

EPISODE 024

“Rumor” by Lee Brice – Using Multiple Love Story Conventions

See the show notes at storiesinsongs.com/podcast/episode-024

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

Today we’ll do our second lyric study about the love story moment of the first kiss. And we’ll use the song “Rumor” by Lee Brice as today’s example to find out how you can pull it off to write about that special and exciting moment when two persons who are attracted to each other are about to share their first kiss.

And by studying the lyrics of this song, you’ll see how you can use multiple love story conventions in a song without getting over the top. You’ll also find out when it’s better to leave your story unresolved and end with a cliffhanger not to steal the spotlight from your song’s central idea.

Sound good?

So let’s get started.

TEASER

The S.O.N.G. Framework

[00:01:21] As always, we’ll use the S.O.N.G. framework to study the storytelling power of the lyrics.



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This framework includes all the questions we need to answer when we want to find out how much a song uses the craft of storytelling to engage its listeners.

It consists of 4 steps: S like Summary - O like Observer - N like Narration - G like Gist.

So first, we first look at what the song is about. Then, this summary will give us a bird' eye view of the song's main content in general.

After that, we dive deeper to find out more about the person who is the central character in that song. I call him the observer because it's the person who lets the listener know what is going on.

In the third step, we analyze the narration to learn about the inner dynamics of how the songwriters applied the craft of storytelling to the song.

Lastly, we get to the song's gist to find out the big takeaway for the listener. We will look primarily at the song's message and determine if it was a cautionary or a prescriptive tale.

“Rumor” by Lee Brice

[00:02:25] The song we will analyze today is “Rumor” by the American country music singer and songwriter Lee Brice.

It was written by Lee Brice and Ashley Gorley, and Kyle Jacobs. It was released to radio in July 2018 as the second single from Brice's self-titled studio album.

So let's go through the lyrics. As always, I'll read them to you first.

The lyrics are under copyright by Warner Chappell Music, Inc, Kobalt Music Publishing Ltd.

[[Video]]

<https://www.youtube-nocookie.com/embed/ObptpVRe6ek>

Rumor lyrics © Warner Chappell Music, Inc, Kobalt Music Publishing Ltd.

*Girl, you know I've known you forever
How many nights we hung out together
Same little crowd, little bar, little town
'Round this old dance floor*



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*My boys are laughing and tap me on the shoulder
Making a motion like, "Could y'all get any closer?"
They wanna know what's up why I'm still holding ya
Even when the song is over*

*There's a rumor going 'round about me and you
Stirring up our little town the last week or two
So tell me why we even trying to deny this feeling
I feel it, don't you feel it too?
There's a rumor going 'round, and 'round, and 'round
What d'you say we make it true?
We make it true
Oh, we make it true, yeah*

*Well, I can shut 'em down, tell 'em all they're crazy
I can do whatever you want me to do, baby
Or you could lay one on me right now
We could really give 'em something to talk about*

*There's a rumor going 'round about me and you
Stirring up our little town the last week or two
So tell me why we even trying to deny this feeling
I feel it, don't you feel it too?
There's a rumor going 'round, and 'round, and 'round
What d'you say we make it true, baby?*

*Oh, be honest, girl, now
Do you wanna do this or not?
Should we keep 'em talking, girl
Or should we just make 'em stop?*

*There's a rumor going 'round, ha, about me and you
Stirring up our little town the last week or two
Oh, tell me why we even trying to deny this feeling
I feel it and you feel it too
There's a rumor going 'round, and 'round, and 'round
What d'you say we make it
Make it true
What d'you say we make it true, yeah?
Come on over here
Let's really give 'em something to talk about, baby
(Talk about, baby) There's a rumor going 'round*



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Now that we have read through the lyrics of “Rumor” by Lee Brice let’s start dissecting them to study their storytelling power using the S.O.N.G. Framework.

Ready?
Let’s begin.

1. Summary (About)

[00:04:43] Let’s start with getting an overview of what the song is about before diving deeper into characters, the different storytelling tools, and the message behind it all. This first step is laying the groundwork for our lyric study.

So the first question is:

1. What is the song about?

I don’t think you had any trouble identifying what’s going on in this song. We have two friends on the dance floor, and they’re still standing close together even after the song has ended. If you have ever been in a situation like this, you know how special it feels to just can’t let go of the other one.

Furthermore, the two friends are aware of the rumors going around in that small town. Stories that they’re already together. So it’s all about: Why not make that rumor true by sharing a first kiss?

