

SONGCRAFTERS COLORING BOOK

by Bill Pere

Sale: The Seven C's

The essence of a great song is Communication...a song that communicates will be a Commercial success and an artistic Classic. These three "C's" are goals that every songwriter strives for. While navigating the route from creation to realization, there are four other "C's" that can help you foresee success. Remember that in the key of C, nothing is accidental.

The voyage from creation to realization has four stops along the way. Each has something specific to offer which is critical to the objective of coming up with the kind of song that can be called a Classic. These four points are: Creation, Craft, Critique, and Collaboration. Sometimes, in our haste to get from a great idea to a great song, we sail along at high speed, seeking shortcuts and bypassing one or more of these important harbors. The results often fall short of their full potential. For many writers, the sheer ecstasy of the creative process is so uplifting that the raw result of a burst of inspiration is considered a final result. The truth is that it gets you only to the first stop on the journey.

A song begins with tapping the creative wellspring inside to find the feelings, ideas, concerns, and dreams that are important enough to you to want to share with others. Through that miracle we call inspiration, an exciting new way of expressing these things reveals itself to you, and a song is born.

Whether a child or a song, birth is the start of journey to maturity. The next phase, usually the most difficult, is the crafting process. A child's early years involve active shaping of the values and motivations that will define the adult. With a song, the initial expression of the idea is usually unpolished, particularly in the areas of Clarity to other listeners, Conciseness of expression, and balance between references to Concepts (love, truth, beauty) and Concrete things (cars, clothes, jewelry). The crafting process means tapping into the parts of yourself which are the complement of your creative side...your analytical self. Each word in a lyric must pass the tests of being metaphorically consistent (no apples among oranges), rhythmically correct (no misplaced accents), generally understandable (no sesquipedalian pedantry), easy to sing (no lines about the sick sheik's sixth sheep), freshly rhymed (clear up and syrup, not moon and June). and many more.

Crafting is the first place where the art and science of song come together (the recording studio is another place). There are many excellent books on crafting, as well as seminars and workshops offered by several songwriter organizations around the country. You may find you are naturally comfortable with applying the techniques of crafting, or you may find it is a great effort for you. Each song needs a stop early in its life at the crafting dock. But how will you know how good a job you are doing?

When you find yourself asking that question, it's time to move on to the next port of call. Like a teenager or young adult adjusting him/herself based on feedback from others, a song which has gone through some initial crafting is ready for critique. This does not mean playing it for your spouse or your pet. It does not mean playing it for someone and being unprepared to hear anything but positive responses. It means playing the song for an impartial group of listeners and being open to whatever they may have to say. It remains your final decision to take or leave as much of their advice as you wish, but it's important to listen with an open mind. The critique process can help you with areas of crafting where you might not be fluent, and can also serve as a small scale exercise in test marketing. Just as our aforementioned teenager is not always going to get sound advice from peers (e.g., "Let's get drunk tonight and go swimming"), the critique you get will have a mixture of valuable advice and fool's gold. There are techniques you can use for determining what kind of critique to ask for and how to interpret the kinds of critique you get. These have been discussed in the February '95 issue of *Connecticut Songsmith*.

Your song may spend some time on its journey ferrying back and forth between the crafting dock and the critiquing dock. With critique comes revision and with revision comes critique. You of course are the ultimate judge of when you are done, but it's important to make at least one pass through that loop.

The last stop on the voyage is one which is open 24 hours a day and is centrally located i.e., you can go there anytime from any other point. This is the Collaboration dock. Few art forms can benefit from collaboration like songwriting can. Songwriting, like parenting, is very complex and requires many skills (creativity, linguistic skill, analytical ability, music composition and arranging, electronic literacy, business sense, people sense, and more). It is rare to find one individual who has developed all of those skills to a high degree. Thus, a song must often be touched by many hands to become a complete package. A good collaborator can help you create, express, craft, package and promote your song. There are very specific things you can look for when seeking a collaborator, to provide the right complements for the skills you have and for areas where you need help. These have been discussed in the January '95 issue of *Connecticut Songsmith*.

To summarize, always look at your song as having a life which must be nurtured, refined, and guided to maturity before it can stand on its own. Getting there is a voyage across the "C's" with specific stops along the way. The creative process is a beginning, to be followed by phases of crafting, and critiquing, with collaboration along the way as needed. The four C's Creation, Craft, Critique, and Collaboration are a powerful combination of processes which add up to the most important "C" of all -- Communication. When this is achieved, your song can become a Commercial success and an artistic Classic.

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Twice named Connecticut Songwriter of the Year, Bill is MBTI certified, a member of CMEA and MENC, and helps develop young talent in songwriting, performing, and learning about the music business.

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