

The second level of critique, which is most frequently found in songwriter groups or from well-informed music appreciators, is the type of feedback that addresses the major aspects of songwriting such as overall structure (placement of verse, chorus, bridge), appropriateness of title, clarity of meaning, flow of logic, effectiveness of the hook, marriage of music and lyric, rhyme scheme, grammar, concreteness, mixed metaphors, and perhaps some comments on performance/production, if appropriate. Most people who are involved with songwriter groups or courses are aware of these song parameters, and can comment on them. The more specific a comment is, the more actionable information you get as the songwriter (and of course, your chosen action can be to ignore a particular piece of input). This is clearly the most frequent type of information given at CSA critiques or similar forums. It is also the most common type of input given from panels of industry pros, or in many workshops where lots of songs have to be critiqued in a short time.

In getting this type of information, it is essential that the songwriter and the critiquer be on the same page regarding the writer's intent for the song -- the above factors have different degrees of significance and applicability depending on whether the song is intended for a mainstream commercial market (and specifically, which genre), a film or musical, a specific artist (Indie, or mainstream), third-party or self-publishing, a specific niche audience, a specific purpose, self-expression, etc.. A critique from a Nashville perspective of a song intended only to be a tribute to your parents' anniversary is of no value to you, or to the critiquer. The song's purpose (but *not* its meaning) is best stated up front in the critique process.

The third level of critique is the most difficult to find, as it requires critiquers who are thoroughly familiar with the more detailed song parameters and how to analyze them. These include the interplay of every vowel and consonant sound, the klang effect of every syllable and word, the understanding of audience psychology, the horizontal and vertical mapping of song elements, and understanding of composition and music theory. This type of critique for a given song, takes a fair amount of time, as it requires going line by line, word by word, chord by chord, motif by motif, and presenting a thorough analysis. Critique like this is valuable and is often a paid service of good songwriting coaches, provided in one-on-one consultation. Occasionally, you can find a Level-3 critiquer at open songwriting forums and workshops, but rarely is there the time to be thorough when many songs have to be reviewed. The value in this type of analysis lies in the fact that the information you get is based on communication and psycholinguistic principles which work across most songs and most styles, allowing you to develop techniques which you can use over and over in your writing.

It's always up to you to determine what the right level of critique is for your songs and goals, and how to use it to improve your craft, but it is essential to understand the three-tier nature of critique in order for you to make informed decisions about what's right for you. (For more, see the related article on "Taking the Mystique Out of Critique")

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Connecticut Songwriters Association. Bill is an Official Connecticut State Troubadour, and is the Founder and Executive Director of the LUNCH Ensemble (www.lunchensemble.com). Twice named Connecticut Songwriter of the Year, Bill is a qualified MBTI practitioner, trained by the Association for Psychological Type. He is a member of CMEA and MENC, and as Director of the Connecticut Songwriting Academy, he helps develop young talent in songwriting, performing, and learning about the music business. Bill's song analyses and critiques are among the best in the industry. Bill has a graduate degree in Molecular Biology, an ARC Science teaching certification, and he has received two awards for Outstanding contribution to Music Education.

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