Gosh, maybe I like that song because I once was in a situation exactly like this. Everyone knew of me being in a relationship before I knew it myself. So as we sat at the campfire and found out about that rumor, we also just thought: Why not make it true?

Anyway, haha, I don’t wanna go down memory lane, but it’s always great when a song has the power to remind you of a special moment in your life. Of course, that makes the song even more special.

And this song is all about the anticipation of the first kiss. That’s what it’s about. So let’s make the rumors true by sharing a first kiss.

Now let’s dive a little deeper because there’s much more to find out about that song.



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2. If the song was a scene from a movie, under what genre would you promote the movie? What is the story's genre?

It's a love story, right?

Because what's the primary universal human value at stake?

It's all about sharing that first kiss. It's about getting rejected or committing to someone. So that universal human value is love.

If you want to find out more about universal human values, check out [episode 23](#) of the Stories in Songs podcast. This episode also helps you find other topics to write about besides love songs. I'll include a link in the show notes.

So the main content genre of the song "Rumor" is Love.

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

Now that we have put a label on the song's story moment and identified it as part of a love story, we can further check if the lyrics fit into one of the must-have love story moments that the audience intuitively knows and identifies as one of the special moments that makes a love story complete.

As a reminder, the six must-have moments that the audience expects from a love story are:

1. the lovers meet
2. the first kiss or intimate connection
3. the confession of love
4. the breakup
5. the proof of love
6. and the scene where the lovers reunite or part.

Those six moments provide us with another waypoint when analyzing the song's lyrics – another step to move forward in our lyric study. They help us go further in one direction and discover more about the meaning behind the words.

In "Rumor" by Lee Brice, the obligatory moment of a love story can be clearly identified. The anticipation of the first kiss is clearly at the center of the lyrics.

Let's move on to the next question:



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4. Do the song's first lines set the expectations of what the song will be about. Do they give a promise to the audience that they'll hear about a love story or the first kiss moment?

Now that we know that the song is about love, especially the lovers' first kiss, we now look at the song's first lines.

As you know, it's crucial to know about the importance of the first line of your lyrics. They have to do so many things that decide if your song gets listened to or if your audience loses their attention.

So the first line of your lyrics have to:

- set expectations what the song's content will be about
- hook the listeners by
 - opening a narrative gap or creating a question in the listener's mind
 - creating intrigue
 - referring to a problem that needs solving
- create tension
- create the setup for the rest of the song. It's the foundation. Everything else you add has to build on top of your lyric's beginning.

There are multiple ways to do this.

- you can establish the setting and the main character by giving them some unique features that seem very compelling and raise questions in the listener's mind
- Or you establish the central problem the song's character has to deal with. Because problems are a great way to let your listeners identify with your song's character and hook them because they want to find out how that problem is resolved.
- Or you start with the promise of what special moment your lyrics will be about – a hint: they should refer to one of the moments we intuitively can identify for a certain kind of story. So they tell the listener exactly if it's a song about a crime, about a monster, about freedom, or about love
- Or you can pull the listener into an unfolding event by using action verbs, the first-person perspective, and a direct address through dialogue
- or just combine the options we've just gone through.

Let's look at the first lines of "Rumor". The song starts like this:

Girl, you know I've known you forever



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That line gives the audience already a great insight into the type of song they're about to hear.

1. They set up the point of view of Direct Address, which lets us know that the singer takes on the role of the song's main character, and he's right in the action. And we're right in the unfolding event with them.
2. Furthermore, the lines hint at a problem. It doesn't seem big, but there's definitely something going on if the song's character states something the both of them already know. He has an intention. And we're intrigued to find out what it is.

So just by looking at that first line, we know it's a song about love. We know they are close, and by stating the obvious, we suspect the song's character is out for something else. We just don't know yet what it is. So we keep listening.

Mission accomplished.

Okay, let's continue by looking at some further love story must-haves.

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

Conventions are the conditions that set up those expected must-have moments of a love story. They refer to the setting, character, and catalysts. Those things – conventions for setting, character, and catalysts – create the conditions for conflict.

So love story conventions are different character roles like rival, helpers, and harmers.

Furthermore, conventions can also refer to the way the story moves forward.

For example, by including

- an external need
- opposing forces to overcome,
- secrets
- rituals,
- moral weight

In the song "Rumor" by Lee Brice, we encounter the following love story convention as the song's main character says to his girl:

*How many nights we hung out together
Same little crowd, little bar, little town*



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'Round this old dance floor

What do you think: What love story convention is at play here?

Yes, the characters hang out on this dancefloor in this bar so many nights, that it has already become a ritual for them.

