

The concepts discussed in this article are a part of the comprehensive analysis of songwriting presented in the complete book "Songcrafters' Coloring Book: The Essential Guide to Effective and Successful Songwriting" , by Bill Pere. For additional information or to order a copy, visit <http://www.songcrafterscoloringbook.com>

(Lots of expanded discussion of this topic in the complete Songcrafters' Coloring Book)

SONGCRAFTERS' COLORING BOOK

By Bill Pere

The Four Faders of Songwriting Success

"If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost. . There is where they should be. Now put foundations under them." – Henry David Thoreau

"Any great work of art . . . revives and readapts time and space, and the measure of its success is the extent to which it makes you an inhabitant of that world -- the extent to which it invites you in and lets you breathe its strange, special air." - Leonard Bernstein

"We believe that not every song, not every artist, not every album, is created equal." - Edgar Bronfman Jr., Chairman, Warner Music Group

In our other articles, we've had an overview of Parameters and Roles, and we're ready to look at one more paradigm -- that which deals with the parameters of why songs achieve or fail to achieve commercial and/or artistic success. This

paradigm will be known as the Four Faders, using an analogy we're all familiar with: the controls on a mixing board (*see diagram below*).

For any song you can name, someone will say "It's a great song !" -- For *any* song, there will always be at least one person, besides the writer and his/her circle of friends, who thinks so. Others will say "It stinks".

The song may make the Top 10 in several countries, or in a regional market, or it may never be played on any station . It may sell a million downloads, or none. It may become a pop culture icon, or known only to a cult following. It's easy to say that a song is popular or not, or that it's a hit or not, but that gives no insight as to WHY. It does not tell you whether the song is well-written or not.

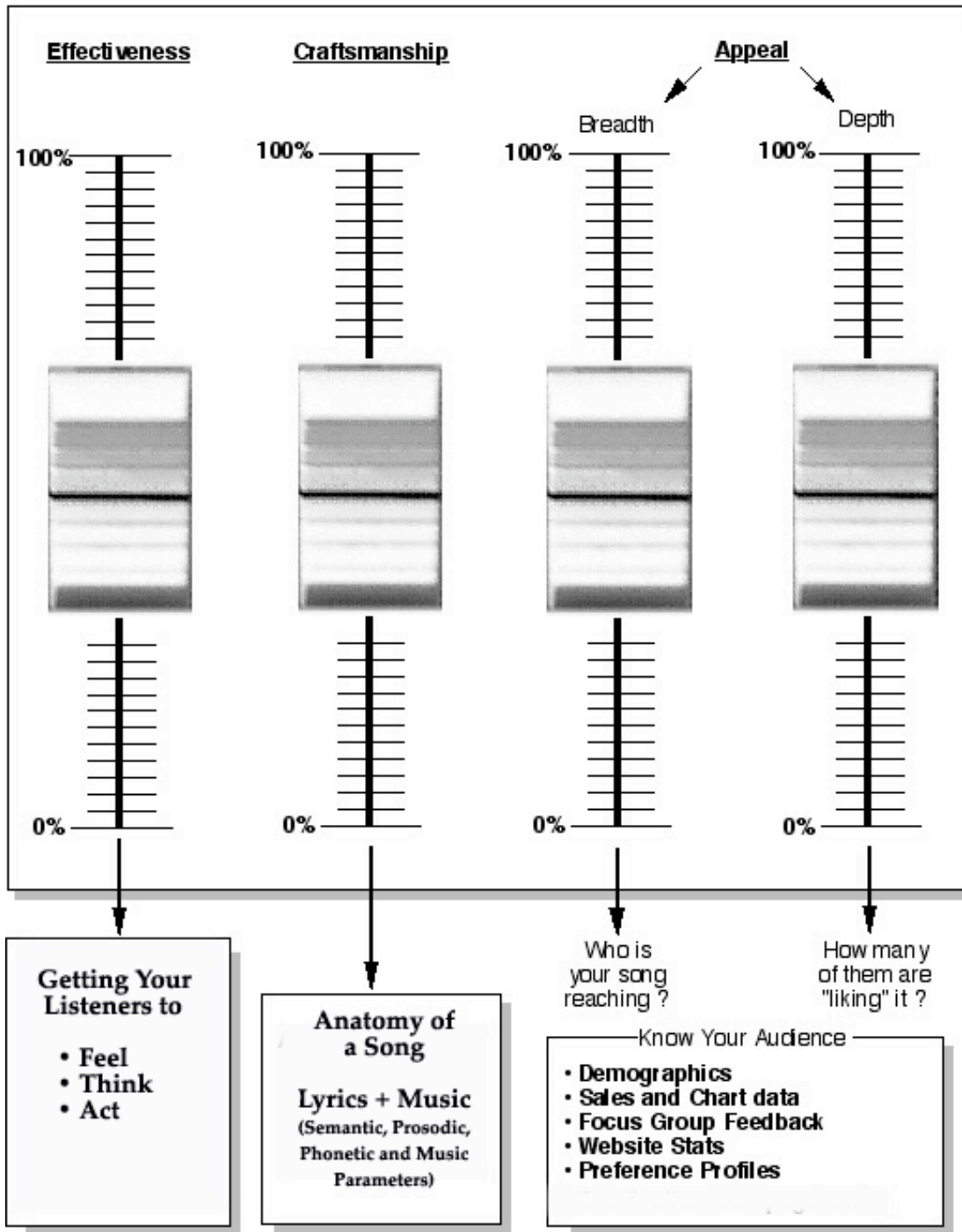
Most average listeners, when they say "It's a great song !" really mean "Regardless of whether it's well written or not, there's something about it which appeals to my personal taste or relates to my personal situation i.e., I like it". "like" does not equate to "well-crafted", and vice-verse.

