

EPISODE 047

How to combine every part of the lyrics so that it contributes to one central meaning?

See the show notes at storiesinsongs.com/podcast/episode-047

[00:00:00] Hi, this is Melanie from Stories in Songs - Writing the Lyrics.

Today, I wanna answer a question that I got recently asked in my Facebook Group.

It's from Hudson. And he asked:

How can I combine every part of the song so that it contributes to one central meaning of the lyrics?

That's an awesome question, and let's talk about it right now.

TEASER

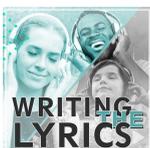
Lyric Coherence

[00:00:59] Alright, so Hudson, what a great question.

And from talking with other songwriters, you're not the only one struggling with the question of how you can combine every part of the song so that it contributes to one central meaning of the lyrics?

So thank you so much for your question.

After all, conveying meaning or something important that you have to share and want others to benefit from, is what this podcast is all about.



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It's about understanding the power of lyrics and wielding that power so that our lyrics can make an impact on people – through the message that's baked in.

And you know what: that message or takeaway of the lyrics is not some bluntly stated sentence like *"You should do this to get XYZ"*.

Or *"my opinion is this or that and I'm just gonna state it here in my song because everyone should do it like this!"*.

If we state our message bluntly, no one's gonna listen to it because no one likes to be preached to.

- It's just like when our parents told us that we shouldn't be friends with that person.
- We must study to get good grades in school.
- Or we have to play it safe and find a job or we end up with nothing.

We have all been through that.

We all have preached and been preached to.

But you know, when we want someone not to just listen but to take action or start believing in that message we wanna share with them ... because we believe it can help them ... then we have to change our approach.

We can't state it bluntly.

We can't tell them what they should or shouldn't do.

And when it comes to lyrics or to life in general and when we want people to really GET it, then we have to share an experience.

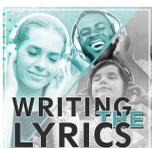
We have to tell them a little narrative, a scene out of our lives or from someone else.

Someone who has been through something that builds up to the message we wanna share.

So it's not a life's story, just a scene.

There's no fully fleshed out story required.

So here's what I would do.



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Just my approach.

So if I wanted to make sure that every part of my lyrics contributes to one central message I want to convey, then first, I'd look for a problem, challenge, or obstacle the character in my song is facing.

Problems are just so great to get people's attention.

And again, if we have a message, then there's obviously something wrong that we want to help them with.

Like remember, when we talked about the inciting incident in [episode 44](#)?

That inciting incident is the first waypoint in the journey of our song's main character, right?

Basically, what that inciting incident is... it's like a ball of chaos that spins into your song's main character's life and throws it completely out of whack.

Suddenly, they see pain... or they see something they lack.

Or they see how their life could be better.

So that creates a goal state for them, right?

They suddenly see what they could have.

And they wanna get it.

Because if they don't, this thing... that thing that threw their life out of balance...

It gets more and more uncomfortable.

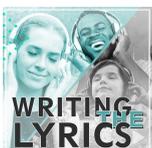
They wanna move away from it.

They wanna either ignore it... or just head straight towards what they want.

Otherwise... it's like there's this enormous problem and it weighs down on them.

So first, I'd focus on figuring out what that problem, obstacle, or challenge it.

I'd address it in the first verse, heck, even in the first line.



I have recorded an entire podcast episode about the Powerful Problem as an attention grabbing opening line. It's [episode 37](#) of this Podcast.

So once I have that problem, I don't wanna just state the solution to it, and that's it.

No, I'll explore that problem, maybe in the first verse and show the character's situation or maybe an attempt of what they tried to solve that problem.

Because here's how I see it.

The inciting incident is a promise to discover how it all turns out.

And that's important.

And it's even more important, as I always say, that we have a shift in what happens to the character's external or internal situation.

If they end up at the same place they started from, nothing really happened.

And there's no takeaway.

But if they end up somewhere differently...

And their external or internal situation has changed, then there's certainly something we can take away from the lyrics.

That's our message right?

And it can be a positive, a prescriptive message or a cautionary one that's like a warning.

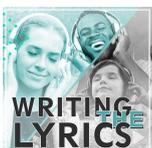
It all depends how it all turned out for the song's main character related to the problem or challenge they faced.

So that inciting incident shows them a pain they want to move away from or a pleasure they could move towards.

It gives them a goal state.

Because there's this external or internal imbalance in that character's life.