And rituals are something that helps to set up a love story.

Furthermore, we encounter another love story convention. Look at those lines:

*My boys are laughing and tap me on the shoulder
Making a motion like, "Could y'all get any closer?"*

The friends of the song's main character take on the role of helpers. Another love story convention fulfilled.

But we can even name another convention:

*There's a rumor going 'round about me and you
Stirring up our little town the last week or two*

There's a rumor going on that those two are already together. That rumor works as a catalyst to spark their love story. In addition, that rumor helps the song's main character take the next step in their relationship. It gives him the courage to ask her for that first kiss. So, all in all, it's the society around them that acts as helpers, too.

But we can even score for another love story convention. This song really unpacks them all. Well, almost. Haha.

Let's look at those lines:

Well, I can shut 'em down, tell 'em all they're crazy

and

*Should we keep 'em talking, girl
Or should we just make 'em stop?*

Our dancefloor couple has two options. They can make the rumors true, or they can fight against them. Even though we get the feeling, they'll both commit to the kiss. Those rumors also work like an opposing force they have to overcome. Somehow, they gotta deal with them.



So it's really great to have this song as an example that shows you how to include multiple love story conventions. One is mostly enough, and you don't have to aim for more, but you see, including some more that work together really well and serve the song's plot is okay too.

So, all in all, we have rituals, helpers, and opposing forces.

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?

This question is important because it reveals ...

- if the song's story moment has already happened and therefore is just a retelling of events that might have led to a certain situation or used to build a bridge to the present,
- or if the song pulls the listener right into an unfolding event
- or if the song is about an imagined, anticipated, or feared future event

In the song "Rumor," we are right at the moment with the two characters. So we are thrown into an unfolding event. We're right at the dancefloor with the song's main character.

7. What's the point of view?

This question helps us know how close the narrative distance is between the listener and the song's main character. It tells us how far the audience is away from the world of the song. You can also see it like this:

Point of view defines the relationship between the singer and the audience. But the point of view also sets the context for your ideas.

So this question helps us to know how well the song's lyrics engage the listener and pull them into the story moment of the song.

And "Rumor" by Lee Brice uses "Direct Address". That's the most intimate point of view.

The singer is talking to some second person or right at the audience.

In Direct Address, 2nd person pronouns are mixed with 1st person pronouns to produce a contact between I and you.



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By far, this point of view is the most close-up and most-intimate point of view. It's all about feelings and not facts. Perfect for a love story that is all about feelings, right?

Because as a listener

- I imagine the singer is singing to me, or
- I watch the singer singing directly to someone else, real or imagined by the singer, or
- I can imagine that the singer is someone I know singing to me, or
- I can identify with the singer and sing to someone I know

So many options on how you can make that song your own.

Summary Step 1 - Summary

Okay, now we've finished the first step of the S.O.N.G. framework.

We now know:

1. The song is about two long-time friends who are just seconds away from their first kiss.
2. We know the song is about love.
3. And it is especially about the lover's first kiss.
4. And in the song's first line, the character intrigues the audience by talking directly to his girl stating an obvious fact that makes us wonder about his intention.
5. The song uses the love story conventions of rituals, helpers, and opposing forces.
6. The character is speaking in the present moment, and we're right there with him as the events unfold.
7. And he is using Direct Address. So the narrative distance is very intimate.

2. Observer

[00:17:27] Now that we have a general overview of the story moment included in the song, let's talk about its main character.

This second step is another foundation for evaluating the storytelling power of the lyrics because characters and their actions make a story. So never underestimate the importance of who your song's main character is.



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

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

This helps us determine if the singer is taking on the main character's role in the song, whether he's just a bystander or an unidentified presence. But, again, this ties back to narrative distance and how closely connected we feel to the song's characters.

As we've already said as we talked about point of view, the connection between I and you in Direct Address is for communicating feelings and not facts. And "Rumor" by Lee Brice is a Love song. So the singer takes on the role of the song's main character.

2. Is the singer referring to another person?

This question serves to list all the characters present in the song. In addition, it's to have an overview of who else is taking part in that scene.

So the song's main character is talking directly to his girl.

But in the crowd around them, we also encounter his "boys". And he also refers to the town they're from and the people living there because they are the ones spreading the rumors.

Now let's talk about the main character in more detail:

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

Answering this question will help you see that your song's main character has a goal that they're pursuing. If they didn't have a goal, they wouldn't need to take any action. Without any action taken, we don't have a story.

So what is it that the character wants?

In "Rumor" by Lee Brice, we just have to look at the story's content genre. It's a love song. And love stories are about the universal human values of love.

