

Verdad

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## **My Approach to Writing Songs**

My personal idea about art:

*Art is always being interpreted by the viewer/listener/reader. It is experienced and recreated by the interpretation of all who participate in the art. I think a fuller piece of art is one which invites interpretation and reaches each of us in unique ways. We don't all have to see or hear the same thing in order to enjoy it. I like some sense of ambiguity in a work of art that allows for individual interpretation.*

I have always liked music. I cannot remember a time when music wasn't some part of my life. As a toddler my mother would rock me and sing songs to me. My favorites were "Tom, Tom, the Pipers Son" and "My Bonny Lies Over the Ocean." I can still hear and feel her singing those songs to me in the rocking chair.

In grade school I enjoyed singing songs in music class, even if I wasn't the best singer. I just liked to sing and I loved music. I can remember at age 12 or 13 starting to make up my own songs. I worked at a swimming pool beginning at age 13. I spent long hours cleaning the pool and making up my own songs. I didn't really know how to play any music, so I just focused on words and melody. It was about this time that I started writing in my notebooks. Later I started playing guitar and since then I tried to put words with melody and chords. It has always been a way that I could put some framework around what I felt and what I was experiencing. It was my memory of my feelings and the lessons I learned. I suppose I have written over 100 songs over the years, but I have forgotten many of them. Some of the forgotten ones were best left forgotten!

At first my songs were very personal. I wrote them about specific things, events, people, and relationships. These songs tended to be serious works and very transparent. Over time I developed a different strategy that I use today. The new strategy involved three ideas. The first was to build more fun into the songs. It was not that I wanted all the songs to be upbeat and happy, but I didn't want all of them to be serious songs. I tried to strike a balance.

The second and third ideas were more significant. These ideas involved being purposely more ambiguous in a song (not being so obvious who it was about or why), and combining different ideas into a single song. Perhaps both approaches were used to disguise the real meaning of a song, but they also created a little bit of mystery and depth to the song. In that way the song could mean different things to different people.

Being less obvious and more ambiguous was perhaps a way to write about important things to me that I might not want to share with others who might be hurt by the song. Without Falling is an example of that. I found that as I got older, I could not be as honest as I used to be, especially if I was going to share songs with others. The lack of honesty is something I lament, but perhaps necessary. Being less obvious was my way of dealing with this. It required me to be more clever in the words and phrases.

I also started not to worry about the facts of a song (the third idea). I started to juxtapose different, but related events, people, or situations into the same song. In that way the song became fuller and perhaps a bit more interesting. The central idea of the song remained intact, but now it wasn't just about me or another person, but about several related people.

Let me give you a few examples. In "already Broken My Heart" I started out by thinking of a friend who was very lonely in her marriage. She felt her heart was already broken from years of hurt and neglect. That idea started the song. However, there are parts in there that related to me "so many nights lying next to you, feeling so cold and alone," and there are other parts that are just my imagination (I don't know anyone who owns an El Dorado car).

I have another song called, "For the Little Ones." It is a lullaby for kids. I wrote it with my children in mind, but when I wrote it I didn't have any children, so I thought of my niece and nephew when I wrote it. They actually came to visit me shortly after I wrote it. I remember that they were surprised at the song - it think it was better than they expected it to be.

I do enjoy watching people react to my songs. One of the biggest thrills in my life was to play some of my songs with Back Tracks (later Tumbling Dice) in Kentucky and watching people dance to my songs. The first song that started it out was "everybody's Dancin'" which fit into the first category of songs - it was fun. I took an incident at college that was real, but I distorted some of the facts to expand the song and make it complete. It was a song about a small incident where I met a girl at a dance.

I have a number of songs that I wish to record. That will be my goal over the next year - to make a good recording on f my favorite songs that I have written. I have a nice recording machine (8 tracks), good guitars and effects, a drum machine - everything that I need to do the job well. I wish I had some fellow musicians who would help me, but it is hard to get others to believe in your songs. I really miss that from my Kentucky friends - they encouraged me to play my own songs and they liked them! I miss that so much.

