

EPISODE 016

One Amazing Songwriting Trick to Increase Your Album's Streaming Numbers

See the show notes at storiesinsongs.com/podcast/episode-016

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

Do you want your songs to be heard?

Then I've got great news for you because in this episode I'll show you an amazing way on how you can make your audience crave more so that they want to check out more of the songs you've got.

So if you've been having a hard time writing something that's never been said before while trying to be relatable and make it interesting, new, credible, and catchy ...

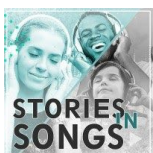
And you're trying to write song lyrics that make people want to listen to more of your songs. Then this episode is exactly what you're looking for!

It shows you "One Amazing Songwriting Trick to Increase Your Album's Streaming Numbers."

And we will use a successful song example to

- understand how using the power of storytelling in songwriting will not only help you get your one song out there
- but also make people want to listen to more of your songs
- It also enables you to figure out how you can write the lyrics for a single release that will help you promote your album.

So do you want to learn this amazing songwriting trick?



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Then keep listening.

What you'll learn in this episode

[00:01:38] My podcast is all about discovering the storytelling power of your song's lyrics. So if you want to improve your songwriting craft, this might just be the right podcast for you.

We're not talking about music production, composition, rhyming, lyrical structure, and all the other songwriting techniques you've probably heard and read about. This podcast focuses entirely on discovering the storytelling power of lyrics. And I'm not referring to songs you already categorize as storytelling songs. The framework I use for analyzing how strong the storytelling in a song is can be applied to every song out there.

Each podcast episode will dissect the lyrics of one particular song. In the last episodes, we've talked about love songs and especially about the lovers' meet scene that almost always seemed like a fairytale moment when it's love at first sight.

But in the last episode, we've moved over to the dark side of love.

The song "Heartache on the Dance Floor" by Jon Pardi showed us what could happen if you miss out on your chance to say hi to someone who turns your entire world upside down.

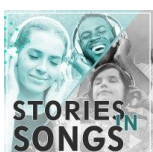
In Pardi's song, the main character got stuck in his life. He was a stranger to a little west coast town and in a bar near the sand, he saw a girl shaking her hips to an old Motown song.

But he did not go and talk to her. Instead, he sang along to the song and missed his chance of getting to know her. So he returned to that bar every night, hoping to see her again.

The song we'll analyze today is like an alternate version of what could have happened in Jon Pardi's song: "Heartache on the dance floor."

We will encounter a character who does talk to that special girl and who even dances with her.

Sounds perfect, right?



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It sounds like another of those happy moments when the lovers first meet, like in “Crazy for You” by Madonna, “Ain’t No Other Man” by Christina Aguilera, or The Beatles with “I Saw Her Standing There.”

Just another meet-cute scene on the dance floor.

But since we are on the topic of no more love story fairytales and happy endings, the situation won’t turn out as the main character had imagined.

The tables will turn.

So are you ready to dive into an alternate universe to Jon Pardi’s song “Heartache on the Dance Floor” and see what could have happened if the character had talked to that girl?

Perfect, let’s start with this episode’s song analysis to discover the lyrics’ storytelling power!

“Middle Of A Memory” by Cole Swindell

[00:04:08] The song we will analyze is “Middle Of A Memory” by Cole Swindell.

It was recorded by American country music artist Cole Swindel and written by Swindell himself, Zach Crowell, and Ashley Gorley. Swindell released it as the second single to his second studio album, “You Should Be Here.”

The song was very successful. It was certified Platinum and received positive reviews from critics praising Swindell’s improvements as a storyteller. Similarly, Annie Reuter of “Sounds Like Nashville” also found that the song has a “vivid storyline” where the maturity of Swindell’s songwriting “shines through.”

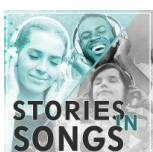
Now, let’s get to the lyrics to find out why there was so much praise for Swindell’s storytelling in his song: “Middle of a Memory.”