Again, if you want to find out more about universal human values, check out [episode 23](#) of the Stories in Songs podcast.

So in love stories, the main character wants to love or be loved. Or they try to get away from love. But their goal is always connected to love.

In "Rumor", the song's character, more precisely, wants to share the first kiss with his friend.



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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?

I don't think the lyrics include what the song's main character needs.

Needs refer to a character's thought, fortune, or character. Or speaking in storytelling terms of internal content genres: Needs refer to a character's status, worldview, or morality.

We can't find anything that hints at how the character changes in those areas.

But "Rumor" by Lee Brice is also a song just about that one moment in time. And this is what you have to consider when it comes to wondering if you have to include how the character changes internally.

- If you write a song about a very short moment in time, focus on what your character actively tries to gain, achieve, or get.
- If you write a song that builds a connection from the past to the present, sometimes even to the future, you can include what your character needs.

So, in "Rumor", it's all about the character's want: Kissing his girl. That's all that's really important in that special little moment in time.

Let's continue with the next 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?

Knowing about our own perception of the song's character is important because if the song has a message or a takeaway, it depends on how we look at the song's character to take that message into consideration for our own life, or if we won't listen.

In "Rumor" by Lee Brice, there's nothing that makes me not want to like the character. For some, it might seem he's putting some pressure on her by asking her again and again. But then you have to consider the relationship the songwriter has established right in the first lines. They've known each other for a very long time and always end up dancing in that bar. So asking her for that kiss is without pressure. It's kind of what comes naturally. They know each other. So they know how to talk to each other.



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So I like the song's main character.
What about you?

Summary Step 2 - Observer

Okay, now we've finished the second step of the S.O.N.G. framework.

We now know:

1. The singer takes on the role of the main character
2. and he talks to his love interest
3. He wants love, and more precisely, he likes to kiss her.
4. and there's no character need included because the song's about one short moment in time.
5. And the song's main character is someone we like.

Alright, now we got a bird's eye view of what the song is about, and we are aware of who the main character is, what he wants, and to whom he's talking.

3. Narration

[00:22:55] Now it's time to study the storytelling power of the lyrics.

Including the power of storytelling in your lyrics helps you hook your listeners and keep them engaged until the song's end. And since storytelling is all about delivering a message or some deeper meaning, your listeners will also be able to take something away from your song.

So let's dive in to find out what works in the lyrics, what does not, and what could have been improved to increase the storytelling power – and ultimately how the song keeps the listener engaged.

The first and easiest question is:



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1. What are the characters literally doing?

We have two characters in a little bar in a little town at night dancing on the dancefloor even after the song is over. And the song's character is asking her a question. There are also the song's character's boys in the crowd who tap him on the shoulder.

So this song lets us know where we are when it's happening, and what's literally going on. And we get the answer to all of those questions right in the first verse. That's really great because it helps us picture those characters and their surroundings. And if you wanna tell a little story in your lyrics, it's always great to include some detail that helps your audience see where the characters are and what they literally do.

Okay, now let's move on to the second question of step 3.

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

The essential Action of the song's main character is all about how they can achieve their goal in the song. What is their strategy to get what they want?

So, if the Literal Action is what's happening on the surface, then the Essential Action is what's happening below the surface, or the subtext within the scene.

Since the song's main character is quite frank about what he wants, there's nothing going on beneath the surface. He's literally asking her to kiss him. There's no secret agenda. He's honest, and that's what we kinda like about him.

Let's move on to the next 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?

You might wonder if a song about a happy love story really needs a problem? Doesn't a problem ruin everything? Can't we have a merry time for once where everything is okay?

Certainly, many people try to avoid conflict as much as they can in their own lives. But when that conflict happens to another person, we're really interested to see how they'll deal with it. Will they overcome it, or will they surrender?



People love stories because we can read, watch, or listen to them from the safety of not being at the center of it all. We don't have any stakes in the game, so we gladly watch how other people fight and fight, and fight.

So yeah, you could write a love song about everything being peachy. But if you really want to wake the interest of your audience, you gotta turn to storytelling. And in storytelling, there's no story without conflict. So including a problem that the song's main character has to deal with and overcome is a great way to engage your listeners.

If you want to know more about why addressing a problem in a song is such a great way to engage your audience, listen to [episode 17](#) of the Stories in Songs Podcast.

