

EPISODE 014

Making listeners relate to the inner turmoil of your song's narrator

See the show notes at storiesinsongs.com/podcast/episode-014

[00:00:00] Hey, this is Melanie Naumann, and welcome back to the Stories in Songs Podcast.

Do you want to make your listeners relate to your song's character's troubles?

But you don't know how to pull it off?

Are you looking for a way to show your song's main character's personal development, especially when you want to show the hardship your character had to go through to become who they are today?

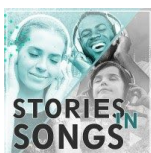
Great News!

Today's podcast episode will help you because it shows you a wonderful way to show the change of your song's character while letting love take on the role of the villain!

And still, be writing a wonderful little love story.

Does that sound exciting?

If yes, then keep listening! It's going to be great!



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What you'll learn in this episode

[00:01:18] Before we study the dark side of love expressed in lovers' meet scenes that go completely wrong for the song's main character, I want us to have some fun today.

Because the next three episodes will make that moment seem like it was the worst thing that could have ever happened, yes, we're going to talk about the troubles and problems that can arise out of a special moment that might turn into tragedy.

But today, I want to take the chance and look at one song that is not about creating an enticing meet-cute scene or love at first sight song that might sound like a cliché. And it's not going to put the love interest in the foreground, but it will be centered on the main protagonist and what meeting the one does to him.

Especially if the character in your song never believed that something like "Love At First Sight" could ever happen to them.

So are you ready to have some fun?

Perfect, let's start with this episode's song analysis.

"I'm a Believer" by The Monkees

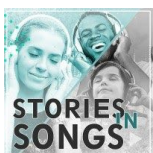
[00:02:13] The song we are going to analyze is "I'm a Believer" by The Monkees. I confess the first time I really noticed that song was back in 2001 when it was played at the ogre Shrek's marriage ceremony and his love, princess Fiona. The Donkey sang the song, who got his voice from Eddi Murphy.

Oh, and yes, I'm talking about the movie "Shrek" now.

Even Weezer covered the song in 2010 for the soundtrack of the third Shrek movie: Shrek Forever After.

Originally, the song was released in 1966.

Micky Dolenz, vocalist and drummer of the 1960s pop/rock band the Monkees, sang the lead vocals. But the American singer-songwriter and actor Neil Diamond composed the song.



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Jeff Barry produced “I’m A Believer.”

It’s success started with becoming the last #1 hit of 1966. Then it became the biggest-selling album for all of 1967, and it is one of the fewer than forty all-time singles to have sold more than 10 million physical copies worldwide.

So that’s pretty amazing, right?

Now, let’s get to the lyrics to find out why the song was such a big hit.

Okay, here we go:

[[Video]]

<https://www.youtube-nocookie.com/embed/wB9YIsKIEbA>

I’m A Believer lyrics © Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC, Universal Music Publishing Group

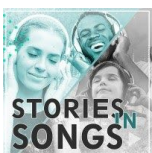
*I thought love was only true in fairy tales
Meant for someone else but not for me
Love was out to get me
That's the way it seemed
Disappointment haunted all of my dreams*

*Then I saw her face. Now I'm a believer.
Not a trace of doubt in my mind
I'm in love
I'm a believer. I couldn't leave her if I tried.*

*I thought love was more or less a giving thing.
Seems the more I gave, the less I got
What's the use in tryin'
All you get is pain?
When I needed sunshine, I got rain.*

*Then I saw her face. Now I'm a believer.
Not a trace of doubt in my mind
I'm in love
I'm a believer. I couldn't leave her if I tried.*

Oh



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*Oh, love was out to get me
Now, that's the way it seemed
Disappointment haunted all of my dreams*

*Then I saw her face. Now I'm a believer.
Not a trace of doubt in my mind
I'm in love
I'm a believer. I couldn't leave her if I tried.*

*Yes, I saw her face, now I'm a believer.
Not a trace of doubt in my mind
Said, I'm a believer, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah (I'm a believer)
Said, I'm a believer, yeah (I'm a believer)
I said, I'm a believer, yeah (I'm a believer)*

Now that we have read through the lyrics let's start dissecting them to study the storytelling craft in this song by using the S.O.N.G. Framework again.

Ready?
Let's begin.

