her goal. The entire song is a confession of love. That means we don't get the sense that love is truly at stake because there's no other force she has to fight against. She can simply just follow her agenda without obstruction.

Remember, in Montgomery's song, there was a conflict of interest between the auctioneer and the narrator. Both had different agendas, and while one needed to do his job, the other needed to interrupt him.

Thinking about what's at stake and opposing forces, we move on to the next question:

3. Is there a problem the character is facing? Does something challenge her? Or is there some kind of conflict that she has to solve? If so, what is the central conflict the main character in the song has to deal with?

At the beginning of the song, she is raising the stakes by continually telling us how great this guy is, and she even elevates how special he is by saying:



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You're the kinda guy a girl finds in a blue moon

The moment she met him, it was clear that losing him or not winning him over would have been a massive loss for her. So we do get a sense of the challenge she was facing in the past, although it's never explicitly stated what she had to do to win his heart.

We also do not know if there was ever a rival. She just urges him to tell everyone he knows that he belongs to her now.

*So tell your mother, your brother, your sister, and your friends
Tell the others, your lovers, better not be present tense*

The song's character's overconfidence eliminates any possible obstacle she might have had or still has to overcome.

My advice to you is that it is risky not to include a problem the character has to deal with. Sure, there are love songs in which the love between the lovers cannot be questioned, and there is no challenge to overcome. But if you want to touch your audience's heart, then make sure you don't use overconfidence to express that feeling but rather thankfulness and appreciation to be that lucky to have found the one.

Is that tip helpful?

Let's continue with the next question:

4. Do the first lines introduce the problem the character in the song will have to deal with? And thus hook us and spark our interest?

Let's look at the first lines again. She's singing:

*I could feel it from the start
Couldn't stand to be apart
Something 'bout ya caught my eye
Something moved me deep inside*

So yes, we are hooked because we know that she has met someone special who really impacted her. And of course, we want to find out more about them.

The second line hints at a small problem. She couldn't stay away from him, but unfortunately, we never hear anything else about that challenge or how she overcame it.



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We do not get to witness the moment she finally gathered all her courage to talk to him or get his attention. I think, especially when you center your love song on the lovers' meet scene, we want to be right there with the characters and feel the tension.

But as said, Aguilera refers to the meet-cute scene as a foundation for her confession of love. That is why she is not taking us closer to the action.

But here, it is essential to look back at the promise you're giving your audience. If your song's first lines promise a love song and especially hint at the lovers' first meet scene, the listeners expect to hear about that moment. If you don't deliver and don't paint a vivid picture around that moment, then you risk disappointment.

Just imagine you're reading the first pages of a book, and it promises to be an awesome love story because that person just met someone special. You're all fired up to learn more about those two and how they will get together. But right after the beginning, the story changes, and you're left with a murder investigation in a crime story. That would bum me, and maybe you, too. It's all about expectations nowadays, satisfying or even exceeding them in delivering on the promise.

Our attention span is as short as a goldfish's memory, around 7 seconds. Make sure you don't lose your audience from one seven seconds to the next by confusing them. As soon as they start wondering if they've missed something, the magic is gone.

Of course, Aguilera still manages to bring home her message that there "Ain't no other Man," but if you set up a lover's meet scene in the beginning, make sure you deliver on it even if you use it as a basis for a love confession.

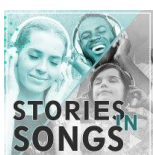
That love confession could as well be the revelation of how everything turned out between those two main characters in the last verse. It would be a nice resolution of that first moment they met and where it led to.

Can you follow me?

Alright, let's start analyzing the lover's meet scene told in the song.

Analyzing the scene told in the song.

[00:26:00] In the last episode, I've introduced you to the framework we are using for analyzing the storytelling aspect of the song. It's called the Story Grid's five commandments.



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Those commandments are the five essential elements of every scene or story. You can use them to look at the big picture or zoom into every story's small units, like chapters in a book or scenes in a movie.

Since songs are a short form of a story and most often only deal with a certain scene taken out of a larger context, we should focus on at least having the first three commandments present in our song. I know this sounds very abstract, but bear with me. I'll explain them to you as we go through Aguilera's song.