In "Rumor" by Lee Brice, the main problem that the song's character faces is that everything's in place for the next step in their relationship, but none of them dared to make a move until that night. So they have to overcome what's holding them back. And especially by having been friends for so long, that's quite a big step. But as I said at the beginning of this episode, many people have been in a situation like this. So the problem is being stuck and afraid of taking the next step.

Now let's see if this problem was already used at the song's beginning.

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:

*Girl, you know I've known you forever
How many nights we hung out together*

Great, isn't it?

The song's main problem is set up in the first lines of the lyrics.

We immediately know what their relationship is like. And by using the verb "hang out", we also know that those two might not yet be a couple. They were just hanging out – hanging out like friends. So the problem is introduced right at the beginning of the song letting the listener know from the start what kind of love story trouble to expect. Well done.

Alright, let's continue with the five commandments of storytelling.



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Analyzing the scene told in the song.

[00:28:02] Alright, now that we really know what the character wants and the problem he's dealing with, let's look at the five commandments of storytelling. That means we will check if the lyrics contain the five key elements responsible for the vital change we need to call a story a working story. After all, stories are all about change.

The first question is:

5. What is the inciting incident?

An inciting incident is an event – either causal or coincidental – that thrusts the song's character into the story's main action.

This event is a stimulus that your character gets. It's something unexpected that they did not see coming and don't know how to deal with it OR they are so focused on achieving a particular goal that they are blind to everything that is going on around them. They just don't see what that particular event means to them. Or they ignore it completely.

In "Rumor" by Lee Brice, we have two different inciting incidents.

There's one for the global and overarching love story that we only get a glimpse of in the lyrics, and there's one inciting incident for the song's scene that is described in the lyrics.

The global inciting incident must have been meeting her. The song's main character didn't know what she actually meant for his life. They became friends, yes, but up until now he hadn't really considered or was blind to the fact that they could be more.

In the scene, the inciting incident is repeated in the chorus again and again. There's a rumor going on in that small town about him and her. Hearing about that rumor thrust the character out of balance. It's something unexpected and something he doesn't really know how to deal with. So he just keeps doing what he always does. He meets with her in that small bar to dance—everything as usual.

But then, something else happens.

Let's continue with the second SG commandment.

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

This unexpected event is the most important essential element of storytelling. It is the reason why a character has to face a dilemma and make a choice to be able to move on. Because



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at that moment, the character realizes the true nature of the inciting incident. They were blind, but now they see what that incident truly means.

In the case of “Rumor” by Lee Brice, the characters are just dancing as usual. But then there’s a tiny complication: The song stops. But they keep on dancing just to be close to each other.

The turning point moment for the song’s main character comes when his boys tap him on the shoulder and make an obvious gesture like:

Could y'all get any closer?

That’s the moment when the value changes. The song’s main character has to deal with the actions of his buddies. The inciting incident is now plain in sight. There’s the opportunity for love. So the value changes from “no opportunity to opportunity”.

And he has to react to what his buddies are implying. So the song’s main character can’t just ignore them. He has to make a choice. And that’s what a turning point does. It throws the character into a dilemma where they have to choose one of two options that are either irreconcilable or both of them are bad.

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

Well, you might think there’s an obvious answer to that question. After all, we have a crisis stated in the lyrics. He sings:

*Do you wanna do this or not?
Should we keep 'em talking, girl
Or should we just make 'em stop?*

And you're right, saying this is a crisis.

But that’s actually the crisis the girl faces.

Yes, other characters in a scene can be thrown into a dilemma, too, where they have to make a choice. And for her the turning point moment was when our song’s main character actually made his choice to confront her with what’s going on between them. His reaction to the inciting incident is now a new stimulus for her. So what he says to her is the crisis she faces: Tell him to make his boys shut up or kiss him. Those are her options.

For our song’s main character, the crisis came before he spoke with her. It’s right between the boys tapping on his shoulder and looking back at her. He has to make a choice now. Will he just ignore his friends and pretend he doesn’t care what they said even though that



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behavior might jeopardize his relationship with her because maybe she's heard the rumors too. Him ignoring that opportunity would mean he's not interested. He'd lose her OR, and now we come to option 2, he confronts the big white elephant in the room risking being vulnerable but at least taking the chance to turn the two of them into something better?

That's his crisis.

8. What's the decision the character makes?

Now the fourth commandment of storytelling is the decision. We, as the audience, must be able to observe what choice the character made clearly. That means they have to turn their decision into a motor action or into words.

And our song's character does just that. He confronts her about what's happening in town and admits his feelings to her. Now he's giving her a choice. Or he pushes her into a dilemma. See it as you like, but his decision was to confront her.