1. Summary (About)

[00:04:50] First, we start with summarizing the song to get a general overview of what it is about and what kind of story or story moment it includes.

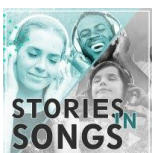
So let's start with the bird's eye view of the story before we zoom in closer.

1. What is the song generally about?

We don't have to read between the lines to figure out that answer.

The song is about someone who gave up believing in love until he meets his one true love. And suddenly everything changed for that person.

The next question is:



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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 lines of the song are:

*I thought love was only true in fairy tales
Meant for someone else but not for me*

“Love” is the third word of the first line of the song.

So we know for sure this will be another love song, which answers our third question of the Summary Step: **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?**

It's a love story.

But what makes it interesting is that we don't even need the second line, “*Meant for someone else but not for me,*” to understand what's going on.

The first line, “*I thought love was only true in fairy tales,*” already incorporates the assumption that this song will include a narrator who was very skeptical about the entire concept of love and basically its existence.

The second line only brings home that assumption by making it unmistakable clear to the audience what our main character's belief system looked like.

So yeah, our expectations are set on hearing about someone finding love who didn't think it could ever happen to them.

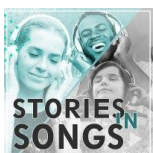
3. So we can say with absolute certainty that the song refers to a specific moment that we expect to see in the love story.

And it's the lovers' first meet.

Only through meeting that special person the change in the character's worldview was possible. He is aware now that love truly exists.

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

Conventions are referring to the roles of the characters. For example, in a love story, we have characters that can take on the role of a rival or of helpers or harmers who are either supporting the love or are against it.



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Conventions can also refer to the way the story moves forward.

For example, by including

- an external need that one of the lovers has to deal with something else externally and not just wants to find love,
- there can be opposing forces to overcome,
- there might be secrets,
- rituals,
- or we go as far as letting morality weigh in.

"I'm A Believer" includes the convention of moral weight. Moral Weight means those who cannot love have a moral failing. But to live happily ever after, they must get over the moral failing by the story's end or suffer the consequences.

In the song, we had a character who thought he did something wrong, and love just did not work for him. We don't have enough backstory to assume why love always failed for him.

But if you think of the movie Shrek, even though it was released decades later, there was a reason why the producers chose to include "I'm A Believer." Because it shows the ogre's personal development from being that monster that keeps to himself becoming a hero by being ready to sacrifice his life to save the princess. And this heroic behavior is right on the scale of morality stories. They move from a selfish person to one that is willing to make a sacrifice for others.

So yeah, I guess the convention of moral weight can be considered for this song.

What do you think?

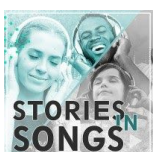
Now the next question is:

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

The narrator uses past tense to talk about how things were and how his disappointing love life looked like.

But by using present tense, the narrator lets us know how things have changed for him and how his beliefs have changed.

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



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

The main character of the song takes on the role of the narrator.

But we are not sure if we listen to his inner monologue or if he’s talking to somebody.

It’s a self-reflecting song, and it could be either.

It all depends on how the listener is affected by what the narrator has to say.

Some who might be in a similar situation of having lost their belief in love might consider the narrator a mentor figure—someone who teaches them about being hopeful because things can change.

They might feel like the narrator addresses them when he says:

*What's the use in tryin'
All you get is pain?*

That is the only time the narrator uses the pronoun “you,” but it can also refer to just a general saying without addressing anyone.

Others might just enjoy hearing the narrator’s thoughts about love to be able to appreciate that they belong to the lucky ones who never had to doubt the existence of true love.

2. Observer

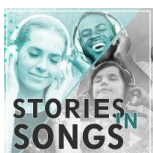
[00:10:26] Okay, now that we have a general overview of the story, let’s talk about the song’s characters.

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

The singer is the main character of the song and takes on the role of the narrator.

2. Is the singer referring to another person?

Yes, he is talking about “her,” but we don’t find out anything about her.



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3. What does the main character in the song consciously WANT? What is his goal?

The interesting thing is this song is entirely different from the songs we've analyzed in the last couple of episodes. In those songs, be it by Aguilera, Madonna, or the Beatles, the character in their song was always after something. Especially after that special someone that they tried to win over.

