

by Jennie Riddle

INSPIRED

WHERE DO SONGS COME FROM?

AT SOME POINT ALL SONGWRITERS HEAR the dreaded question, “Where do your songs come from?” The reason this is a tough one for most of us is that, in as much as there are things we can do as songwriting practices, there is no guaranteed formula. Inspiration is not something you can process out. However, for me, it can be said that inspiration comes out of times and seasons. Solomon, in his book Ecclesiastes, accurately and beautifully articulates what we should expect to encounter in our limited days on this earth, “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven” (Ecl 3:1 ASV).

Eyes Open

A constant awareness of the season we are currently in, and the seasons that are impending, motivate me on a daily basis to write for the needs that exist and those soon to arise. When the heart-cries of those around have become audible to my spirit, I am inspired to aid them in their joys and sorrows. As the Lord reveals His intentions, passion is stirred in me to sing His words over our broken world for its comfort, healing, and hope.

Eyes Forward

I take the responsibility of feeding God’s sheep very seriously. Everything I personally know about nourishing people (spiritually, mentally, and physically) has been taught to me through the crucible of parenting. A mom must stay a step or two ahead of all that happens in a given week. The Proverbs 31 woman who rises while it is yet night and prepares food for her household has been an example for me. I try to prepare words that will spiritually nourish the sheep for the upcoming seasons that God has in store.

Eyes on Him

I write out of what I know and what I “see” coming. For me songs are a mixture of what God has taught me by experiencing His ways in the daily mess of living, and what He is revealing for the season ahead.

I try to avoid writing out of yesterday like I try to avoid yesterday’s manna. Yesterday’s bread will not sustain tomorrow, and tomorrow will come. Fresh preparation takes more forethought and heart than serving leftovers. With that said, however, our experiences of God and His ways are immeasurably priceless and serve as a foundation for trust as we face the days to come. Therefore, I additionally write out of what I “own.” Personal experiences, uniquely mine, are my testimony that overcomes the enemy not just in my life, but in the lives of those around me.

For me, when inspiration hits, I borrow from yesterday’s experiences and a fresh revelation of God infuses it with life for today, then, with eyes filled with vision for the seasons of tomorrow, and a heart full of His love for His sheep, I write in order to feed.

Jennie Riddle is the author of many songs including the widely used “Revelation Song.” Her songs have been recorded by artists such as Phillips, Craig, & Dean; Kari Jobe; Gateway Church; Christ for the Nations; Meredith Andrews; Don Moen; and many others.



SONG ARRANGING

by Ken Reynolds

A COMMON MISTAKE IN SONGWRITING IS thinking that once you have a solid chorus, verse, and melody, you have a great song. One element that’s easily overlooked is how the song is arranged. There are many things that can contribute to a song being catchy or easy to sing. But a poor arrangement can disguise a potentially great song. One of the things I say when teaching a songwriting class is, “There are no rules in songwriting.” Songwriting is an art. Everyone has different tastes. But, if you want to write a song that others will want to sing, you have to consider a few fundamental guidelines.

Pretty Straightforward

I like to categorize a basic song like this: Intro-Verse-Chorus-Bridge-Outro. Now of course there are sub-categories in these, such as pre-chorus, vamp, instrumental, etc. Each of these elements can play an important role in how a song flows. I’m a huge flow person. If the song doesn’t flow well, I don’t want to sing it. A technique that I use at times when writing is working with 6 bar phrases. It gives the song a different feel, yet keeps things simple. It’s quite common to write a song with a 4 or 8 bar verse. Try adding 2 bars and make it a 6 bar or 12 bar verse. Lyrically, it needs to make sense with what you’re trying to say. If you have an 8 bar verse, try saying it simpler by making the verse 6 bars. It can make the song move a little smoother. It can also make you think of different ways to say the same thing.

Practical Example

Another element is the pre-chorus. I love pre-choruses. Not every song calls for one, but it’s a great way to set up a chorus. The song “Your Faithfulness” off of my latest CD uses both of these methods in a cool way. The verse is 4 bars but the pre-chorus is only 2 bars. But, it’s just

enough to set up the chorus. It can either be called a 6 bar verse or a 2 bar pre-chorus. Verse 1: (6/8 feel):

V1

Maker of Heaven, maker of earth
(bar 1)

Great are Your thoughts toward me
(bar 2)

Rich in compassion, Your mercy endures
(bar 3)

Your love is all I need
(bar 4)

(pre-chorus)

I believe in the power,
(bar 5)

The power of Your love
(bar 6)

(Go to songdiscovery.com to download a free MP3 of this song.)

