


You ^{Can} Write A Song


RANDY KLEIN

Syllabus

musicfirst

RANDY KLEIN is a multi-award-winning composer, pianist, songwriter, record producer, author, president of Jazzheads, an independent music label in NYC, and music educator.

His extensive catalog of recordings can be heard on all streaming channels. His songs encompass a wide range of styles and musical genres learned from an eclectic musical background. They include: Musical Theatre: Black Swan Blues, Twinkle's Fairy Pet Day, Fancy Nancy: Splendiferous Christmas, Ever Happily After, Flambé Dreams, Move! (Royal Theatre Carré, Amsterdam); I Don't Do Club Dates; Falling Apart. Concert and Choral Works: Fanfare For Jerusalem performed at the Metropolitan Opera House by 400-voice Hazamir Chorale; The Margaret Walker For My People song cycle featuring poetry of Margaret Walker, had its symphonic premiere November 2023 with the Mississippi Symphony Orchestra, Facing It and Dear John, Dear Coltrane, based on poetry of Yusef Komunyakaa and Michael Harper, premiered at the Forbes Center For The Performing Arts.



As the composer of Jubilee The Folk Opera, he a member of the creative team awarded a National Endowment Grant for the Arts and an ASCEND Initiative grant between Yale University and Jackson State University, Jackson, MS. He is the recipient of the Creatives Rebuild New York Award, The Simons Public Humanities Fellowship, Hall Center for the Humanities at University of Kansas; a BMI Foundation Jerry Harrington Award for Musical Theatre; four Southern Regional Emmy Awards, including original score to the film-documentary Richard Wright (Black Boy) (PBS/BBC). Two gold records for songs recorded by R&B Hall of Fame legend, Millie Jackson, Top Ten Dance Hit – Watch The Closing Doors, by IRT. Randy's music can be heard: National Emmy-winning documentaries Free To Dance (PBS Great Performances); Beyond Tara: The Extraordinary Life Of Hattie McDaniel (American Movie Classics); African Burial Ground Museum in lower Manhattan and Civil Rights Museum, Greensboro, NC.

Randy is a longtime member of the Dramatists Guild, the Advanced BMI Lehman Engel Musical Theater Workshop, NARAS, The Association of Popular Music Educators (APME), Alumnus of the Berklee College of Music. Exclusive Steinway Artist.

YOU Can Write A Song by Randy Klein

The easiest way to learn about songwriting is **listening to songs**. It is amazing how much listening can teach you about the craft, and it is fun to do.

Listening is easy: turn on or click playback, you're hearing a song. But musicians who are songwriters have to learn to listen to songs in a more insightful way. You have to learn to focus your ear onto a particular part of a song to discover how it works. Focused listening makes you a better songwriter.

It is through song observation that we experience how composer/lyricists wrote the song.

- What is the structure of a song?
- What is the rhyming pattern?
- What is it about the lyric construction that compels our interest and feelings?

Observing 'well-written songs', one can hear structure, rhyming patterns, subject, lyric, melodic and harmonic decisions made by the composer and lyricist, and feel the marriage of the music and lyric.

Learning from a song without the emotional attachment that comes from observing one's own work allows for objective conversation.

You Can Write A Song features eighty-plus video song examples, is an organized method that teaches how to **listen** to songs and learn from them. This subject is thought provoking and should be on every music school's curriculum. The video song examples are carefully chosen and show the lyrics of the song as it is being heard.

Honing this focused listening skill of isolating and evaluating the different elements that comprise a song is key. **You Can Write A Song** is essential for all growing musicians and music educators.

This is a fun course to take and a fun course to teach. **Enjoy!**

As with all lessons utilizing popular music, PREVIEW ALL CONTENT BEFORE SHARING WITH STUDENTS. Read all lyrics. Listen to all examples. Watch all videos.

Edit lessons/activities and substitute or supplement materials as needed to meet the needs of your students and the norms of your school community.

COURSE GOAL: By the end of the course, each student will have written a chorus with a strong hook and one supporting verse.

“I Can Hear It / I Can’t Hear It” is a learning/grading tool that can act as a framework for building critical listening and songwriting skills. There is no middle area for listening; either you can or you can’t hear something. Once the student can hear and describe the part of the song they are listening to is when they get a grade of ‘I Can Hear It’.

Guiding Principle: If you can hear it, you can sing it.

A Cumulative Process: Learning the art of songwriting is a cumulative process. You will continue to add to the skills you already have each time you write. What you learn from the song you are writing, you bring with you to the next song you write.

Chicken or Egg?

For different songwriters, the parts of a song may come together in a variety of ways, orders, and evolution.

This process-focused course begins with LYRICS FIRST. This is a proven, time-tested pathway to songwriting. If you can hear what you speak, you can write a song.

Melody and Melodic Rhythm are approached as natural outgrowths of the creator's speaking voice.

Music notation is NOT REQUIRED but may be added at teacher discretion.

SONG FORM (structure) is addressed in full in Lesson 7. Understanding the parts of a song is central to song form. Some teachers may wish to introduce Lesson 7 sooner in the sequence.