Okay, that’s how the lyrics go:

[[Video]]

<https://www.youtube-nocookie.com/embed/PS9Wo0iQUsg>

Middle of a Memory lyrics © Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC, Warner Chappell Music, Inc, Kobalt Music Publishing Ltd., Round Hill Music Big Loud Songs



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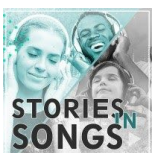
*Baby, it just took one look at you.
For me to change my one drink order to two
Like we already knew each other.
Like we been talking all night.
About a minute into our first dance
We got blindsided by your friends.
All in a hurry like you had to go.
Didn't they know you can't leave someone?
Girl, you can't leave someone.*

*In the middle of a dance floor all alone.
In the middle of an old school country song
Right when I was just about to lean on in
Why'd you have to go then?
Baby, in the middle of the glow of the neon light
It shoulda, coulda, woulda been the night of our lives.
Girl, it ain't right, no.
How you gonna leave me right in the middle of a memory?*

*We were gonna dance till they shut it down.
People'd be staring while I spin you 'round
Thinking we were so in love, yeah
They wouldn't know we hadn't even hooked up.
I'd get your number, and I'd give you mine.
And we'd be hanging out tomorrow night.
But now I don't know where you are
I'm under these lights right here in the dark.*

*In the middle of a dance floor all alone.
In the middle of an old school country song
Right when I was just about to lean on in
Why'd you have to go then?
Baby, in the middle of the glow of the neon light
It shoulda, coulda, woulda been the night of our lives.
Girl, it ain't right, no
How you gonna leave me right in the middle of a memory?*

*Yeah, it's like you walked right out in the middle of a movie.
Tore the back half out of a book
And no, you'll never know, girl, what you did to me.*



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It ain't right saying goodbye

*In the middle of a dance floor all alone.
In the middle of what could've been our song
Right when I was just about to lean on in
Why'd you have to go then?
Baby, in the middle of the glow of the neon light
It shoulda, coulda, woulda been the night of our lives.
But, girl, it ain't right, no.
How you gonna leave me right in the middle of a memory?
In the middle of a memory
In the middle of a memory*

Now that we have read through the lyrics let's start dissecting them to study the storytelling power of "Middle of a Memory" by using the S.O.N.G. Framework.

Ready?
Let's begin.

1. Summary (About)

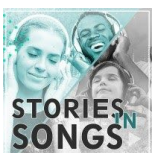
[00:07:14] First, we start with a summary of the song and talk about what kind of story or story moment it includes.

1. What is the song generally about?

The song "Middle of a Memory" deals with a man who met a girl at a dance, but she left before he could express what he feels for her.

As Matt BJORKE of Roughstock also wonderfully said: It is "a song most people have lived" because you never believe how fast a chance can slip through your fingers until you've experienced it yourself.

And because so many people have had similar experiences, it's a theme people like to keep hearing on the radio.



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2. 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?

When we compare that song to a movie scene, we can come up with lots of different movies where one of the two was left standing on the dance floor. Be it at the prom of a teenage love movie, or a wedding, or in a dance club.

The point is that the scene is very familiar to us. We have seen it or experienced it ourselves, which is why we can clearly say it's a love story.

3. After listening to the song, does the song refer to a specific moment that we expect to see in the love story?

Yes, we just have to hear the first two lines, and we immediately know what love story moment the song will be about.

*Baby, it just took one look at you.
For me to change my one drink order to two*

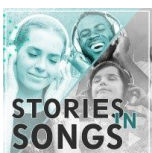
With those two lines, we expect to see the moment when the lovers first meet. The song's main character has seen that girl, and by changing his drinking order from one drink to two, we know that he wants to go and talk to her.

4. So, the song's first lines already set the expectations of what the song will be about. They give a promise to what kind of story moment the audience can expect.

Because the lovers are about to meet, and we are hooked because we want to know if the main character's attempt to talk with her will be successful or if he fails. Because that is something, we do not know. We have no clue how that moment will turn out for the main character. It can go either way. But we expect to see how they meet. That is a given, and therefore the promise the first two lines of the song gave us.

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

Conventions are referring to the roles of the characters. In a story, a character can take on different roles. They can be the hero until the tables turn and they find themselves as the victim, maybe because they were betrayed by someone who acted as their mentor but who turned out to be a shapeshifter.



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In a love story, we have characters that can take on the role of a rival, which means there is another possible love interest. Just think of *Bridget Jones Diary*: Shall Bridget be with her attractive boss Daniel Cleaver who is a womanizer and is not loyal. Or shall she choose Mark Darcy? Darcy and Cleaver are rivals.