The pre-chorus is simple and quick, but moves right into the chorus with a

quick big drum build up. Interestingly enough, the chorus of this song is only 7 bars instead of 8. You don't realize it, and I didn't plan it, but my lyrical thought was complete so I didn't force it. Never force lyrics or melodies. It needs to feel natural.

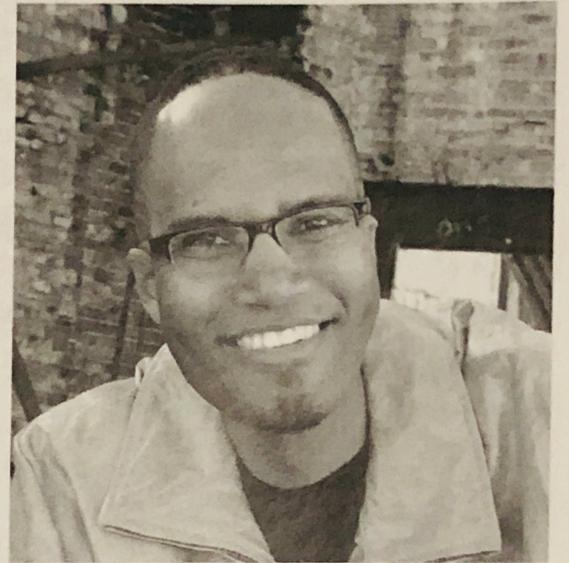
Break Right

Let's talk about instrumental breaks and bridges. Instrumental breaks can be great or your own worst enemy. Most congregations hate instrumental breaks because most of the time, they're stuck watching a screaming guitar solo or the band jam out, while wondering what to do because they stopped singing. I'm a musician and I love to rock out, but not at the expense of the worshiper losing focus. Bridges are only necessary if you have something else to say; not for extending a song to make it a little longer. If the song is complete without a bridge and it needs a little lift in the middle, then throw in a short instrumental break and lead back

into the pre-chorus (down, dynamically) or try modulating up a half or whole step and end with one more chorus.

There are so many more elements to song arranging. Hopefully, these pointers will help give you a fresh approach to your songwriting.

Ken Reynolds is a worship leader at Resurrection Life Church in Grandville, Michigan, which was also where his recent CD, *One World, One God* was recorded live.



SO YOU WENT TO CHURCH ON SUNDAY. The following Tuesday, as you were out running errands you found yourself humming a song. It's one of the songs from the worship set you heard last Sunday. This is a common occurrence we remember the songs sung at Church—throughout the week. It's much rarer for us to suddenly recall the five points of the pastor's sermon, as we bustle through the mall on a busy week day. Music has a way of sticking in our heads like glue. It is a powerful medium, and has been recognized by great men like Luther, Wesley, and Zinzendorf as a catalyst for conveying deep theology.

In 1524 Luther wrote to his friend Spalatin, saying "[Our] plan is to follow the example of the prophets and the ancient fathers of the church, and to compose psalms for the people [in the] vernacular, that is, spiritual songs, so that the Word of God may be among the people also in the form of music." Luther knew that theology and 'pop songs' were a great combo. He used the popular music of his day, knowing that people would instantly be able to relate to it. Then he dropped bombs of intense theology into that musical format.

AMONG THE PEOPLE

EMBEDDING THEOLOGY IN THE MUSICAL VERNACULAR OF YOUR CONGREGATION

by Vicky Beeching



Palatable

It reminds me of the song from Mary Poppins "A spoonful of sugar makes the medicine go down." Many young people groan at the thought of wading through a Systematic Theology book, or blowing the dust off a work by Augustine or even someone as recent as Tozer. So without wishing to sound at all patronizing—rather, just having a heart for young people to truly know good doctrine—I'd like to suggest that perhaps great music can be the "spoonful of sugar" that helps great theology get into the next generation's minds and hearts.

This creates great responsibility for those of us who write congregational worship songs. Having access to young people's ears through iPods and laptops, with far more frequency than pastors or authors, we are the everyday preachers. We need a "Lyrical Reformation." We need to be skilled in knowing God and His Word, then act as excellent translators of these things to the people in our churches. Eugene Peterson in his Introduction to *The Message* says this has been his life's work—translating God's word into verbiage that his hearers could really relate to. And our