But getting to that goal, it's never a straight and easy path.



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There are obstacles in between.

And imagine it like this: when your character faces that problem. It's like they're standing on a cliff.

So maybe does your listener who faces a similar question, and they have no idea where to turn to or how to go on.

It's just a damn cliff right in front of them.

Sometimes even, your listener has already fallen down that cliff.

And they sit at the bottom of the pit... and have no idea how to get out of there again.

And here's the amazing thing.

When we talk about our song's character's journey... we hit all the waypoints that lead from one side off a cliff, down that cliff into the pit, climbing up on the other side, and reaching what the character wanted or needed in their life.

And through that journey, we can pick up our listeners... wherever they might be stuck at.

And by seeing the character in the song going on that journey and taking action...

Well, that can be inspiring.

It can be empowering like the song "I Will Survive" by Gloria Gaynor.

But we can't tell someone who just went through a bad breakup:

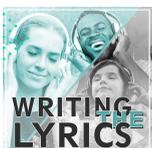
Forget about that guy. He wasn't worth it.

It's not helpful because the pain remains.

But when we experience... and that's really important here... when we EXPERIENCE how someone else faced a similar problem and they made it through... then that's what bypasses our critical minds and enters our heart and soul.

That's how we can communicate a message in our lyrics.

And let me tell you one more thing... what I think is really valuable.



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When you try to figure out how every part of your song can contribute to one central meaning of the lyrics, ... then use the problem the song's main character faces as a relevancy filter.

If something doesn't help to illuminate the problem or the song's main character's journey in trying to deal with that thing ... leave it out.

For example, even in the song "Another Day in Paradise", the setting of the cold winter contributes to the problem the homeless woman has. For her it's all about survival. It's important that we know that it's freezing.

So again, everything you write, it needs to revolve around your song's main character's journey and the problem they're dealing with.

And you know... here's one more thing.

I'm talking about the journey, right?

And about hitting the waypoints.

Again, that's important so that we can create that journey.

Because only through the journey can our listeners experience something. And through that experience, again, that's how they can get the message that we have for them. Without bluntly stating it.

So I would include the problem in the first verse, then for example, we could include the second waypoint in the second verse.

That's the turning point.

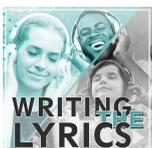
And we talked about that second waypoint in the previous episode.

That's the moment that throws the song's main character into a crisis.

And they just have to make a choice.

You know, when people are under pressure and they are facing a crisis, what they decide shows their true character.

And you know, sometimes we don't get what we want, but what we need.



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And if I really wanted to make sure that my audience gets the gist of what my lyrics were truly about, I'd include the outcome of the character's choice.

Is it prescriptive or cautionary?

So that forms the message.

And if I have this problem I'm focusing on, I also know what my character wants.

And I use that problem and their goal as a beacon for the entire lyric outlining process.

Everything that serves I keep, everything that does not, I throw out.

I have an entire podcast episode about the relevancy of the problem. So just check out the show notes and you find the links to learn more about the waypoints and everything.

So yeah, if I'd want to make every part of my lyrics serve the message I want to communicate to my audience — and that's what I think a song should do because I firmly believe that songs have the power to change or even save someone's life — then I'd create a little narrative around one problem someone is dealing with and taking the listener onto the character's journey on how they tried to deal with it ... and of cuz, I'd show how it all turns out.

Yes, and that's how you can combine every part into one central meaning of the lyrics by always keeping the song's main character's problem in mind and leading them to a better place, or sometimes ... a worse place if you wanna warn someone.

Hope this was helpful!

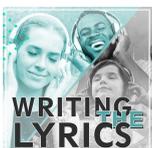
If you have a question, please feel free to write me an email at podcast@storiesinsongs.com.

Or join my Facebook Group called Songwriting: Writing the Lyrics.

The links are in the show notes.

Have a great day!

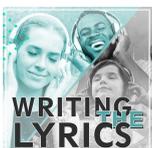
Melanie



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Show Notes

- [#37 - Attention Grabbing Opening Lines - Part 1: The Powerful Problem](#)
- [#36 - Knowing Which Lyric Lines & Ideas To Keep Or Throw Out – How To Answer The Question Of Relevancy](#)
- [#44 - Throwing Someone's Life Out Of Balance – Waypoint #1: The Inciting Incident](#)
- [#46 - The Turning Point in the Journey of Your Song's Main Character – Waypoint #2: The Turning Point Progressive Complication](#)



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