

# **Fear and Songwriting**

By Pat & Pete Luboff

Fear has no place in the continuous learning process we call songwriting, but it is invisibly present everywhere. It masquerades as reasonable concerns based on real problems. Whatever form it takes, it is a killer of creativity. So, part of our jobs as songwriters is to be ever vigilant to fear in all its disguises. The more we can free ourselves from its tyranny, the better writers we will be. Here are some of the fears we've heard expressed by songwriters all over the country (including us).

## **The Fear of Not Being Good Enough**

Many songwriters who use our consultation service ask the same question: "Do I have what it takes to be a songwriter?" which means, "Am I good enough?" Our answer is a question: "Do you enjoy writing songs?" If it feels good, and you feel you want to/have to do it, that's good enough! No one can tell you if writing songs is worth it for you, or if you are worthy to write songs.

We're also yoga teachers and there's a parallel. We ask our yoga students to keep their eyes closed while doing the yoga. This is so they don't look at the other people and make comparisons and (probably negative) judgments about how well they are doing the pose. In yoga, as in songwriting, we are each of us on our own path of development and there are no measuring tapes to say who is further along.

There are obviously some songwriters who are absolutely great. For instance, during Tin Pin South week in Nashville, you can spend six hours a night in clubs all over town being blown away by writers of such daring and skill, it's like watching triple somersaults on a flying trapeze. They didn't get there by worrying whether they were good enough. And you won't get there by worrying whether you'll ever be that good. The choice is whether to feel half-empty desperation or half-full inspiration.

## **The Fear of Rejection**

We hear that "I Swear" was rejected for five years before it became a hit on two charts at once. That "You Needed Me" was rejected over 100 times. Allen Reynolds (Garth Brooks' producer) brought two songs to Reba McIntyre that she passed on because they were not right for her and both went to number one with other artists. The reasons why a song doesn't get cut are as many as angels on the head of a pin. A pass on your song does not mean anything about you. You are lots more likely to get a pass than a "hold" and if that fact gets you down, you'll just have to get over it. Otherwise, the pitching process will be too painful for you.

If you take rejection personally, you will communicate defensiveness to your music business contacts and with a zillion songs to listen to in the hopes of finding ten that fit their needs, they just don't have time to deal with your negative energy. So, keep positive, keep pitching. Every great writer can wallpaper their walls with the rejection slips they got early in their careers. Join the club! If you let fear of rejection keep you from getting your songs out there, you just rejected yourself!

## **The Fear of No More Ideas**

We've actually had writers tell us they wouldn't write another song until they got their first one right. We've gotten long letters describing years of arguments between collaborators over one song. Others ask us about writer's block. All of these are symptoms of the fear that we will never have another good idea. Balderdash and bunkum!

The world is teeming with ideas. TV, movies, newspapers, books, our lives, our families and friends, all flood us with new ideas every minute of the day, and our brains keep on going all night long while we sleep. We couldn't stop having ideas if we tried. What we can do, though, is put a stranglehold on the expression of the ideas.

Many writers do this by trying to write final lyrics in meter and rhyme right off the bat. When we write songs, we use the method we describe in our book "12 Steps to Building Better Songs." We may talk for hours before we write one word of lyric. By the time we do get down to the lyric writing stage, we already know very thoroughly what we want to say. That makes it so much easier to say it!

Other writers get stuck on a song and rewrite it to death. Some songs just aren't ready yet. Move on, you're an infinite source of creativity. Give the song some space and maybe come back to it later if you still believe in it.

There are two levels of songwriting. There's how to do it, which can be learned by studying the craft. And there's what to say with it, which has to do with your life lessons. We think the latter aspect is the more crucial of the two. If you choose to write about an idea

that is extremely important and meaningful to you, by definition, you will have lots to say about it.

## **The Fear of Songs Being Stolen**

So many writers express this fear! They want to spend big bucks to copyright every song because someone might steal them. They don't want to show their songs, because someone might steal them. If only these writers could spend one night in Nashville and see how freely songs are shared here!

Copyrighting your songs does not protect them from being "stolen." If someone actually infringes on your song, you'd have to take them to court and prove they had access and that their song was substantially the same as yours. This costs a whole lot of money, which means it's not going to happen unless the song you wrote is a big hit and there's money to fund the lawsuit. The chance of this happening is so remote, you're wasting your time even thinking about it. Many big publishers don't copyright the songs in their catalogs until they're actually recorded.