So the first question we ask is:

5. What is the inciting incident?

The first commandment is the inciting incident.

That means there must be a causal or coincidental event that happens to the main character. Either it is unexpected, or it is an anticipated event that happens. The purpose of an inciting incident is to get the story or scene going and makes a promise to the audience of what's to come.

Causal inciting incidents result from active choices a character makes, and a coincidental inciting incident is when something happens by chance or accident.

I consider looking at the inciting incident in the way of asking myself: What is the character's plan? Or what is their first initial goal before the tables turn?

That's how it all starts.

Does that make sense?

Okay, so what is the inciting incident in the song "Ain't no Other Man?"

Therefore we need to look at the entire song and consider what happened in the past and where we are now at the current moment.

The furthest we go back in the song is when the main character tells us:

Never thought I'd be alright, no, no, no

Because that was her status quo before she met him.

The song itself does not provide any clues to where she was off to when she met him. Was it a club? A restaurant? A park? We don't know.



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So the inciting incident that let her go to that specific place where she met that guy or met him on the way is unknown to us. We can only assume there was something on her mind, she was trying to do - and if it was only grocery shopping.

If we think back to Montgomery's song "Sold (The Grundy County Auction Incident)," the narrator went to the auction house to bid on some cattle.

That was much clearer and gave us a better picture of where to place the characters in our minds. We knew the setting. In Aguilera's song, the moment those two lovebirds met is like a void. It's all up to our imagination, which can be a good thing, but if you're left with not even a clue, then it's harder to see that moment in your mind. After all, you reach universality by being specific, and not the other way around.

Does that make sense to you?

Okay, let's move on with the second Story Grid commandment of analyzing a scene. And it's called the progressive complication turning point.

Therefore, we ask the question:

6. What is the unexpected event that turned the tables?

This moment refers to an unexpected moment that throws the main character into a dilemma. They are at a crossroads and need to make a decision first.

This turning of events is either caused by another character's action or by a revelation when new information comes to the fore.

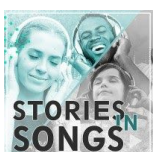
Either way, a turning point catapults the main character straight into a crisis. They ask themselves the question: *Shit, what shall I do now?*

The unexpected event happens right in the second line of the second verse.

She sings:

*Never thought I'd be alright, no, no, no
Till you came and changed my life, yeah, yeah, yeah!*

He changed her life. So he was the turning point in her life.



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7. But what's the dilemma the main character has to face now that he has entered her life? What are her options?

Remember, she just saw him, and they haven't even talked yet.

In the crisis moment, the moment when the character is at a crossroads, they either have to choose between two bad things where one thing is worse than the other, or the character has to choose between two irreconcilable goods, which means something could be good for her but not good for somebody else, or vice versa.

No matter the crisis, there's always something to lose.

In Aguilera's song, we hit a wall now. Since the song did not include a problem the character had to face or a challenge, there's just no obstacle to overcome. And this lack of a problem affects the crisis, or lack thereof, as well.

There is just no reference whatsoever to tell us about the moment she or he made the first move. Or a hint to the uncertainty of what could happen if her plan to get his attention would go wrong. We don't feel like there was something at stake.

So again, the audience is not as invested in rooting for the character in this song because it is just a retelling of events that only focuses on the good things, and the troubles, doubts, and worries are all left out. So we just can't root for the character because they have already found their happy end without taking us on the journey of how they got there. They keep being the hero of their story and do not become the guide to help their audience who might meet that special someone too, but will not have a clue of how to approach that person because this song did not offer any guidance. It just jumped forward to the happy ending.

This becomes clear when we look at the fourth commandment.

8. What's the decision the character makes?

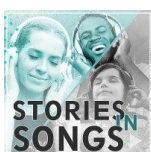
Since there was no crisis, there is no decision the character has to make.

All we get is the resolution, which is the last commandment.

9. How does it all turn out?

She sings:

*What was cloudy now is clear, yeah, yeah!
You're the light that I needed, yeah, uh!*



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So once again, we know the outcome of their little story, but we just know half of how they got there.