9. What's the resolution?

The last commandment is the resolution. So what are the consequences of the character's decision? After all, our song's character's reaction created a stimulus for the girl. She needs to respond to that stimulus now. And how she'll react is the resolution of the scene.

But we don't know what will happen next. We're left hanging. This is almost like a cliffhanger in a movie.

There's so much tension. Everything we've just talked about builds up so much tension, and we just want it resolved to be able to breathe again. But the scene was cut.

Now, why is that?

Why did the songwriter choose not to include the ending?

Well, he wants to keep us in the moment of the song's little story. And since that situation is one that people can relate to, it's probably up to them to think of or remember how it all turns out. And that's okay. This way, you further include your audience and give them something to think about or even dream about.

Just imagine if the songwriters would have included her decision and that she either runs away, asks him to make his buddies stop saying such nonsense, or that she kisses him. Then everything we've heard in the lyrics before would lose their spotlight. Suddenly the



lyrics would be about something else entirely. Either about her leaving, his dilemma to make his buddies stop talking, or what that kiss feels like. Our attention wouldn't be on the anticipation of the first kiss anymore nor on that moment in a friendship when you're seconds away from taking the next step. All of this excitement would be lost.

So yes, it's okay not to include a resolution, especially when the resolution would steal the spotlight from the central idea of your lyrics.

Just a hint: Keep an eye out for lyrics where the person – the person your song's main character addresses – is pushed into a crisis too. As a rule of thumb, if they are pushed into a crisis in the last verse, better leave out how they'll react because you can't make your character respond to them again. It gets really complicated for obvious reasons. You really risk stealing the spotlight from everything that has led up to that moment. And you also rob your listeners of continuing to think about that situation in their minds and how it will play out.

Change

[00:36:16] 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 other character's decision and the consequences that decision led to. We don't know how our song's main character might change internally. We don't know enough about him. And that's okay. After all, this was a song about one specific moment in someone's life. You don't always need the whole backstory of who someone is. Just enjoy the present moment, right?

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 was nudged by his friends to make a move. And he acted on their suggestion and asked her if she felt the same about him. So the situation changed from negative to positive because it changed from no opportunity to an opportunity.



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

Okay, here's how it started:

Girl, you know I've known you forever

And the song ended like this:

There's a rumor going 'round

Unfortunately, those two lines don't show the change in the character's situation. But then again, we don't know how it all turns out between the two of them. The entire song is about that rumor and the question of whether they'll make it true or not. So we only see the change when we look at the entire song, but we can't get a clear sense of what has changed just by looking at the first and last phrase.

Writing Techniques

[00:38:18] Lastly, let's talk about some of the writing techniques used in this song. This just helps us talk about some additional things we could apply or avoid in our songwriting.

The first question is:

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

As a rule of thumb, it's always good if your lyrics answer the following questions:

- Where is the scene taking place?
- When is the scene happening?
- What is happening? How do the characters move over our imaginary stage?

If you answer those questions, your audience will be able to picture what's going on. They can place your characters in place and time and see them move and not just stand still as if your scene was a still frame.



Furthermore, you might want to avoid stating the obvious like: “I’m dancing with her, and I will ask her to kiss me. Because rumors are going around in town.”

That’s just telling the audience.

But in order to be more specific, you should rely on showing the audience what’s going on. And this song is a great example to set the stage and see the characters interact with each other.

Just look at those lines:

*Same little crowd, little bar, little town
 'Round this old dance floor
 My boys are laughing and tap me on the shoulder
 Making a motion like, "Could y'all get any closer?"
 They wanna know what's up why I'm still holding ya
 Even when the song is over*

The descriptions are very specific to the WHERE, WHEN, and WHAT is happening.

But what’s happening in the rest of the song?

The bridge repeats what has been said in verse 2. The song’s main character asks her again if they should shut up his friends and the rumors by kissing.

So you could have used the bridge to introduce a new perspective. A bridge is a transition from one point to another. So you could have literally shown in your lyrics how she responds just a little. As we’ve already discussed, we don’t have to include her reaction like kissing him or running away. But we could have included a subtle movement of hers in the bridge to heighten the tension by really showing the thrill of the anticipation of the first kiss. Maybe she leaned towards him, just a little closer? Maybe she’s smiling? Maybe she’s caressing his arm. Something small. Something tender. This way, the narrative of the lyrics would have progressed and avoided repetition.

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?

Imagery is a literary device that refers to the use of figurative language to evoke a sensory experience or create a picture with words for your audience. By utilizing effective descriptive language and figures of speech, songwriters appeal to a listener’s senses of sight, taste, smell, touch, and sound, as well as internal emotion and feelings. Therefore, imagery is not



limited to visual representations or mental images but includes physical sensations and internal emotions.

