

EPISODE 025

A Songwriter's Six Best Friends - ADVANCED: The Story Grid Diorama Model

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

Today you're in for another bite-sized episode to talk about a songwriter's six best friends.

You might have already heard about the term: Songwriter's Six Best Friends in the book "Writing Better Lyrics" by Pat Pattison or in one of his courses.

But today, we want to make his concept more practical. We want to use a specific model that will help us visualize our six best friends.

At the end of today's episode, you'll be much clearer in how you can put your six best friends to use without wondering how it might all fit together.

You'll get the glue delivered in this episode. So let's go.

TEASER

Songwriter's Six Best Friends

[00:01:35] Now, whenever you start exploring an idea, you have to answer some essential questions to get a clear picture of what kind of scenario you want to communicate to your listeners.

That means you'll have to call up your six best friends.



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And your six best friends are:

- who,
- what,
- when,
- where,
- why,
- and how.

You might say: “Duh, I know that.”

Well, then that’s great. After all, those questions are the basics of writing – either if it’s an article for a newspaper, or an essay, or, of course, a story.

You should always answer those questions in your text to give your audience the context and the content of what’s going on:

- Who does something? Who acts?
- What happens?
- When does it happen?
- Where does it happen?
- Why does it happen?
- How does it happen?

Let’s go through those questions to find out what each of them means for your lyric writing.

Lyric Writing: Who

[00:02:34] Let’s start with the question WHO.

This question refers to the characters in your song. Specifically, you want to answer: WHO is talking and to WHOM?

So you need to know what role the singer of the song will take on. Will they be just a narrator of someone else’s story or the hero in their own story? Will they lead a monologue, or will they be talking to someone else?

This question of “Who is talking to Whom” is closely connected with the point of view.



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Point of View in Songwriting

We'll talk about point of view in songwriting in another episode, but let's quickly run through them so that you know your options:

In general, point of view defines the relationship between the singer and the audience. And so, it controls our distance from the world of the song.

That means the most intimate relationship between audience and singer is when we use Direct Address. In Direct Address, 2nd person pronouns are mixed with 1st person pronouns to produce a contact between I and you. This point of view is all about feelings and not facts. So the WHO is "I" and I am talking to "you".

Then there's second-person narrative as a possible point of view. Sometimes YOU can be used as a SUBSTITUTE for 1st person. Here, there is this kind of sense of intimacy, although the word I, or me, or us, or we, or any of the first-person pronouns are never going to be stated. It's only you and maybe a third-person pronoun.

Then there's first-person POV. Here, the singer as character/storyteller is right in front of the audience. We feel like we know him. And the singer or the "I" participates in the action revealing things about them. So the WHO is "I", the singer, and they are talking directly to the audience ABOUT other people and events. So the audience is an observer to the rest of the song's world. Here we have first-person pronouns mixed with third-person pronouns, but no YOU.

And lastly, we have third-person as a possible point of view. Here, the singer acts as a storyteller who simply directs the audience's attention to an objective world neither the singer nor the audience is a part of. This point of view is the most objective. It's all about facts, not feelings.

So the point of view helps us to answer the question of WHO is talking to WHOM.

Lyric Writing: What

[00:05:15] Now another friend of ours is the question WHAT.

We feel like we need to express something when we start writing a song. There's something that we have to say, and the song will be a vehicle to express that feeling, to express that idea.



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So what are you singing about in your song? This one matters a lot, right? You gotta actually have something happening in your song. You gotta know what's going on.

Listen to [episode 23](#) of the Stories in Songs Podcast. Here we talk about universal human values. They help you find topics to write about so that you always know your possibilities when it comes to WHAT you want to write about.

That means:

- Do you want to write about something along the lines of love and hate?
- About life and death?
- Maybe it's important to you that justice is served and someone punished for their crimes?
- Maybe you want to express how some people sell out and betray their values while others hold on to them?
- Or you want to write about honor and dishonor,
- freedom or subjugation?

Lyric Writing: When

[00:06:26] Now you also should know WHEN is your narrative happening and for how long? Will it span from the past to the present and to the future? Or will it be about a single moment in time?

And WHEN is that?

Is it in the morning when the world wakes up? Roosters crow, or the traffic in the city gets louder? But WHEN exactly is it in the morning? If it's at 2 am, then it might be a phone conversation between your song's characters, or is it only him leaving a voice message? Or is it when they wake up together? Or alone?

Is it a winter afternoon when the sun sets early, and it's cold outside? And it's the season where everything comes to an end before a new cycle starts?

Or is it in the summer? It's hot, and there's passion, and there's love under the stars?

Or maybe it's in the fall when everything slows down, and everything starts falling to pieces? Everything just withers away.

When could also be in a distant or not so distant past, combined with a season that either creates a metaphor to the character's internal state or it creates an ironic distance?



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WHEN could also be a special occasion? Is it on Valentine's Day, Christmas? Thanksgiving? Someone else's wedding day? A funeral?

You can draw from that background information emotionally.

Lyric Writing: Where

[00:08:00] Now, where is your narrative happening? You're free to go anywhere you'd like. Is it on vacation in the Caribbean Islands? Is it in prison? Or the place the couple shared their first kiss like in "Kiss Me Slowly" by Parachute? A hotel room or under a bridge? Is it in the outback or in an opera house? Or maybe your character is just walking down the street like in "Boulevard of Broken Dreams".

All those different places create different settings to the surroundings of where your characters are. You gotta know where you place them to be able to step into their shoes and see the event unfold through their eyes. Do they meet their past love at the reception desk of a divorce lawyer? Or do they spot that person across the street? The way you place your characters will give you great insights into the scene you're trying to create.

