

Song Writing: Tips on how to write fresh lyrics

By Brenton Brown

So, you know what you want to say, and roughly the way you're going to say. How do you then convert message into lyric - or lyric into message?

The following article highlights some thoughts and ideas on how to write fresh lyrics.

1. Find a Hook

What is a hook? A hook will normally meet all or some of following definitions:

1. A lyrical phrase that immediately engages the listener this may either be strangely familiar or just unusual and fresh.

Examples:

'Who is this?' - immediately Michael and Helen Frye have our attention. Well who is it? The question hooks us and draws us into the song.

'Did you feel the mountains tremble?' - again Martin Smith has grabbed our attention: 'what does that mean? What are they talking about? It draws us into the song.

'Come now is the time to worship' - a strangely familiar phrase, but it catches us. Why is now the time to worship? It's got us hooked, we want to know!

'Kneel me down again here at your feet' - why? Is something wrong. What's happening?

'Jesus, be the centre' - it doesn't obviously pose a question. But it's a fairly awkward, and unusual phrase. I'd never heard it before. What does he mean by that?

'I'm falling on my knees' - striking image, powerful hooky phrase.

2. Fits with music in terms of rhythm and melody.
3. Forms a pleasing sequence of sounds when sung or spoken.
4. Has to be accessible - i.e. clear enough meaning.

As an exercise listen to lots of songs and see if you can identify the hook or hooks and then look at what makes it a hook (is it lyrical intrigue? Is it melodically pleasing or infectious? Etc). Also try this with different music genres.

2. Have a stash of Goodies

Keep a notebook and be on the lookout in your conversations for phrases that just pop out at you so that when you find that hook you can write it down so you don't lose it!

3. Ask yourself: Is there a fresher way to say this?

Always be on the look out for new expressions of ancient truths, these cut through the layers of familiarity and allow the message to penetrate our hearts.

This article is taken from a series of notes by Brenton Brown (used at a Song-writing workshop at Mallshanger in December 2000) edited by Simon and Gaynor Shaw used with kind permission and updated by Vineyard Records UK. Brenton Brown is a songwriter and worship leader on the Vineyard Records UK releases 'Come now is the time', 'Hungry', 'Surrender', 'Doing the Stuff Live' and 'Holy' Brenton and his wife, Jude, now live in the US and attend the Malibu Vineyard.