But in the song "I'm A Believer" by The Monkees, the narrator's WANT isn't that important. He wants not only her but mostly love, but what's even more important for him is his NEED - which, luckily, he is no longer unaware of.

So let's talk about his NEED with the next question.

4. What is the narrator's internal desire?

The song focuses completely on the internal personal development of the narrator.

He wants love, but he used to be too devastated by everything that went wrong and all the disappointments, so he gave up believing in love.

That means his worldview, concerning the existence of true love, shifted from his blind belief to disillusionment.

You can say he took on a new worldview. One in which love only exists in fairytales but not in real life.

So his internal desire, the thing he needs, is a change of his worldview for the better. He needs to disband his disillusionment and find his way back to a justified belief that love does exist.

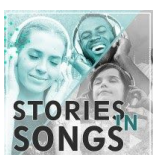
And this justification can only be reached if he finds his own true love.

And he does in this song.

And the way he is telling us about who he was and how he has changed shows us that he got what he needed: He believes in love again.

Let's talk a little more about the narrator by answering the following question:

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



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I think we can empathize with what the narrator had to go through.

We've all been there - at the end of a relationship feeling badly hurt and devastated.

Maybe we even wanted to give up on love as well.

Some found it again.

Others are still searching for it.

But the narrator is like a mentor, a guide that spreads hope by sharing his story. He shows how vulnerable he once was. He's honest. And he is able to self-reflect.

So yeah, I like the narrator.

Are you feeling the same?

The last question of the second step of the S.O.N.G. framework is:

6. What is the point of view?

As always, I refer to the book "Great Songwriting Techniques" by Jack Perricone to determine the point of view.

In "I'm A Believer," we have a first-person narrator. In the lyrics, we mainly encounter the pronoun "I," and the way he tells his story is like sharing an epiphany.

Now in the last song we analyzed, "I Saw Her Standing There" by The Beatles, the first-person narrator also used direct address to include the listeners and make them feel like they are being told that story.

Now in "I'm A Believer," there's no apparent direct address. So how can you still pull it off to engage your audience?

In the song by The Monkees, we have an inner monologue, but here's the thing: By sharing your character's thoughts, you can also create a connection with your audience.

You allow them to reflect on their own experience and compare it with those of your song's character. Furthermore, the distance between your listeners and your character gets very close and intimate.



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We are more invested in connecting with another person when we know about their troubles and identifying with what they had to go through. If we have similar experiences, we are more willing to listen.

Maybe some can even say: “Hey, that’s me. I’m like the narrator in that song because of ...”

So sharing your character’s thoughts is another way to pull your audience into your song and engage them.

Alright, now we got a bird’s eye view of what the song is about, and we are aware of who is telling us the story.

3. Narration

[00:15:08] Now it’s time to study the storytelling power of the lyrics.

The first question is:

1. What are the characters literally doing?

There is no apparent physical action happening.

We can’t say the narrator is at a ball or doing anything in particular. All we can say is that the narrator is telling us about himself.

So let’s take a closer look:

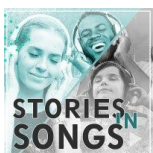
2. What is the essential action of what the character is doing in the scene? What is on his secret agenda? What are they trying to achieve?

The narrator is celebrating his worldview shift.

He does not have anything on his secret agenda. He’s not trying to convince someone or follow up on something in particular.

He just wants to share what he came to realize: He believes in love now.

Now let’s move on to a fundamental question:



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

Even though we are looking back at the problem, the narrator still had to deal with his disbelief in love.

I think the second verse sums up the character's challenge pretty good:

*I thought love was more or less a giving thing.
Seems the more I gave, the less I got
What's the use in tryin'
All you get is pain?
When I needed sunshine, I got rain.*

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.

The narrator says:

*I thought love was only true in fairy tales
Meant for someone else but not for me*

Yes, the problem we've just talked about can be found in the song's first two lines.

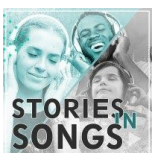
And as a listener, I am hooked because the song's character is talking in the past tense: "*I thought love was only true in fairy tales*," which means something happened that made him change his belief.

And I am hooked to find out what made him see that love is not just real in fairytales.

Is that something you can agree on?

Analyzing the scene told in the song.

[00:17:21] Alright, let's start with the Story Grid's five commandments to evaluate and analyze the lovers' meet moment.



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5. What is the inciting incident?