If you don't show your songs, what's the purpose of writing them? Didn't you write them to communicate something to someone? This fear is related to the lack of ideas fear. You think you have to guard your idea because it's one of a very few. But if you look on the ASCAP or BMI web sites, you'll probably find a dozen songs with your same title in the repertoire already. There are only three chords and seven notes when it comes right down to it. Ideas are in the air for all minds to access. There's bound to be some duplication! When our song "Body Language" was cut by Patti LaBelle, there were three songs out with the same title at the same time, including one by Queen that rose up the charts.

Show your songs in workshop situations and get the other writers to put their signatures and the date on the lyric sheets. This will serve as proof of date of creation should you ever need it. Also save all the tapes and papers you wrote the song on, to show your writing process. Then let your songs loose in the world and fear not!

## **The Fear of Collaboration**

Writers who have only written alone sometimes do so because they fear the trouble that might come of personality clashes in a collaboration. That's like saying you won't fall in love because your heart might get broken. Other writers just don't like the idea of opening up to another person's ideas; they fear the loss of control over their songs. Some writers feel unworthy of approaching other writers they admire because they fear not being able to keep up their end of the collaboration.

Collaboration brings more ideas, more resources, more talents, more connections, more commitment and even more fun to the songwriting process. Whatever form your fear of collaboration takes, it's worth overcoming it. We've collaborated with each other, with one or two more writers, and in groups from 10 to 100 people, some as young as six years old. Once certain ground rules are in effect, the rest is just plain fun. To make it simple for the six year olds, we point to our noses and say there's only one rule: No noes! In other words, everybody's ideas are listened to and no one says "No" to any of them. We just keep coming up with more ideas and one idea leads to another until everyone says "Yes!"

That way, no one's heart gets broken, everybody is wonderfully out of control of the song and participates equally in the creation of the song. Look, Ma, no fear!

## **The Fear of Intentional Growth**

Many writers talk about how their songs “just come” to them. Some say that the songs are dictated to them directly by God. These writers are afraid to mess with what must be perfection, since it was delivered so miraculously. They are afraid to commit the sin of re-writing! Sure, there have been some wonderful songs delivered in finished form to a few songwriters. Amanda McBroom says “The Rose” arrived in one sitting at the piano. But that is a rare experience. 99% of songs are written, re-written and re-written again. The same goes for books, magazine articles, and movie scripts. Yes, we’re thankful for the inspirations that arrive, but we’re not afraid to apply a little perspiration to make them better.

We had two songwriting organization leaders from two different parts of the country tell us on the same day that their groups weren’t interested in workshops because they didn’t think they needed to learn anything.

We think that the definition of songwriting is “a lifestyle which involves constant personal growth and constant effort to improve our ability to communicate our ideas.” The more we know the more we know how little we know! We go to educational songwriting events, read books, study songs and work on our spiritual and emotional growth every day. We’re always on the lookout for new information. If we attend a music business panel discussion and hear one or two good ideas that inspire us, we think it’s worth it.

The arrogance of saying you have nothing more to learn is really fear of admitting how little you know. Everyone you meet is

teaching you something. If you're not moving forward because you think you have nothing to learn, wouldn't you be better off wrong?

## **Fear of Success**

Related to the fear of not being good enough, fear of success sneaks up and stops us from doing the things that we know will work. We cringe at opportunities we let slip by because of a false sense of inferiority/superiority. Another way to express fear of success is to do things that sabotage relationships that promise to be fruitful. Still another way to do it is to do nothing. We know so many songwriters with terrific songs who do nothing to pitch their songs.

One writer asked us, "Why is songwriting so hard?" The answer is that it's not. We make it hard because we think it's hard. We could just as well ask ourselves the question, "What would this look like if it were easy?" The answer is it would be fun, like a game. We'd enjoy every step in the process and we'd be happily expecting it all to result in success. What stops us from seeing it that way?

We have to consider how we define success. If our vision of success is to have a number one hit on the charts, then we can go for it and get it with lots of hard work and luck. But it will most likely be a long time between the setting of that goal and obtaining it. If we define success as doing our best every day to improve as songwriters and make the connections we can for our songs, we can be successful on a daily basis.

So, let's look within and find those fears and blow them gently out. Like bubbles, they burst and disappear, leaving us lighter and ready to create freely.