Harmony is added in Lesson 10, starting with single notes to form a bass line. Guide your students as you see fit with ideas like home tone, tonic, dominant, etc. Such vocabulary is not included in the core lessons. If you are using DAW-type music software, look for harmony/chord functions to assist students.

Beats and rhythmic accompaniment are touched on only at the end of Lesson 8. The focus of this course is on creating lyrics and melody that work together. PLEASE USE MUSIC SOFTWARE to empower students to create a rhythmic framework **after** they have developed a strong hook, chorus and verse.

Assessment and evaluation of the creative process can be tricky. Your school may require evidence of student growth. Suggestions for assessment and evaluation (grading) will be provided. Use what best serves your school requirements.

Throughout the lessons, students will be asked to give feedback (critique).

Model positive messaging and helpful suggestions with starting phrases like:

- I like how you...
- It was very effective that you...
- Did you think about trying....
- I wonder what might happen if...
- Maybe try something like...

When working with students, experiment and demonstrate as many options as you can for song lyrics, melody, harmony, etc. The more you are willing to **take creative risks and not judge the process**, the more your students will explore their own creativity.

Depending on your unique school and class schedule, the activities in this **course may be modified as needed**.

- Listening activities may be done as whole-class activities or as solo listening. Some songs on a playlist may be played for the whole class, while the rest are assigned for individual listening.
- Some songs provided may need to be skipped at your discretion or due to available time.
- Creative activities may work better for your students in small groups (or with the whole class) rather than as solo activities by individual students, even though songwriting is usually an individual art form.

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CHARTS (worksheets) are included throughout the course.
These may be printed or downloaded and annotated with your choice of software.

Students are encouraged to **RECORD** throughout the course. Students may use the included MusicFirst Recorder, record on a device like a phone, or use other software and upload the recording.

BONUS activities may be used as supplemental instruction, lesson extensions, or independent activities for students.

- ✦ **LESSON 1.** I Can Hear It – I Can Describe It – I Can Feel It
 - ✓ **1a.** What is a song? (write)
 - ✓ **1b.** I Can Hear - Feel - Describe (listen/upload chart)
 - **Lesson 1 Bonus:** One Note At A Time Game
- ✦ **LESSON 2:** The Hook
 - ✓ **2a.** Hook Hunt (listen/upload chart)
 - ✓ **2b.** 4 Hook Ideas (write)
 - ✓ **2c.** Record Your Hook (record)
 - ✓ **2d.** About Your Hook [reflection] (write)
- ✦ **LESSON 3.** Rhymes
 - ✓ **3a.** Find the Rhymes (listen/upload chart)
 - ✓ **3b.** Rhyming Patterns (listen/upload chart)
- ✦ **LESSON 4:** Thinking Process for Writing a Lyric 1 (CHORUS pre-write)
 - ✓ **4a.** Write About ANYTHING (write)
 - ✓ **4b.** Song About ANYTHING (write)
 - **Lesson 4 Bonus:** Songs About ANYTHING

- ✦ **LESSON 5.1:** The CHORUS: I Can Hear It - I Can Sing It
 - ✓ **5.1a.** Hear It - Sing it Chart (listen/upload chart)
 - ✓ **5.1b.** Record the Chorus (record)
 - **Lesson 5.1 Bonus:** Melody Challenge
 - ✓ **5.1 Bonus:** Melody Challenge (record)
 - ✓ **5.1 Bonus:** Reflection (write)
- ✦ **LESSON 5.2.** Write the CHORUS containing the HOOK
 - ✓ **5.2a.** Write the Chorus (write)
 - ✓ **5.2b.** Speak Your Chorus (record)
- ✦ **LESSON 6.1:** Thinking Process for Writing a Lyric 2 (VERSE pre-write)
 - ✦ **6.1.** Verse (4 lines) (write)
- ✦ **LESSON 6.2.** Speak the VERSE
 - ✦ **6.2.** Speak Your Verse (record)
- ✦ **LESSON 6.3.** Connect the VERSE to the CHORUS
 - ✓ **6.3a.** Record the Verse and Chorus (record)
 - ✓ **6.3b.** Verse-Chorus Reflection (write)
- ✦ **LESSON 7.** The Parts of a Song
 - ✓ **7a.** Song Structure (listen/upload)
 - ✓ **7b.** Song Structure discussion (write)
 - **Lesson 7 Bonus:** Songs that Start with the HOOK and CHORUS
- ✦ **LESSON 8:** Listening Skills Check-up
 - ✓ **8a.** Listening Review 1 Checklist (listen/upload chart)
 - ✓ **8a** Listening Review 1 Details Chart (listen/upload chart)
 - ✓ **8b.** Listening Review 2 (listen/upload chart)
 - ✓ **8c.** Listening Review Reflection (write)
 - ✓ **8d.** Free-Write (write)
- ✦ **LESSON 9.** Music to Words - Speaking into Singing
 - ✓ **9.** Record Your Song Melody (record)
- ✦ **LESSON 10.** Adding Harmony
 - ✓ **10.** Record Your Song with Harmony (record)