Let's look at four factors. Since parameters can vary and be set at certain levels by conscious choice, let's think of them as faders on a 4-channel mixing board. You can set each of the faders at maximum, minimum, or in between. The combination of the four yields a particular 'mix' or result. Using the diagram on the next page, our four faders for looking at a song are:

- Effectiveness,
- Craftsmanship
- Breadth of Appeal
- Depth of Appeal.

These four factors help clarify the role that craft plays in songwriting.

The Four Faders of Successful Songwriting



Effectiveness refers to whether or not the song elicits the desired effect when heard by as listener. The songwriter, through their intent, controls 100% what that *desired* effect is, but the listener controls 100% what the *actual* effect is when

they hear the song. Thus, effectiveness is a shared parameter: Typically a songwriter wants their intent and the effect to align. Some common desired effects might include:

- wanting listeners to cry uncontrollably when they hear the song;
- wanting listeners to get up from their seat and shout "Hallelujah!"
- wanting listeners to excitedly tell all their friends that they just *must* hear this new song!
- wanting listeners to purchase the CD or track.
- wanting listeners to feel outraged about a particular situation
- wanting listeners to feel good about their life

.. and so many other possibilities, all defined completely by you, the songwriter.

Appeal is controlled 100% by the listener. It is a totally subjective parameter, based on individual taste. Either your song appeals to someone or it doesn't. The songwriter has no say in that. When people say "music is all subjective" or "it's all just opinion", they are usually referring to appeal, unaware that there are other channels on the mixing board.

However, there is one instance where you can exert some control over Faders #3 and 4. When writing a song for **niche marketing**, i.e. a song designed to be pitched and appreciated only by a bounded demographic (Hockey Fans, Train Enthusiasts, Boy Scouts, Massage Therapists, Biologists, Coin Collectors, etc) you are automatically lowering Fader #3, Breadth of Appeal, because you are targeting only a defined segment of the overall population. This is a good thing *when done with Eyes-Wide-Open* because when you have an audience with a known common interest, it is easier to market the song and achieve higher Depth of Appeal (Fader #4) to compensate for the lower setting of Fader #3. If too-narrowly focused references are used *without* the intent of niche-marketing, the song will fall short of your goals. (See Chapter 7 for full discussion of Appeal).