The same is true for the love story in *Titanic*. Cal Hockley is Rose's arrogant and snobbish 30-year-old fiancé, but the poor orphan Jack Dawson, played by Leonardo DiCaprio, is the one who wins her heart.

In a love story, there can also be people who are in favor of or against the relationship. Just think of *Romeo and Juliet*. Their families certainly didn't want those two to end up together.

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 - for example, *Romeo and Juliet* had to keep their love a secret,
- rituals,
- or we go as far as letting morality weigh in.

In "Middle of a Memory," our main character and the girl he dances with are blindsided by their friends. Now I wouldn't go as far as saying that their friends were against the beginning of their little relationship, but they certainly acted as hinderers. They got in the way of those two love birds.

So the song does include the convention of the character role of harmers.

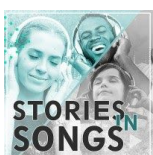
Now the next question is:

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

The character talks about the past when he tells us his story of how he met that girl and what went wrong. He also talks about how everything could have worked out if their friends hadn't interrupted them. He dreams of a better scenario, and in his words:

It shoulda, coulda, woulda been the night of our lives.

we feel his regret and the sadness that overcomes him.



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Similar to Jon Pardi's song "Heartache on the Dancefloor," our character gets stuck in life because he can't move past the chance that slipped right through his fingers.

We have no idea how long the character will be paralyzed by being left on the dance floor. In the song, we switch over to the present and find ourselves still at the dance. He sings:

*But now I don't know where you are
I'm under these lights right here in the dark.*

So we know it might have only been minutes since she left him standing there in the middle of a memory. But what does he do?

Nothing, right.

But don't jump to any conclusions just yet. Let's talk about the main character after the next and final question of the first step of the S.O.N.G. framework.

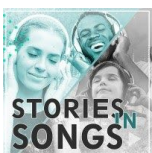
7. Are we hearing someone's inner monologue, someone narrating a story, or a conversation between two or more people?

The main character is talking to that girl he shortly danced with as if she was still there. But all we hear is his inner monologue. He's trying to grasp what happened. He tries to understand how everything could have changed from a fairytale moment into getting thrown into ice-cold water—waking up as if everything was just a dream.

The main character is talking to himself as he tries to make sense of that moment, although he is addressing that girl.

2. Observer

[00:13:07] Now that we have a general overview of the story moment included in the song, let's talk about its main character.



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

The singer is the main character of the song.

2. Is the singer referring to another person?

He is talking about that girl he met and how his friends blindsided them.

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

I think the answer is obvious to that question.

Even the song's title suggests the incompleteness of how the character feels.

*Yeah, it's like you walked right out in the middle of a movie.
Tore the back half out of a book*

He was left standing in the "Middle of a Memory." And all he wants is to complete the memory with a happy ending.

*I'd get your number, and I'd give you mine.
And we'd be hanging out tomorrow night.*

That's the scenario he wanted to have come true.

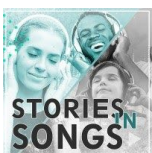
But it is out of reach for him.

That's why he's still hanging onto that dream to what kind of a beautiful memory that night could have led to. And here we find the reason why our main character got stuck. He's just overwhelmed by the turn of events that he can't even comprehend what happened. It's like he's standing there with a dropped chin and staring at the door she left through.

The turn of events took him completely by surprise because as he ordered two drinks instead of one, he already had high expectations about that girl. She was all he wanted, and before he could even make his move, she disappeared.

So you can see that if your character encounters something for which he has high hopes, he will be even more taken by surprise if it doesn't turn out the way he imagined.

So if you want to focus on the moment between a turning point event and the upcoming crisis, you should study this song. After all, you are free to choose to tell a complete story in



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your lyrics, only talk about a moment of your chosen content genre, or zoom into the impact of how overwhelming an unexpected moment can turn out to be.

But let's talk more about the turning point when we talk about the Story Grid's five commandments.

Now that we know what the character wants, let's talk about his NEED.

4. What is the main character's NEED? What is his internal desire?

We know the main character of the song wants the happy ending that he expected to have. He wants her. He wants love. He wants his memory completed before another day passes, and the chance for a better ending of that dance floor scene are non-existent.