To sum it up, we don't know how they met exactly, we don't see the dilemma or problems they faced, and we don't know what decision they had to make to get to this point.

All we have is the overarching change from her past to her now, which leads us to the most defining element to determine if the song tells a story or a part of it: Change.

Change

[00:32:19] Every element of a story needs to include change. There needs to be a difference between the beginning and the ending. If there is none, then we can say with utter certainty, nothing happened. And if nothing happened, we neither have a story nor an exciting moment.

Does that make sense to you?

Stories are about change.

And the bottom line with change is that it requires loss. Even when change is positive, we lose something of ourselves coping with its effects.

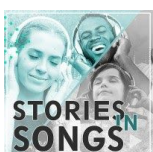
So when we fall in love, we leave a part of our old worldview behind, mature, and embrace a better understanding of the world.

And if you want to tell a captivating love story moment, you need to be aware that you show a change in your character's situation, and preferably in their minds. Did your character grow as a person, or did the unexpected event strike them down so hard that they have ended up disillusioned?

I can't stress this enough. You have to know what turning point brought your character to a crossroad moment because that unexpected turn of events either leads to a change to the positive or, if your character can't deal with it, to a negative outcome. The point is, if you want your song to work as an element of the story, you need to include the reason for the change, and you need to show it.

So let's look at Aguilera's song "Ain't no other man" again.

10. Did the song's main character change her perception of the world around her after going through that situation?



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Let's answer this question by looking at the second verse. She sings:

*Never thought I'd be alright, no, no, no
Till you came and changed my life, yeah, yeah, yeah!
What was cloudy now is clear, yeah, yeah!
You're the light that I needed, yeah, uh!*

So yes, the main character has changed from not being alright to feeling alright. And that was possible through the maturation process they went through. Because that one person made it possible for the character to change:

*You are there when I'm a mess
Talk me down from every ledge
Give me strength, boy, you're the best!
You're the only one who's ever passed every test!*

11. So to wrap it up, how did the situation change for the main character in the song?

In a nutshell, her situation changed from being single to being in a relationship. So it's from a negative to a positive, especially when we look at how much he has influenced her life to the positive.

12. Another interesting way to observe if the song is about change is to compare the first and the last sentence of the song. **Can we see a difference between how the song started and how it ended?**

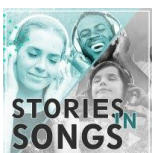
Okay, here's how it started:

*I could feel it from the start
Couldn't stand to be apart*

And the song ended like this:

*Ain't no other man, it's true (Alright)
Ain't no other man but you!*

So if we look at the beginning and the ending of the song, we get the impression that everything that has happened was her falling in love with him – which is to the point of what this song is about. But we don't see any significant change if we only compare the lines of beginning and end.



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Nevertheless, I have to add that we have the crucial elements present that make a scene work. We need the turning point, and we need to see the change from what was life before she met him to how life was after she met him. They got together, and she is a much happier person now. So the song fulfills the critical storytelling criteria, even though it's only the bare minimum.

But I hope you can see the flaws of the song's lyrics and the possibilities of how it could have been made even more captivating.

Writing Techniques

[00:35:51] Lastly, let's quickly talk about the writing techniques used in this song.

The first question is:

13. Is the singer only revealing some general information, or does she go into the specifics?

Unfortunately, and as already stated, we are mostly left in the dark. We don't know the setting, which makes it hard for us to place the characters in a certain place in our imagination. We also do not know how bad she was off before she met him. She tells us that she wasn't alright, but telling is not showing.

Have you ever heard of the writing advice: Show, don't Tell?

I bet you have.

But if you struggle with the difference between showing vs. telling, you're not alone. Once you've got it, it seems simple.

Here's a quick reminder:

Telling is similar to informing your audience rather than allowing them to deduce anything.

You're supplying information by stating it.

So if we take Aguilera's song as an example, she only tells us:

Never thought I'd be alright,



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That's telling.

Showing would paint a picture the listener could see in their mind's eye.

