

What's It All About ? (Even if Your Name Isn't Alfie)

"The only books that influence us are those for which we are ready, and which have gone a little further down our particular path than we have gone ourselves." –

E. M. Forster, English novelist

"Life is an ongoing process of choosing between safety – (out of fear and need for defense), and risk – (for the sake of progress and growth). Make the growth choice a dozen times a day." -- Abraham Maslow

Songcrafters' Coloring Book – both the book and this blog -- is about choices -- *your* choices. The choices you make as a songwriter which cause your songs to get the reaction you hope for, or the one you don't expect; The choices which determine whether your song sells a thousand copies, a million copies, or never goes beyond your studio shelf.

By looking at the individual components of songs, those choices become clear to you and let you know what to expect when you decide on one option or another. This is not about songwriting "rules", as there really are none. Looking at songwriting as an interrelated series of informed choices is the primary paradigm of "Songcrafters' Coloring Book".

Everything in songwriting is a choice with artistic, commercial, emotional, spiritual, or monetary consequences. When creating, performing or marketing songs, we often don't know what all those choices are, let alone the results that flow from each one. Common sense tells us that if we don't know what our options are *and* the consequences of choosing a particular one, it is impossible to make an informed decision, or the best decision to meet our objectives. When we understand what our choices are and their associated outcomes, we gain control over that incredible process we know as songwriting.

I developed the concepts presented here over many years, beginning in the 1980's, initially presenting them in published articles and songwriter forums. The response was overwhelmingly positive, even though using many of these techniques requires significant effort and commitment. It became clear during that time that it was also necessary to include an overarching model of "Why and When" along with the "How", so that a person seeking to use these techniques to further their craft would have all the information needed to make fully informed choices and understand why it is worth the effort. Thus, there are two primary types of topics discussed here: the **Why's** and the **How's**.

It is important to know *Why* the techniques given here are important and *When* they can be used to best advantage. Along with that, there are some core ideas and paradigms (overarching concepts) which underpin all the later "How-To"

discussion. The *How-To* topics look at how you apply a particular technique to achieve a particular result.

The information presented in "Songcrafters' Coloring Book" comes from many sources. There are of course many printed and quoted references. In addition, as Director of Special Projects for the Connecticut Songwriters Association since 1980, and President since 2004, I've had the great fortune to work with many top songwriters and industry icons, learning from them first hand, interviewing them, and developing personal and professional relationships over the years. These folks are listed at my website, www.billpere.com. The knowledge and insights they've given me have been invaluable, and I am greatly indebted to them for their willingness to have shared their time and expertise.

I have also had the privilege through conferences, presentations and classes, to directly interact with more than 10,000 aspiring songwriters across the U.S., and to critique thousands of songs. Through my own performances, my 15 released recordings, and my several websites, I've been able to interact with thousands of audiences of loyal fans, new listeners, and hecklers across several countries. As a result, this book looks at songwriting from an array of different perspectives, and brings them together in a brand new way.

Why is Any of This Relevant?

Over the last decades, the music business has changed dramatically. Musical styles, technology, distribution methods, recording equipment, and consumer tastes all continuously evolve. However, the essential things that make a great song have remained constant. Yet, they have never been clearly defined. A song which becomes a standard endures across different styles, artistic interpretations, and the passage of time. Here, we seek to define the key ingredients which make that happen.

There are several excellent books and websites out there which present a potent arsenal of songwriting tools and techniques. "Songcrafters' Coloring Book" does that as well. But there are few places you can turn to find a presentation of exactly when and why to apply those tools, and the pros and cons of doing so. This book provides that in depth.

Some of this material may influence the way you write songs, but it does not alter the elements of what makes a song great. The songwriting approach presented here can give you more control over those elements and improve your ability to make them work together to produce that magic we call a standard, a hit, or just a great song.

Why undertake a new way to approach songwriting? Because there is one other significant change that has occurred. Today, *anyone* can wake up in the morning,

pour their feelings out on paper, sit down in their high-quality easily-affordable home studio, and make a recording, which for less than the cost of a haircut, can then appear on i-Tunes and every other major worldwide music distribution outlet in a few weeks.

Consequently, there is now more music flowing direct-to-consumers than at any time in history. Your competition has increased dramatically, in sheer volume and in production quality, but not particularly in the quality of the songwriting. Thus, more than ever, the quality of the songs is what's going to lift you *and keep you* above that ever-growing baseline of clutter. Not the production, or the performance – the *songs*. Great music and great lyrics.

Most songwriters are going to continue writing songs the same way – a mixture of feelings, instinct and maybe a few general guidelines. Occasionally, great songs will emerge. However, the writers who take the time to work on new ways of making their creative output *consistently* stand above the rest will become the ones who are recognized as the next generation of great songwriters.

If you are reading this book, I thank you for allowing me to be your guide on this journey to give you more control of your own creative output.

-- Bill Pere