But what does he need?

I think he quickly needs to come to the understanding that he needs to act. He needs a sophisticated worldview on which he can rely on.

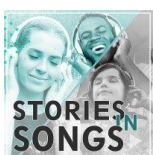
But what does that mean?

He needs to understand that he has only minutes left to act. He can either keep standing there in the middle of the dancefloor in the middle of a memory or go after her.

In order to understand that he needs to act if he doesn't want to live in regret about what he could have done, he needs to know right then and there what could happen if he does not act. He needs to be able to foresee the future and be able to make the best decision that could still save the chance he had with her.

But only if he is sophisticated enough to see that the world is not black and white he will understand that he's not left under the lights in the dark and that all his hopes were in vain. But that there's actually another chance. Even if it's no guarantee for a happy ending, it's at least a choice to act and go after her before she's too far away.

But again, he needs to have a sophisticated and mature worldview to understand his options. But we don't know what the impending crisis will look like for him because we are caught right in the moment between the turning point and the crisis.



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A turning point slaps you in the face. It's so unexpected. You didn't see the turn of events coming. It's so surprising that you need to take a minute to make sense of what happened. And that's exactly what we encounter in this song by Cole Swindell.

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?

So far, I'm sympathizing with the character in the song.

After all, it's a moment that could happen to all of us, or that has already happened to us.

If I like the character or not will be determined by the decision he makes.

After all, a person's actions speak more than a thousand words.

You could say you'd do everything for your girlfriend and you would never cheat on her. But if you do, your actions show who you really are.

And that's why in stories, we need to see how a character acts. We don't like to hear backstory or the narrator telling us who the story's main character is. Actions speak louder than words. And we know who someone is when we see them in a dilemma and the choices they make.

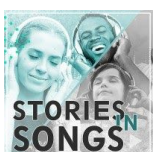
That's what tells us if we like the character or if we don't.

Since the character of the song "Middle of a Memory" by Cole Swindell is seconds away from the moment when the dilemma hits him, and from his decision, we can't tell if we like him or not.

We can only empathize with him. And that's worth a lot too because it establishes a connection between your audience and your song's character.

But remember, only actions reveal the true character of a person.

In Jon Pardi's song "Heartache on the Dancefloor" that we talked about in the last episode, we had a character who even had two moments of clarity. Two times he was in a dilemma and could have made a different choice that would have led to either getting the girl's attention or later to being able to move on in his life.



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But both times, he did not act. He stayed stuck in his false belief that if he waited long enough, she would return.

I don't know how you feel, but I don't like it when people sulk and don't get off their butts to take action.

In that case, the character's actions defined that Jon Pardi's song's character was relatively passive and clueless, and not someone who takes a chance.

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 "Writing Better Lyrics" by Pat Pattison to determine the point of view.

In "Middle of a Memory" by Cole Swindell, the songwriters used direct address. Direct address is when you encounter the pronouns "I" and "You" and the main character of the song is talking to somebody - be it to someone directly or just addressing them in their inner monologue, which feels as if they are talking to them - which is the case for "Middle of a Memory."

Alright, now we got a bird's eye view of what the song is about, and we are aware of who is telling us about that half-lived memory.

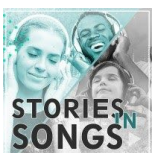
3. Narration

[00:20:15] Now it's time to study the storytelling power of the lyrics.

The first and easiest question is:

1. What are the characters literally doing?

We have a couple of characters – the main character, the girl, and the friends – who were at a dance. But literally, we are left with the main character who shortly danced with the girl and is now left standing in the middle of the dance floor under the lights in the dark. That's all that is literally going on.



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So literally always refers to the main action of the scene that you can observe. It's everything that happens on a surface level.

But what's going on underneath?

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 main character did have a secret agenda because we get a sense of how high his expectations were about meeting and dancing with that girl. Otherwise, he would not feel so overwhelmed by the turn of events.

He wanted to get her number, get a second date, and who knows how much more he already imagined of their beginning relationship.

We've already talked a lot about what the main character wants. And it is because of his high hopes that we can really grasp what kind of future is at stake for him. And which he is about to lose.

So his plans were clearly showing that girl what he feels, maybe leaning in to kiss her or just be closer to her, but it was all part of the beginning he had imagined or even anticipated. His essential action was directed towards staying in touch with her.

