

THE 'ART' OF SONGWRITING

There is something 'zen' about the art of songwriting. Sometimes it feels like trying to understand a Zen koan: the sound of one hand clapping; the effort to make no effort; the process of writing a song is described, yet is also beyond words; it is both something that can be learnt and something that cannot be taught by conventional methods.

In Noh Theatre they refer to the Art of Faint Patterns; saying the most with the least gestures and fewest words; there are few broad brushstrokes and the small movement of one finger (often passed down from generation to generation) can make a whole audience gasp with delight, or weep.

So how can you learn to write a song? Like most of the arts, the best learning process seems to be hands-on, actually doing it alongside inspired, skilled teachers and in the good company of other enthusiastic students.

You can read books about music theory, there are computer programmes to help you find melodies, rhymes and synonyms, computer software can even help you get harmonies and use sampled stock musical phrases on any instrument.

But none of these are a substitute for that moment of inspiration, when a melody unfolds from the fingers on the keyboard or fretboard; those few lost hours when a lyric somehow falls from the heavens, when you say in song something you have wanted to say for years.

When the lyrics of a song enwrap an emotion or feeling beyond language. Opening yourself to this process, knowing how to encourage this in yourself, raising your awareness so that your songs truly reflect your connection to life. Now that is the art of songwriting.

Calling it 'art' doesn't elevate it to some higher plane of activity! On the contrary, just as with Beginners Mind, it is often the beginner with no previous experience of songwriting who can produce something startling and transfixing.

It is all down to receptivity, flexibility and willingness to move the mind and emotions to new places, new territories not travelled or experienced before. We do promise some of this on our Songwriting Events.

Barry Lane
2010