In figurative imagery, a thing is often not what it implies. There is often the use of hyperbole, simile, or metaphors that construct an image that could be different from the actual thing or person. For example, “his cries moved the earth” is not an example of literal imagery but of figurative imagery as the earth do not move with cries.

In “Rumor” by Lee Brice, the songwriters didn’t make use of figurative imagery. But that’s okay. The lyrics – as they are – sound really grounded, grounded, or down-to-earth like the song’s main character. It’s just believable that he’d talk to her like he does. After all, the song uses direct address, and it’s a form of dialogue even though we don’t get the other person’s answer. But direct address is talking TO somebody. And you wouldn’t use shiny similes or metaphors when you’re talking to somebody. That just wouldn’t sound natural.

Summary Step 3 - Narration

Okay, now let’s quickly summarize part 3 of the S.O.N.G. framework.

We now know:

1. The song’s character is dancing with a good friend in a bar, and he wants to share a kiss with her.
2. and he doesn’t have any ulterior motives.
3. The problem is that he has to react to the rumor going on. It’s time to take the next step in the relationship.
4. The inciting incident was the rumor that started to go around in town.
5. The turning point progressive complication happened when his friends tapped him on the shoulder to signal that it was time for the next step.
6. The crisis was ignoring his friends at the risk of losing his chance forever OR talking to her about what was going on.
7. His decision can be observed. He is telling her of the rumor that’s going around.
8. We don’t have a resolution because we don’t know how she’ll react.

4. Gist

[00:43:19] Alright, now let’s talk about the song’s message and if it provides a takeaway for the listener.



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As we know, when a character faces a crisis, they are forced to make a decision that will drive meaningful change. So this moment determines if the song will have a happy or sad ending.

And that's what we'll take away from the song. Have the character's actions contributed to a positive or negative outcome?

If the song turns from bad to good or good to better, the song offers us a prescriptive tale. We can learn from the song because the main character had to face an obstacle and made the decision that led to positive consequences.

If the song turns from good to bad or bad to worse, the song offers us a cautionary tale. We can learn from the song as well, but this time we learn what we need to avoid because the main character had to face an obstacle and made the decision that led to negative consequences. The song's story moment serves as a warning. *Better don't do what the song's character did to avoid ending up like him.*

This last step is important because it's about the song's message. And if your song has a message that your listeners can take away from it and apply to their own life, then the song made a difference in their life. And that's what great songwriting is all about.

Now let's start with the first question.

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

That's the first question we need to answer in order to find out if his choice led to the preferred outcome of solving that problem or if he failed.

The problem that we defined for the character was that they were stuck in their relationship and didn't dare to take the next step. It's very clear to us that they are not just friends but feel more for each other. Otherwise, why would they meet and dance so much? They wanna be close to each other.

And that rumor helps them to talk about their relationship and where it's headed. So the character has made a courageous and necessary decision by deciding to talk to her about it. So the problem is solved. What's said is said.



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

I've already told you that many people might have experienced a similar situation where both of them were too shy or afraid to take the next step in their relationship.

But when we listen to this song, we clearly see what's obvious. Those two like each other a lot – like a lot lot. And when we're able to see them, it's easier to look at our own lives and compare the situation to what we might experience. And so the song encourages us to also talk about the rumor that's going around in our life. Because as we know from just observing those two song characters, we know why that rumor was going around. Their feelings for each other are obvious. And our friends might see what we couldn't see too – just like we do when we watch someone else's situation.

So the message of the song, even though we miss the resolution of how it all turns out, is still strong enough to let us take away the following: "Love has a chance to triumph if you are honest about your feelings."

That's it. That's the takeaway. And it's a great message. It's one that helps us survive and derive meaning in this world.

The last question is:

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

This question helps you check that your song's title refers to the one thing you want your listeners to take away from your lyrics. The title does not need to be on the nose, but it's great if it hints at the message or the problem the song will solve or address. The title can be as abstract as "Middle of a Memory" or as specific as "I Saw Her Standing There." But those examples tie back to what each of those songs is about.

So does the title "Rumor". The song is all about the rumors that are going on. After all, they are the inciting incident to them having the courage to talk honestly about their feelings. So the song's title holds its promise.

Summary Step 4 - Gist

Okay, now we've finished the fourth and last step of the S.O.N.G. framework.