Now let's move on to a fundamental question:

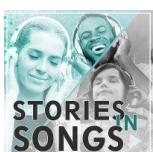
3. Is there a problem the character is facing? Does something challenge him? Or is there some kind of conflict that he has to solve? If so, what is the central conflict the main character in the song has to deal with?

The central problem for the song's main character is about to unfold.

He is moments away from realizing his dilemma, which is all about running after her or keeping standing there in self-pity.

For now, the main problem is making sense of what has happened so that he can see his options and make a decision.

So he's right there in the middle of a huge challenge that will decide if his hopes still have a chance to come true, or if he gives up what he wanted, probably regretting his decision once it's too late and the chance has slipped out of his grasp.



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But of course, you can also just say that the main problem is that a girl left a boy at a dance. That's right as well.

Let's continue with the next question:

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

The first lines go like this:

*Baby, it just took one look at you.
For me to change my one drink order to two*

The first lines do not introduce us to a problem. At least, not an obvious one. It may be understood that the main character does not know that girl. And that's what's going to complicate matters, which is ultimately the cause of the dilemma he is about to face.

She can disappear forever because he does not know her.

That is certainly a problem, but when we only hear those first lines, we are not aware that not knowing her will result in that kind of problem.

So the first lines do not hook us because they introduce us to a problem the main character has to deal with, but because they give us a promise as to what kind of love story moment we can expect. And that's enough to keep us engaged.

Remember, it's not that important if the first lines introduce your audience to a problem the song's character will deal with, but their main job is to hook your audience and spark their interest. That's what they need to do.

If you choose to set up a problem that will be dealt with in the lyrics, that's fine. It's also great to give your audience a promise as to what kind of story moment they can expect in your lyrics and fulfill that promise. That's great as well.

It's also okay if the first lines introduce us to the song's main character or the setting. But the words you choose for accomplishing that need to mean something. They need to make sense and contribute to what you say through your lyrics.

And again, they need to be interesting or intriguing enough to engage your audience so that they keep listening to your lyrics and don't just nod their heads to the music or even change the station or skip the song.



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Analyzing the scene told in the song.

[00:24:48] Alright, now that we've already talked a lot about the turning point and the crisis, let's dive a little deeper into the Story Grid's five commandments to evaluate and analyze the story moment of the lovers' meet-scene.

5. What is the inciting incident?

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

We might say that the inciting incident was the character making the decision to go to this dance. Then the turning point would be meeting that special girl.

This was true for all of the songs we've talked about in the last episodes. They made a decision to go somewhere, and there they met their love interest, which completely turned their lives upside down.

But in Swindell's song "Middle of a Memory," the inciting incident is not the decision to go to that dance, but it's meeting that girl.

Here's why: The first lines of the song start right with seeing this girl for the very first time.

*Baby, it just took one look at you.
For me to change my one drink order to two*

So he just saw her, and by seeing her, he knows what his essential action will be. He knows what he wants to accomplish. He wants to get a drink for her and go and talk or dance with her because his ultimate goal might be to get her number so that he can see her again.

So seeing her there at the dance sets the goal of what he will try to achieve. The goal is defined by his high expectations that we've already talked about.

That's why seeing her is the inciting incident. It might be a coincidental event because it was luck to see her there in the room right when he was ordering drinks. But his head is already full of hopes because she is what he will be after.

She is his goal. And that's the inciting incident's job: Establishing what the character will try to achieve in the scene.



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6. So, what was the unexpected event that turned the tables?

Our main character just started dancing with this girl, and everything seemed perfect. Everything seemed as if he was about to get what he wanted: All his hopes fulfilled. Maybe they dance a little longer, then he can ask her for her name, her phone number, and they'll meet again. That's the memory he actively tries to create.

And this would all come true if it wasn't for the big ball of chaos in the form of her friends who took her away from him and left him standing there in the middle of a memory.

He did not see it coming that their dance would be interrupted. That was a scenario he did not expect and which took him completely by surprise. And it also destroyed all his hopes and his high expectations.

And that's precisely why he's just standing there doing nothing yet because he is still trying to come to terms with what happened.

And when a character in a story gets into an overwhelming moment like this, you know for certain that they were just being hit in the guts, metaphorically speaking, and have to catch their breath before they can deal with the new situation.