If your character is not alright, then you can show it by letting them avoid places where most couples go, eating unhealthily and binge-watching romance stories with used tissues in their lap, only focusing on work, or whatever comes to your mind that shows your character in action.

When you show rather than tell, you make your audience part of the experience.

And in songs, it's just incredible when you listen to it, and you feel like you have overcome time and place, and you're right there in the shoes of the character of the song, feeling what they do and facing the same challenge. That's how to make your listeners root for the character in your song.

So remember, telling is only stating the facts. But showing paints a picture that the listener can enter to take part in the story emotionally and see it unfold in front of their mind's eye.

Does that make sense?

The last question we ask concerning writing technique is:

14. Is the song evoking specific pictures in the audience's mind by using imagery?

When I say using imagery, I'm talking metaphors, painting pictures with words, that kind of stuff. Of course, you can always combine showing with using analogies to make your lyrics even more unique.

But in Aguilera's song, we only get presented with lots of general terms. There's nothing specific that paints a detailed picture except the blue moon's comparison to show how special that guy is.

So if you write lyrics, try to include specificity and avoid general and already overused terms that don't provide any imaginary power to spark your listener's imagination to see everything about your character and their situation.

As my mentor, Shawn Coyne, says: Specificity breeds Universality.

Even if you can't come up with ways to show or be more specific when you write the first draft of your lyrics, it's okay to use general terms so that you can get down on paper what



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you want to write about. But when you revise, try to be more specific, show, don't tell, and invite the listener to join.

Does that sound good?

4. Gist

[00:39:06] Great, now we're left with the fourth and last step: What's the gist of the song? What's going to be its big takeaway?

So we start with ...

1. Looking back at the problem the character had to deal with in this song, did she solve it?

Well, since there was no problem she had to face, there's no solution to it. Hence, we can neither say if the song was a prescriptive tale or a cautionary tale because we don't know the actions that led to the outcome.

The song cannot be considered as guidance because it's only one person's story, and we're left out.

2. What is the message of the song? What can the audience take away from it?

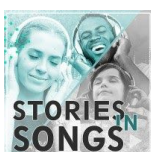
The only message I can think of is: Love exists.

I know that's very abstract, but the song just doesn't give us enough meat to get any more details out of it.

3. Does the title refer to the message of the song?

The song's title is "Ain't No Other Man," which is repeated throughout the song. The rest of the lyrics also refer to how special that guy is, and so it does underline the general idea that love exists and that this special someone can be found even though the song does not provide any clues to how to find it or deal with it once you stumble over it.

Now we have gone through the 4-step-framework of analyzing the storytelling in the lyrics of a song.



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Are you feeling overwhelmed?

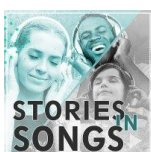
Remember, that just means you have only heard a bunch of new stuff, and you are taking in new things, trying to build connections to what you already know, and basically, you are learning.

Three Lyric Writing Mistakes That Could Cost You Your Audience's Engagement

[00:40:41] Before we finish this episode, let's sum up the three lyric writing mistakes that could cost you your audience's attention and that we've encountered in Aguilera's song.

Just to be clear, this doesn't mean that the song's lyrics are bad. We're just looking at them through the lens of a storyteller and how it could have been written differently.

1. The first one is the **choice of tense**.
 - a. If you write in present tense, you put your audience in the same situation your character goes through. It's happening right then and there, and your audience goes along for the ride.
 - b. But if you use past tense, everything has already happened, and there's nothing we can do about it anymore. Therefore, your audience won't be that much invested in your song's story moment and not root for your song's main character.
2. The second killer of creating an emotional connection with your listeners is speaking in **generic terms and stating information** rather than showing what's going on.
 - a. If you don't feed your listeners' imagination by painting them a picture, they might lose interest in listening to what you have to say. They just can't find a way to connect with the character in your song because the characters seem too two-dimensional, and the situation they are in is not in your listeners' grasp to be able to dive into that world.
 - b. Avoid being too generic and just telling your audience what's going on. Be specific and show them.
3. The third writing mistake that could cost you your audience's attention is making it **sound too perfect**.
 - a. If you leave out a problem the character in your song has to face, there's no challenge and hence no reason for your audience to root for your character.
 - b. There is also no helpful message to be taken out of the song. If everything seems like a fairy tale, it just doesn't ring true. A positive message should always include an obstacle someone should overcome to get what they want.