We now know:

1. The character solved the problem he faced.



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2. So the song's message is: "Love has a chance to triumph if you are honest about your feelings."
3. And that message refers to the song's title "Rumor" because, without those rumors and other people making the couple aware of what's right in front of them, they might have still been stuck on that one level of friendship.

What we've learned in this episode:

[00:47:59] Great. We've now talked about the four steps of the S.O.N.G.-framework and analyzed the lyrics to the song "Rumor" by Lee Brice. Great job.

Let's just take a note of what we've learned from studying the lyrics of "Rumor".

First, we have learned that you can use multiple love story conventions in your song's lyrics if they support each other and contribute to the central idea of your song's narrative plot.

In "Rumor", we had the convention of rituals because it was established very early on that those two dance a lot together – especially around the same time and place. So this ritual gave birth to the rumor that was spreading around them. And the rumor is the problem or call it an opposing force that they have to overcome. Because they gotta deal with it. That way, the small town that's spreading the rumor as well as the song's character's friend act as helpers in their relationship. So our love story conventions have a cause-and-effect relationship. That's why multiple love story conventions work so well in this song.

We've also learned when it's okay to leave out the resolution of how it all turns out for your song's main character. Especially when your song's central idea focuses on one specific moment in your character's life, and another person is pushed into a crisis by the active decision of your song's character, you can leave out how that other person responds. This way, the listener can dream about how it will turn out for the song's character. And if you set up their situation positively, the listener will have no problem figuring out the answer or response of the other character. The story will complete itself in your listener's mind.

Just pay attention to this: As soon as you include a response from the other person to the main character's decision (which will probably be at the end of the song), you'll distract your listeners' attention to that response. And everything you've built will lean towards that response. If that response is what you wanted to express in your song all along, feel free and do it. But suppose you set up a situation like in "Rumor" by Lee Brice, where the point of the lyrics was about the anticipation of the first kiss and what circumstances led to talking



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honestly about feelings. In that case, you can leave out the resolution because the lyrics already provide a meaningful takeaway for the listener.

Song Exercise - The First Kiss

[00:50:30] Well, as always, there's an exercise you can do to apply what we've learned in this episode.

Go to the show notes or visit storiesinsongs.com/podcast/ and find episode 24 to download the exercise PDF.

So that you have an idea of what I want you to do:

I want you to write your original lyrics about taking the next step in a relationship.

Use the following criteria as a guideline:

1. Use **present tense** to answer the following questions:
 - a. Where is the scene happening?
 - b. When is it happening?
 - c. What is happening = what are the character's literally doing in your scene?
What can we observe or watch them do?
2. Include at least three love-story **conventions**.
3. Use **direct address** (pronoun "I" and "you") to show the intimacy between your song's main character and their beloved.
4. Let your lyrics provide a similar **message** to the audience like: "Love has a chance to triumph if you are honest about your feelings."
5. Include the **first four commandments of storytelling**.
 - a. Mention the event that serves as the problem the song's main character has to overcome. That's the inciting incident. It's the moment that sets the rest of the narrative in motion.
 - b. The turning point will be an action by another character (like the tap on the shoulder) or some new information that's been revealed.
 - c. It's not necessary to include the crisis explicitly, but it should be clear what's at stake for the character.
 - d. Show the character's decision by what they're saying to their beloved.
 - e. You don't have to include the resolution of how the beloved responds. But the key is to make it evident to the audience that the couple has the same feelings for each other, and there will be a positive outcome.
6. You can use the **narrative structure** of the lyrics "Rumor" by
 - a. including the answers to when, what and where in the first verse



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- b. including the inciting incident in the chorus
- c. including the turning point moment in the first verse as well
- d. including the climax in the second verse that might or might not put the other character into a crisis
- e. including a resolution in the bridge (you have to see if it fits the lyrics' central idea and doesn't steal the spotlight). It must lead up to that moment.

I hope you enjoy this task.

If you have any questions or want to show me what you've come up with, feel free to write me an email at write@storiesinsongs.com.

I'll see you next time in another bite-sized episode. Then we'll talk about a Songwriter's Six Best Friends and how we can advance that concept by using The Story Grid Diorama Model.

Listening to that episode will help you be much clearer in how you can put your six best friends to use without wondering how it might all fit together.

Thanks a lot and see you next time.

Bis bald, cu soon, Melanie

Show Notes

- Finding Topics to Write about by Looking at Universal Human Values – <https://storiesinsongs.com/podcast/episode-023/>
- The Simplest Way to Start and Finish Song Lyrics that Mean Something! <https://storiesinsongs.com/podcast/episode-017/>



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