And the songwriters did a fantastic job of highlighting how shocking it can be to get something taken away from you that you already thought was yours for sure.

In the song: It was the memory the character thought he'd get.

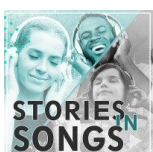
Now let's move on to the third commandment.

7. What is the dilemma that the character has to face? What are his options?

As we've already discussed, the song does not include a crisis, no decision, and no resolution.

Because it focuses on the punch in the guts that the turning point caused.

The song's character is trying to catch his breath to make sense of the change in the situation. Only after he has swallowed the bitter pill of the new cards he's been dealt will he be able to see the options he's left with.



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That means he will hopefully understand that he could go running after the girl and ask for her number, risking to make a fool of himself but at least not living in regret about what he could have done, OR he could let her slip and get drunk, hoping that alcohol will destroy the memory he tried to create.

It's his choice, and his decision would tell us what kind of person he is.

But the song does not go that far into telling us how it all turns out.

We only have the inciting incident and the turning point: no crisis, no decision, no resolution. We only encounter 2 of 5 Story Grid commandments in that scene.

Does this mean the song does not work when we consider the lyrics' storytelling aspect?

Absolutely not.

The most important commandment is having a turning point. A turning point is the event that changes the situation for the character. It either makes their situation worse or leaves them better off because they just got some great new information, a revelation, or someone or something helped them achieve what they were after. Either way, the tables turn one way or the other.

And as we said many times before, change is the indicator if a story or a story moment works or not.

And look at it this way: How many tv series are you watching and at the end of the episode, they leave you hanging with the big question: "Oh my god. I can't believe what just happened? What is the character going to do?" But we don't find out until we watch the next episode.

Ending a scene with a turning point is the definition of having a cliffhanger.

And that's what the songwriters did in the lyrics of "Middle of a Memory." They ended the song with a cliffhanger.

So why would you do that?
Especially when that song is a single release?

Well, I think people will stay engaged with what they have encountered in the lyrics because they want to know how it turns out. It's the same why we binge-watch TV series. We always want to know what happens next.



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And if you have a single release that ends with a cliffhanger, maybe your audience is so intrigued by the event in your lyrics that they buy the album, hoping to find the answer to the question of what happens next. Cliffhangers need to be resolved. And just imagine the satisfaction your audience would feel if they would encounter the resolution to that cliffhanger in one of the songs on your album.

8. What's the decision the character makes?

/

9. How does it all turn out?

/

Change

[00:31:25] Alright, let's just talk a little more about how the turning point led to a change in the situation. After all, a working scene always needs to include a change. Otherwise, everything would stay the same, and it would be boring if nothing happened, right? At least, when we look at stories.

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

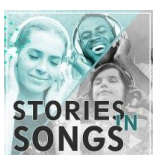
We can only answer this question once the cliffhanger has been resolved by another song that shows us the character's decision and the consequences that decision led to. We can't assume if his worldview will shift or not or if he is already sophisticated enough to make the best of the hand he's dealt.

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

This one is easier since it focuses on the turning point event.

We had a character who had high hopes in how the encounter with the girl would turn out for him. He was so positive that he would create an amazing memory, and possibly many, many more.

But the girl left before he could make his move.



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So the character's external situation changed from being in control to not being in control anymore. He was confident of what he was about to gain, and now it seems like he's lost it.

Therefore, the situation changed from good to bad, from positive to negative.

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:

*Baby, it just took one look at you.
For me to change my one drink order to two*

And the song ended like this:

*How you gonna leave me right in the middle of a memory?
In the middle of a memory*

So when we compare the beginning with the ending of the song, we are able to sum up what has happened. In the first lines, we have the typical "Boy meets Girl" scene, and in the last lines, we find out how that encounter has turned out: She left him.

We don't know the reason because the cause is written in the lyrics between the beginning and the end, but still, we get a clear picture of how the character's anticipated hopes were not fulfilled.

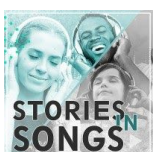
And I just love it when a song's ending mirrors the beginning but also shows the change of what happened in between.

That's just amazing songwriting and a must-have for successful storytelling.