Lyric Writing: Why & How

[00:09:21] You also need to know WHY is your song's character talking about that event or talking to someone? What's the cause for all the fuss?

And you should also know how to tie the plot together. We'll talk more about the Why and How in later episodes. After all, they refer to the message of your song's story – the takeaway for the listener. So there must be a higher reason for why that character is caught in a specific moment or tells someone about it.

So no worries, we'll cover those two questions in detail another time.

So,

- who's talking to whom?
- What do you have to say?
- Why are you saying it? Why do you want to tell this?
- When is it?
- Where is it?



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- And how does it all come together?

Those are your six best friends, as Pat Pattison has called them.

But, as promised, there's a great way to put those questions into practice so that we're able to better visualize the little story we want to tell in our lyrics.

Story Grid Diorama Model

[00:10:30] And to achieve that, let's use the concept of the "Diorama Model".

The "Diorama Model" was first introduced to me by my mentor Shawn Coyne, the creator of the Story Grid, more specifically at the Story Grid Trinity Seminar he held in 2021.

This concept is so amazing. It will boost your creative flow whenever you sit down to start writing the lyrics for a new song.

And the best thing of all: it's so easy, I bet it will come naturally to you! And you can use that concept even before you start wondering about your six best friends. If you use that concept, they'll come to you without you having to call them up.

All you have to keep in mind is that there are three essential pieces that you need to think about when you are planning to outline your idea. It's context, content, and interactions, or if you are a fan of alliteration: context, content, and conflict.

And here's what you need to do:

Imagine you have to create a diorama.

Remember, a diorama is this three-dimensional model some of us had to create in school. Now you don't need to get out your craft supplies. ✂️ Promise!

Just think about what you would have to do if I'd hand you a blank diorama right now. And you should use it to show me what your next song will be about.

So, where would you start? What's the first logical step you gotta do to put that diorama model to use to be able to present your song's story or story moment?

1. Well, first, you'd color the diorama and paint it to create the setting. That means you would want to describe the world to give your audience all the relevant information, but not every



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detail. With your colors, you would set the mood for what's to come. You create the **CONTEXT** – the alternate world. That means you would visually answer the questions **WHEN** and **WHERE** your song's narrative takes place.

2. After you have created the alternate world of your story – its context – you have to fill your painted world with avatars or characters. That's answering the question of **WHO** will interact in the alternate world you've created? That means:

- Who will be your narrator or main character on the stage of your diorama,
- and to whom will he/she be talking? Will they be talking to themselves, to someone particular [their first or second party?] or to the audience [third party]?

Step two helps you create the **CONTENT**.

Now that you know the **CONTEXT** and the **CONTENT** on the diorama screen, you can start envisioning the kind of Audience that would be attracted to this world and these kinds of avatars interacting in this world.

Who is your targeted audience?

For whom are you writing this song?

It's always a great idea to keep in mind who will benefit from listening to this particular story. This way, you can make sure that you keep the narrative promise and deliver on the audience's expectations by delivering a message worth communicating.

3. Now the last step is about the **WHAT**, **WHY**, and **HOW**. You need to engage your avatars in interactions such that you can hold the attention of the audience.

That means, first you must excite your audience through the actions of your avatars so that they can see **WHAT** is happening, and then intrigue the audience by raising a question in their minds. That question can also be named: **WHY?** Why are you showing this particular interaction or conflict? **WHY** are the characters doing that?

And if you integrate those transmissions well, you will enlighten your listeners with a signal truth that you – as the artist – intends to move from your mind to the audience's by the song's end. And thus, answering the question of **HOW** does it all come together.

Diorama Model & Six best Friends

[00:14:55] So whenever you want to write some lyrics, picture a blank diorama in your mind.



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1. First, you paint the diorama to create the setting. Your friends WHEN and WHERE will come to help you.
2. Then you fill that stage with life. So WHO will be interacting with WHOM?
3. And lastly, you think about the interactions that will take place. WHAT is happening? What can we literally watch as the characters interact with each other? What is going on? And we are curious to find out WHY that interaction is happening. And when we get all those questions answered, we'll see HOW it all fits together.

You might be wondering if you have to stick to one diorama per song or if you can use multiple dioramas in your song. Say, maybe the verses have their own kind of setting, and so does the chorus or the bridge.

Well, there's no right or wrong answer.

For example, if you write about one particular moment in time, for example like in "Crazy For You" by Madonna where it's all about meeting someone hot on the dancefloor, then you'll probably stay in that one diorama.

But let's say you write a song where every verse is set in a different time. Let's say you start out in the past, move to the present, and then to some wishful future thinking, or the characters stay at the same place, but the seasons change, then the setting or the place where the character is might be changing, too. If you change it, make sure it makes sense and supports what you're trying to say.

For example, if I start a song with a memory of boys making mischief after summer school, and I switch to the present moment where one of them sits in jail because they kept breaking the law, then that's a great contrast that also supports the message of the song.

If you are in doubt, look at it this way: Each diorama can be one piece of the story you'll tell in your lyrics, but your entire story can also stay on one single set. It all depends on WHAT you're trying to communicate or let your audience see.

Preview

[00:17:32] I hope the Diorama Model approach is helpful for you to picture the story you want to write about in your lyrics.

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In the next episode, we'll talk about Pat Pattison's Development Engine. And again, we'll use another great storytelling tool to find out how we can actually tell a great working story through Pattinson's concept of the three boxes.

Until then, bis bald und auf Wiedersehen, Melanie

Shownotes

Story Grid Trinity Seminar: <https://storygrid.com/trinity/?ref=mel>



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