The one parameter that is 100% under your control as the songwriter is the **craftsmanship** which goes into your song. Craft refers not to the tools and techniques you use, but to the degree of skill you have in *applying* those tools and techniques. You can choose which tools to use, how to apply them, and with what level of skill. Wisely chosen and well applied, craft will help align the writer's desired effect and the listener's actual response, and it will help broaden and deepen the appeal of your song. Craft, as Fader #2, is the bridge between Channel 1 and Channels 3-4 on our mixing board.

Once we understand each parameter and how they affect songs, we can then talk about how you can control them. Using our Olympics metaphor, many Olympic events are judged by two parameters: Degree of Difficulty and

Execution, and the final score is the sum or product of both. The Degree of Difficulty is like the Craft fader (#2), and the Execution is like the Effectiveness fader (#1). If the Olympic audience voted, e.g. American Idol style, (fortunately they don't...) that would be the Appeal parameters, (faders #3 and 4).

How Do You Effect an Effect that Affects People's Affect ?

Of the Four Faders, *effectiveness* is the parameter which is easiest to define and measure. An effective song is one which elicits the specific response that *you* want the listener to have. *You* are the one who defines what that desired response is – tears, laughter, thoughtfulness, action etc. There are three levels of response that a listener can have when hearing a song:

- To **feel** something (an emotion is triggered)
- To **think** about something (you are moved to give thought to an idea or situation)
- To **act** on something (you are moved to turn your thought into some considered action)

Please note: In this and all following discussions, there is no value judgment made or implied about one type of song being "better" or "worse" than any other. All products of creative effort have value, however they do not all have equal ability to cause a particular effect in a particular listener. You are completely in charge of what effect to want to cause, and the principle here is that of recognizing types of songs accurately for what they are, so as not to form any unrealistic expectations as to the types of reactions they might elicit.

As you might guess, the simplest type of response to successfully elicit from a listener is to have them feel something. This ease with which this can be done is a double-edge sword.

Music, even without words, usually evokes a feeling, pleasant or unpleasant. For a great resource on how the brain responds to music, see "This Is Your Brain on Music" by Daniel J. Levitin, Dutton Press, 2006. Simple, sincere words, without music, can evoke a feeling. Random verbal or visual images, without music, can evoke a feeling. The emotion in a voice just making sounds (no words) can evoke a feeling (think of Donna Summer's 22 simulated orgasms in the long version of "Love to Love You Baby"). Instrumental texture can evoke a feeling (heavy metal without guitar distortion would not be very heavy). Thus if your specific objective in writing a song is simply to evoke a feeling – any feeling -- you don't have to work very hard lyrically to achieve that objective and be effective if you know what type of music carries what type of emotive triggers.

So what's the other edge of the sword? Because music and an emotive voice so easily evoke feelings, the part of us which does not like to expend extra effort is

naturally drawn to this type of song. It becomes easy to get comfortable churning out songs that just express raw emotion, and you might never come to realize what you're capable of creating, or the reactions you *could* be getting, if only you tapped additional energy from your reserves. You can be excellent at writing this type of song, but have your Eyes Wide Open to the fact that it is like being a world-class pole-vaulter with the bar set at 9 feet instead of 19 feet. If you have thousands of fans responding to your raw emotive songs, what's to say you wouldn't have tens of thousands, or more if you went to the next level of evoking thought and action?