Writing Techniques

[00:33:53] Lastly, let's quickly talk about some of the writing techniques used in this song.

The first question is:



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

The character talks about his imagined future that got ripped away from him as their friends blindsided them.

He could have just said: “*You would have fallen in love with me*” to show what he was hoping for. Instead, he gets very specific as he reveals every step of his plan that would have led to the same outcome.

In the second verse, he sings:

*We were gonna dance till they shut it down.
 People'd be staring while I spin you 'round
 Thinking we were so in love, yeah
 They wouldn't know we hadn't even hooked up.
 I'd get your number, and I'd give you mine.
 And we'd be hanging out tomorrow night.*

So yes, the lyrics are very specific as they show us how the memory the song's character wished for would have looked like.

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

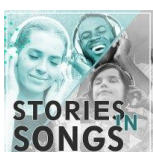
14. Is the song evoking specific pictures in the audience's mind by using imagery?

Well, I love the title of the song: “Middle of a Memory.”

She left him in the “Middle of a Memory,” which is a powerful image the songwriters created. It's original and not something you hear very often, but still, it's not hard to understand what is meant by those words.

And that's the beauty of choosing the right words to express what you want to say. If you can come up with new poetic comparisons that sound great, original, and are easy to get, you got yourself a winner.

Some songwriters use too much creative language to talk about their story moment. They might sound good when they write their newly created metaphors down, but if there are too many, then the lyrics won't make sense anymore, and those comparisons become a painful blight in the lyrics.



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So my advice to you: Don't use too much fancy creative language in your lyrics because you risk that your audience won't understand what you were trying to say. If it's too hard to figure out what the song is about, your listeners will quickly lose interest.

I mean, look at those seasoned songwriters who came up with the titles like "Heartache on the Dancefloor" or "Middle of a Memory." They use only one powerful creative phrase to sum up the main theme of the song. And those words are part of the lyrics, and they do not interrupt the narration because we wonder what they mean. We know.

So if you're someone who tends to disguise every word's meaning, think about if that is the way to go. Or if it would be better if people would just get your message and what you have to say.

4. Gist

[00:36:35] Alright, let's move on with the big takeaway of the song.

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 character was that he was left standing on the dance floor. Since the character is not yet aware of the dilemma he's in and the options he's got, he cannot make a decision yet.

Without a decision, we can't say if his choice will turn out for the better or worse. Or for being a prescription or a warning if we ever find ourselves in the same situation.

We just don't have enough information.

Now, where does this lack of an answer leave us?

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

As said, the problem is not solved yet. The character still has to catch himself to be able to review his options and make a decision.

So we have no idea what will be the right or wrong choice for him and how it will turn out. So we can't come up with a specific message concerning that situation.



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But we can also look further and maybe say: “Disappointed high hopes will leave you paralyzed.” That could be a takeaway that is true for this song, but it’s not a message directed at the love story in particular. It’s more a general saying.

Nonetheless, even though the song ended with a cliffhanger, we can still take something away from it. And that’s enough for a song like this that leaves us wondering how it will all turn out.

The last question is:

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

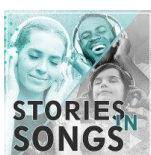
The song’s title is “Middle of a Memory,” and the title wraps up what the character’s main problem is that he has to deal with in this song. It’s all about the expectations, hopes of what he set out to do, and that got all taken away from him. He’s literally stuck in the middle of a memory. So the title is on point and just a masterpiece of a catchy creative phrase.

What we’ve learned in this episode:

[00:38:30] Awesome, we’ve just gone through the S.O.N.G. framework, and I hope you can take away one or some of our observations for your own songwriting.

So let’s sum them up quickly to remember the most important things we’ve talked about:

1. We have learned that the actions of a person, especially when they are in a crisis situation, and have to make a choice, define who that person really is. Actions speak louder than words. So whenever you introduce your audience to your character, and you want to show them who that person is, don’t just tell your audience, but show them through using character action and letting them make a decision - whether it’s good or bad. It all depends on how you want to portray your character.
2. We were introduced to the power of creating a cliffhanger in the lyrics of a single release and its importance if you want to push your album sales. People want to find out what happens next, and if you can deliver on how a song is continued on another song of your album, your audience will feel satisfaction, even catharsis. We want to find out how a story turns out. So you can use this imminent need for a resolution to promote your album.