The inciting incident can either be a causal, an anticipated, or a coincidental event.

I usually consider this incident to be like setting the goal of what the story's character originally wanted before he gets at a crossroad and has to make a decision before moving on.

For "I'm A Believer," the inciting incident must have been a bad breakup. This was a causal inciting incident because the narrator's former lover must have caused it. And it put him on the path of thinking that love does not exist for him.

6. So what was the unexpected event that made him change what he believed in?

This unexpected event is called "the turning point."

The song's main character did not believe in love anymore.

That is until he saw her face.

And meeting her changed everything for him.

So we can assume with absolute certainty that she was the turning point of his life.

7. But if she was the narrator's big life-changing surprise, what was the dilemma that he had to face? What were his options?

Meeting her was a revelation.

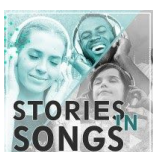
It made him see that love exists.

So his crisis was: Was he going to start another relationship, risking to get hurt once more while hoping that it's the real deal this time, OR should he keep disbelieving in love and avoid her?

The crisis is not explicitly mentioned.

But since we know the resolution of what happened after he made his decision – which was committing – we can look back and find out what dilemma he must have faced.

But the dilemma is not important to look back on.



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And we don't need to hear how he made up his mind because the crisis is implied by knowing how his life was before and after he met her.

8. What's the decision the character makes?

As already said, he puts his heart on the line to experience love again. He wants to believe in love and that she is the one.

So he commits to her.

9. How does it all turn out?

The resolution is the fifth and last commandment. It tells us how making that decision turned out for the protagonist.

He sings:

I'm a believer. I couldn't leave her if I tried.

So we know that the narrator and his love interest are in a relationship now.

Everything has turned out for the best.

Change

[00:19:47] So let's quickly look at the change that defines if the story worked.

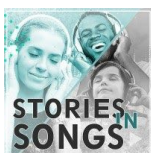
10. Did the song's main character change his perception of the world around him after going through that situation?

Yes, and we've already talked a lot about the narrator's personal development. His worldview shift is the essence of the song's lyrics.

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

The character's external situation changed from being alone to being in a committed relationship. Once again, that's a positive shift.

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?



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Okay, here's how it started:

*I thought love was only true in fairy tales
Meant for someone else but not for me*

And the song ended like this:

I said, I'm a believer, yeah (I'm a believer)

So when we compare the beginning with the ending of the song, the narrator's worldview shift is clearly recognizable.

He moved from thinking that love only existed in fairytales to believing in love.

So that's pretty awesome.

Writing Techniques

[00:20:56] Lastly, let's quickly talk about some of the writing techniques used in this song.

The first question is:

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

The narrator is personifying love and presenting it to act as a villain against him. He says:

*Love was out to get me
That's the way it seemed*

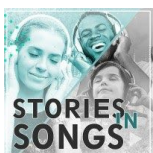
So the narrator is battling against love itself.

He thought love only results in pain and is taking from him more than he could give.

Love made it rain on him when he was hoping for love.

So in talking about love like it is a villain, an antagonist, he gets very specific in telling us about the problem he was facing.

And the great thing about the lyrics is that the songwriters chose to highlight only what love represented to the narrator to show his worldview shift.



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They didn't get into other details, but they focused on one global theme for this song: Love as the villain that makes your life miserable. And they pulled it off so great because they did not confuse their audience with too many unnecessary details but really emphasized the one aspect of the character's life that had the largest impact on him.

Another question about the writing technique considering the storytelling aspect is:

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

There are a couple of images that are related to what we just talked about.

We can vividly see love is chasing the narrator as if it was a cat and mouse game.

There are also other moments that show movement, especially when we look at the second verse:

*I thought love was more or less a giving thing.
Seems the more I gave, the less I got*

We can literally see him giving his love away but never receiving anything in return. And we also have the line:

When I needed sunshine, I got rain.

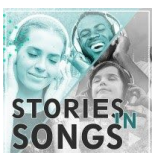
This might not sound like a very clever and unique picture, but when we consider it under Love's aspect as an antagonistic force, the comparison becomes much stronger.

Because every time he wanted love, all he got was heartache. We see the sunshine up in the sky, and then the heavy clouds move in. Clouds bring rain, which is just another expression for tears.