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- c. So make sure your character has to overcome a difficult situation so that we can celebrate with them a positive outcome.

Song Exercise - The Lovers Meet

[00:42:55] Now let's move on to the promised exercise so that you can apply what you've learned, which means the more you practice, the better you will get at using the craft of storytelling in your own songwriting.

Since we are still on the Meet-Cute Scene topic, I want you to create another original "Lovers Meet" scene that will lead to the confession of love. This exercise is inspired by Aguilera's song "Ain't No Other Man."

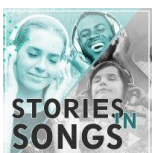
In the show notes of this episode, you can download the PDF with all the instructions. But I will also go through the exercise now so that you know how you are supposed to do it.

To help you get started, I have some constraints that I would like you to follow so that you have some guiding points that help you along as you write the lyrics.

1. The first constraint is to please use **direct address** to show a one-sided conversation as your song's main character tells their special someone about the moment they met. Just put yourself in your character's shoes and use the pronouns "I" and "you."

Unlike Aguilera's song, I want you to avoid the flaws of that songs' storytelling aspect in the lyrics by focusing on the following things:

2. Come up with a **specific problem** the character in your song has to deal with. Is it getting the attention of that special someone? Is there a rival? Are there other people against the relationship? Are there secrets they try to keep? Let your imagination run free.
3. I also want you to include all **five commandments**. But they do not have to be in order. You can switch them up between your verses, chorus, and pre-chorus.
 - a. The inciting incident of your character is establishing an event that the character in your song anticipates. That's his/her status quo. Ask yourself: Where are they off to? Where are they heading?
 - b. The turning point will be meeting that special girl or boy for the very first time.



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- c. The crisis must show what's at stake for the character if they let that special someone pass.
 - d. Show the character's decision.
 - e. Include a resolution letting your audience know how it all turned out. Use the third verse for the confession of love after retelling how they first met in the other two verses for setting up the confession of how much they have come to love that person.
4. Furthermore, the song must **end positively**.
 5. Instead of relying on an overconfident **character**, show one that is appreciating the luck they've had.
 6. Use "**Show, don't Tell**" and be **specific**.

For further inspiration, I will add the abstract beats of the song "Ain't No Other Man" in the exercise PDF. Abstract beats are kind of like identifying the specific moments in your song's little story. And I will use abstract terms so that those beats give you a variety of options to how you can use them for your own lyrics.

For example, a beat might be called: Shock and Awe, the What-If game, or as simple as "the last temptation."

So if you want to do this exercise to get better at telling stories in songs, please check out the show notes of this episode and download the exercise PDF. It will be more comprehensive than the introduction I have given you here in this podcast episode.

And once you see the task laid out in front of your eyes, it will become more evident.

Outro

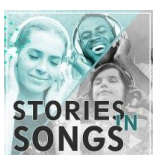
Alright, now we've come to the end of today's show.

If you liked it, please leave a rating and review.

In the next episode, we will look at Madonna's song "Crazy for You," which could be considered the missing piece to Aguilera's love story moment of her song "Ain't No Other Man." It will also show you how you can apply the writing technique "Show, don't Tell" to really pull your listeners into the action.

Are you excited?

Then subscribe to my podcast so that you don't miss the next episode.

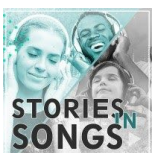


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Thanks a lot and see you next time.

Oh, and by the way: If you want to check out another song that is similar to Christina Aguilera's song "Ain't No Other Man", listen to "Love At First Sight" by Kylie Minogue. You will see they have the same abstract storytelling beats.



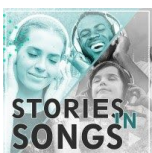
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 - Introduction to the Love Story and the Lover's Meet Scene:
<https://storiesinsongs.com/podcast/episode-010/>
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