If the Olympian in you can achieve a 6 or 7 out of 10, how would you ever know your full potential if you didn't try or *were not encouraged to try* for a 8, 9, or 10? (See the discussion of *Appeal and Ullage*, Chapter 7) As you work your way through difficult parts of this book, think of it always as encouragement to continually try for the next step above where you are; to stretch yourself to find new boundaries. *Don't settle for a 7.*

To look at it another way, recall our analogy of a song being a gemstone brought up from your inner mine of creative ideas. The farther down in the mine shaft you have to go to bring something to the surface, the more effort it takes. The more intermixed it is with other materials, the more effort it will take to purify. To evoke an emotion through a song, you don't need to dig down too deeply, and what comes out is usually pure feeling. To go to the level of getting others to think and act, you need to explore many more corridors of your inner self, bring forth cohesive and persuasive ideas, and process them into a higher state of linguistic and musical clarity. Thus, you're expending more effort to purify the gem.

As you know, there are many feeling-only songs which are commercially successful. Does that automatically make them effective and well-written? Think of our 4-channel mixing board. There is no direct link between commercial success and either effectiveness or craftsmanship. They are on different channels. Commercial success is linked to the two faders dealing with *appeal*. You are in charge of your definition of success, and for many, being an *effective* songwriter, independent of appeal, is the primary measure of success.

You can think of Effective songwriting (Channel 1) as being artistically/critically successful, and songwriting with Appeal (Channels 3-4) as being commercially successful.

They are however, distinctly different. You are the one running the mixing board, and it does not have to be a choice of one or the other. Aiming for both is always an option, although it is the more difficult, but perhaps most rewarding choice.

The Dating Game: Presenting a Song is a Social Interaction

So how do you get a solid handle on the interrelation of song, effect, and listener ?

Think of a song as a conversation, a social interaction between you and a stranger. This is essentially what occurs when you present a song to someone. ***Understanding this concept is one of your most powerful songwriting tools !***

We've established that you have choices and you are in control of your selections and defining the outcome you want. If sounds too easy, it is, because there is one other important factor in the mix. Think of typical social situations where you make a series of choices – what to wear, how to do your hair, the scent to use, what to say, how to act – all designed to make the specific impression that you desire. *This works out only if the person on the other end of the social interaction is on the same wavelength as you, and their expectations are met.* Otherwise, you can make all those carefully thought out choices, but the experience becomes the job you didn't get; the pick-up line that fell flat; the sales pitch that didn't pan out; the audition that went nowhere; the relative you didn't mean to offend; the prank that only you thought was funny.

The Blind Date

If you intend to have an audience, there are two sides to the interaction . An important principle is to *always show respect for your listener* by anticipating and meeting (or surpassing) their expectations. Think of presenting a song as if you were going on a blind date. You are asking a stranger to share some intimate time with you. Now think of all the things that make a blind date successful or disastrous. If you only talk about yourself and never invite the other person into the conversation, will there be a second date? If you genuinely try to connect but you just have no common interests, will there be a second date? If you make the other person do all the work to figure out what you're talking about, will there be a second date?

And on top of all of this, not only were you the one who asked the person to come spend this time with you, *you are asking THEM to pay for the date!* They pay for the transportation to your gig; they pay the entrance fee at the door; they pay for your CD and your merchandise; they give you their time and attention. Clearly, it falls to *you* to make the experience worthwhile for the person whose favor you are courting.

The successful blind date is a one where the time together is an equally shared experience, personal connections are made, and common interests and tastes are found. Ultimately, *you are in charge of shaping the experience*, but go into it with your eyes-wide-open. . If there is even the hint that you feel *you* are doing the listener a favor, or that it's really about *you* and not them, you are compromising your chances of affecting the listener a positive way.

The two faders dealing with Appeal will be discussed in a separate article on "Courting Appeal".

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Bill Pere was named one of the "Top 50 Innovators, Groundbreakers and Guiding Lights of the Music Industry" by Music Connection Magazine. With more than 30 years in the music business, as a recording artist, award winning songwriter, performer, and educator Bill is well known for his superbly crafted lyrics, with lasting impact. Bill has released 16 CD's , and is President of the 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, 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.

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