4. Gist

[00:23:19] Okay, now let's sum up the song by talking about its big takeaway.

Does that sound good?



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

The problem that we defined for the narrator was him losing faith in love. He didn't believe it was attainable for him.

But he turned around and disbanded his wrong belief to embrace the luck that finally brought him together with his love.

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

The song "I'm A Believer" by the Monkees is a prescriptive little tale.

The narrator acts like a guide, a mentor, someone who has experienced both sides of the same coin, and he wants us to know that a black and white view of love does not exist.

Love comes with pain. He knows that.

And there can be sunshine after a breakup again.

So the message is: Do not lose your faith in love because love might still be waiting for you.

The last question is:

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

The song's title is "I'm A Believer," and yes, the song is all about believing or not believing in love. And the narrator takes sides. He is a believer in love.

So the title is on point with what the song is about.

How a first person narration can hook your audience

[00:24:37] Now we're left with the task of applying what we've learned to our own songwriting.

But first, let me sum up how "I'm A Believer" managed to hook and engage the listeners even though it's a first-person narration without addressing the listeners directly.



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1. The narrator gives us insights into his thoughts, letting us know what troubled him—thus let us emphasize with what he had to go through. He is keeping the narrative distance relatively small so that we can even identify with him.
2. The narrator is battling an antagonistic force, which ironically is love itself. This shows the challenge the narrator had to overcome,, and it also establishes a connection with the listeners who might have felt like the victim of love at a certain time in their lives.
3. The song focuses completely on the personal development of the narrator. Meeting the One was the turning point for his life, but it does not lead him astray to start telling us about how beautiful or amazing that special person was. Instead, he follows one theme, and that is doing everything in his power to let us understand his worldview shift.

So even though you got a narrator only telling his side of the story without actively including the audience, we can still be engaged in the song.

That's the power of storytelling.

Song Exercise - The Lovers Meet

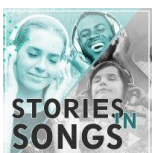
[00:26:06] And let's use what we've learned in this week's exercise:

I want you to write your original lyrics about how meeting the One changed the life of your song's character for the better.

As always, in the show notes of this episode, you can download the PDF with all the instructions.

But here's a short overview.

1. Use **past tense** to show how the life of your song's character looked like before he met the One.
2. Use **present tense** to highlight his worldview shift that shows that they believe in the power of love now.
3. Let love take on the villain's role, as an **antagonistic force** that made his life more miserable than good. (At least before everything changed with meeting the One).
4. Use **first-person narrative** (pronoun "I") to make the listener connect with what your narrator had to go through.
5. Put the **focus** of your telling on the worldview shift of your narrator.



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6. 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. Mention the event that led to the character losing their faith in love. (Breakup, betrayal, death, ...)
 - b. The turning point will be meeting that special girl or boy for the very first time. Don't put too much emphasis on that moment. Include it, but keep your focus on your character and what that unexpected moment does to them internally.
 - c. It's not necessary to include the crisis, but it should be clear what's at stake for the character if he fails to change his belief.
 - d. Show the character's decision.
 - e. Include a resolution letting your audience know how it all turned out, especially by focusing on your main character's change of thought.

For further inspiration and to read over the guidelines, download the exercise PDF in the show notes of this episode.

Do the exercise because the more you study the lyrics of other songwriters, the easier it will be for you to write your own lyrics and tell captivating stories in your songs.

Sound good?

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

If you liked it, please leave a rating and review and let me know what you think.

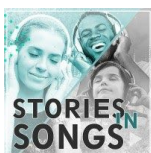
In the next episode, we will continue by analyzing the moment when the lovers first meet. But this time, no more happy endings.

This time, we will start looking at songs that show that not every time everything turns out the way we dream about.

Sometimes, meeting the One can become a moment that may haunt us for the rest of our lives.

So I hope you are excited to learn about the other side of love.
If you don't want to miss the next episode, subscribe to my podcast.

Thanks a lot and see you next time.



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Show notes:

Find out more about love songs in those episodes:

- How to write a powerful love song?
<https://storiesinsongs.com/transcripts/ep-006>
- How to write a heartbreaking love song to get over someone?
<https://storiesinsongs.com/transcripts/ep-007>
- Introduction to the Love Story and the Lover's Meet Scene:
<https://storiesinsongs.com/podcast/episode-010/>



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