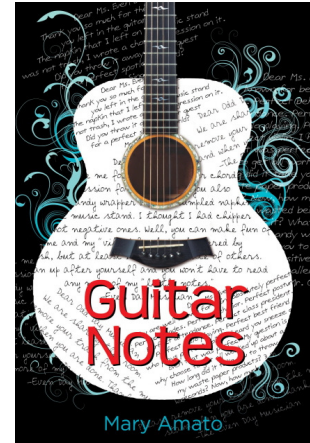


Mary Amato's Songwriting Lesson

Understanding Song Lyrics as Poetry

Read the lyrics (below) for the final song that Tripp writes for Lyla in *Guitar Notes*. You can listen to the song on <http://thrmsociety.com/>

- Look at the imagery, metaphors, and rhythm.
- What is the rhyme scheme? Does the rhyme scheme stay the same in both verses? How does this affect the poem?
- Notice that most of the rhymes are slant rhymes (e.g., mops and locks). I use one perfect rhyme (be and me) in the bridge. Why do you think I made these choices.
- Notice the repetition in the chorus. Why is repetition often used in choruses?



Lucky Me

VERSE

The sun was tied up in clouds
And the moon wrung out of its songs
Up on Twelfth Street the trees were just trees
Holding nothing but leaves in their arms
All my days were locked in a closet with the
Rags and the brooms and the mops
Nothing to feel but the feel of nothing
Slipping through keyholes and locks

CHORUS

But you know what I need
You strum against my strings
And make me sing
Sing lucky lucky me
Sing lucky lucky me

VERSE

<http://thrmsociety.com/>

You were telling your little white lie
Making everybody happy, crying inside
Staying so long with what they chose
You almost missed what you needed most
All your days were stuck in a rhythm
That you couldn't change or stop
Nothing to say cause your words and emotions
Were twisted and chained into knots

CHORUS

But I know what you need
I strum against your strings
And make you sing
Sing lucky lucky me
Sing lucky lucky me

BRIDGE

We can't let this pass us by
Can't let it go without a fight
We are who we're meant to be
Singing lucky lucky me

REPEAT CHORUS

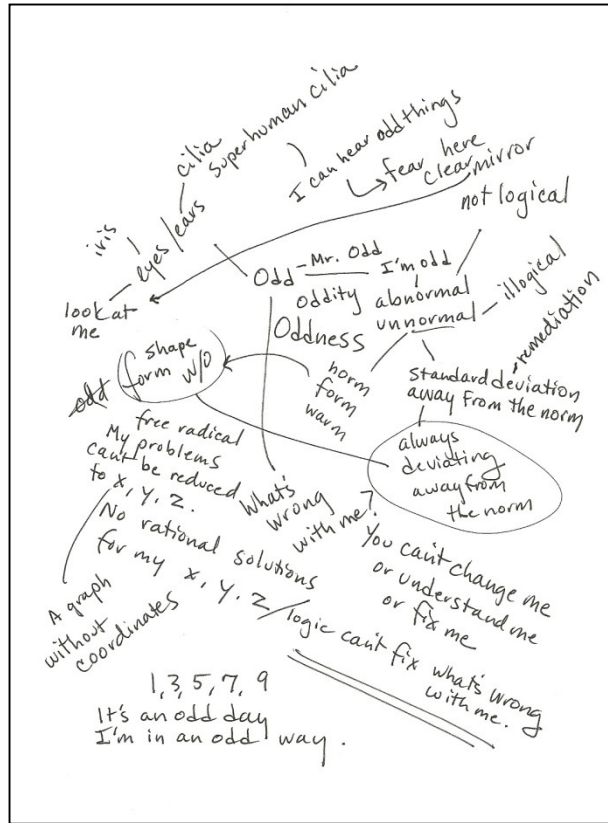
Writing your Own Song Lyrics

Is there a process for songwriting?

There is not one right way to write a song. Every songwriter develops his or her own process. I usually begin by brainstorming. I write a key word or a phrase—what the song is really about—on a piece of paper and jot down everything that comes to mind when I think of the topic. I try to look for and play with rhyming possibilities. Then I see if I can pull a simple phrase that will form the basis of the chorus. I jot down this phrase and then think about how to develop it a little further, either using repetition or adding another lyric line or two. After I have a sense of what my chorus will be, I spend time working on each verse.

Look closely at my original brainstorm for the Mr. Odd Song, then read the lyrics below.

<http://thrumssociety.com/>



Mr. Odd Song

Woke up today, saw my face in the mirror

Eyes don't lie, message is clear

I can hear it. I can see it. I can say it.

I'm odd.

Chorus: I'm a graph without coordinates, a shape without form

Always deviating away from the norm

Logic can't fix what's wrong with me

I'm odd. I'm odd. I'm odd. Indeed.

I've got superhuman cilia in my ear,

which gives me the ability to hear the fears
and lies that people hide behind and what's more
I can hear which crayon's happy in a box of sixty-four

Repeat Chorus

Now take these steps to write your own song.

1. Think of a subject for your song. Keep it simple.
2. Brainstorm whatever comes to mind when you think of this topic.
3. Try to find a key word or phrase and build your chorus with this word or phrase (embrace repetition).
4. Write at least two verses.

Music

Just Play

In *Guitar Notes*, Tripp advises Lyla to “just play.” With the guitar, he suggests this: “Start with one note and let your fingers find a place to go; and if you like the tune, repeat it until it wants to go somewhere new, then follow it, even if it peregrinates.” Either with your own voice or with an instrument, just play until you find a melody you like.

Melody as a Pattern

Try making up a melody by using a pattern. Repeat the pattern. Then vary the pattern to create an element of movement or surprise.

In *Guitar Notes*, the song *Tell-Tale Heart* follows a common pattern. Listen to the song here:

<http://thrumsociety.com/>.

Use a pattern as a template to create your own four line verse or chorus:

Think of one melodic phrase that lasts for four counts. This will be your line 1.

Repeat this line. This will be your line 2.

Start the melody the same way, but vary the ending slightly, keeping the chords or underlying music the same. This will be your line 3.

<http://thrumsociety.com/>

Surprise the listener by starting the melody line on a new note (if you started on a low note for lines 1-3, start on a high note for line 4). This will be your line 4.

Harmony

In the novel, Lyla teaches Tripp how to sing in harmony. Record yourself singing a simple song (sing it slowly). Experiment with creating a harmony. Note that many harmonies are created by singing “in thirds” (meaning two whole steps above or below the melody note).

In *Guitar Notes*, *The Pomegranate Waltz* has a tight harmony, mostly in thirds. Listen to it here:

<http://thrumsociety.com/>.

Here is the harmony for the “oh” in *The Pomegranate Waltz*. Notice how the harmony line is one third below the melody line.