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3. We also know now that we don't need all 5 Story Grid Commandments for the storytelling power to work in your lyrics. The event that turns the tables for better or worse is the indicator of change, and that's what stories are all about. There needs to be a change.
4. We have experienced the impact of what happens when our expectations and hopes are taken away from us by an unexpected event, the turning point, and that it needs time to recover from such an event. We know it's like a punch in the guts, and the character needs to catch his/her breath. And we can write about that overwhelming situation in a song as well. The main thing is: we include the punch in the guts.
5. Lastly, when you write songs about the lovers' meet-scene, the turning point doesn't necessarily need to be meeting that special person. Meeting them can also be the inciting incident that establishes what your character's goal looks like (by including hopes and expectations). The turning point will then be another unexpected event that either destroys those hopes or helps your character get what they want.

Song Exercise - The Lovers Meet

[00:40:49] Now, we're left with the task of applying what we've learned to our songwriting.

I want you to write your original lyrics about a character who has a clear goal and feels confident in achieving it (winning someone's heart), but who encounters an unexpected misfortune that makes them stop to catch their breath.

1. Use **past tense** and **direct-address** to help the character make sense of what just happened to them and use "would" to paint the imagined future of what their hopes or expectations were.
2. Use **present tense** to reel back into the present moment so that your audience can see that your character is still trying to catch their breath after metaphorically being punched in the guts.
3. Create **one creative phrase** for your chorus and/or song title that is original, new, but also easy to understand. It should be able to paint a picture in your audience's head before they've even listened to your lyrics. Don't use too much imagery and poetic phrases. Just really focus on the one.
4. Include only the **first two Story Grid commandments** so that you learn how to create a cliffhanger.
 - a. Start your song with the inciting incident. This is meeting that special person for the very first time. And it's establishing a dream scenario in your character's mind. You can share their expectations before letting the tables turn to make the turning point event even more impactful. You can also write



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the lyrics as Swindell did in his song “Middle of a Memory” and paint their hopes after the turning point. Your choice. Just make sure the inciting incident leads to those high hopes and expectations and establishes a goal they are so confident of achieving.

- b. Think about the love story conventions that are at your disposal. In Swindell’s song, the friends acted as hinderers. But you can also include a rival who steps up as the turning point event. Or you use opposing forces outside of the character’s control like there’s an evacuation or the police storms the dance club. Everything is possible. It must be unexpected, and it must separate the lovers. And it must leave the main character standing there trying to make sense of what just happened.
- c. Do not include the crisis, the decision, or the resolution of how everything turned out. Just focus on the aftermath of the turning point event and how your character deals with coming to terms with that situation.

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

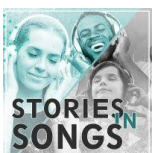
Do the exercise because the more you study the lyrics of other songwriters, the easier it will be for you to write your own lyrics and tell captivating stories in your songs. Because you can use songs of other songwriters as inspiration. So if you want to write about a scene when a boy meets a girl, but she leaves before he can make a move, then you could look at “Middle of a Memory” by Cole Swindell to see how he pulled it off. You can read through other lyrics to get inspired and get a feel of where the important story moments occurred so that you’ll never get stuck in writer’s block again.

That’s why it’s so important to study the lyrics of successful songs. They show you the craft, inspire, and help you hone your songwriting skills by enriching your possibilities of songwriting.

So if you have time, do the exercise and then find another topic you want to write about. Compare the lyrics of different songs and find out what they have in common and how they differ. Then use what you liked about them for your own songwriting. Never copy, but be original with your ideas.

I’m sure you got this.

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



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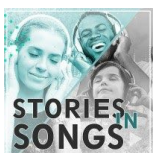
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If you liked it, please leave a rating and review and let me know what you think.

In the next episode, we will continue by analyzing the moment when the lovers first meet. We'll move far into the dark side of love when we look at how the band Placebo pulled it off to write about meeting someone attractive for the very first time.

If you don't want to miss the next episode when you learn how to kick the love song cliché of love at first sight in the butt, then subscribe to my podcast.

Thanks a lot and see you next time.



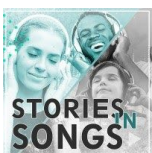
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Show notes:

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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