

Title:

"Hooks To Hits: The Key to Writing Songs That Sell"

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Summary:

The main ingredient that distinguishes a perfectly respectable "album cut" from a hit song is the presence of a killer hook. But if they were so easy to create, we'd all be millionaires! How can you enhance the impact of your songs' hooks to appeal to both audiences and the People Behind Desks? Read on!

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Article Body:

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The main ingredient that distinguishes a perfectly respectable "album cut" from a hit song is the presence of a killer hook. But if hooks like that were so easy to create, we'd all be millionaires! How can you enhance the impact of your songs' hooks to appeal to both audiences and the People Behind Desks? Read on!

To make this article more useful, gather up your 3 strongest or most recent titles, hooks or choruses, so that you can apply what we're discussing to the "real world" of your material.

Tap Into Your Personal Experiences For "Nuggets of Truth"

It's my firm belief that the old adage, "write what you know" is applicable to songwriting as well as prose. Although some of us prefer to believe we can write about anyone and anything, our most meaningful and successful songs usually spring from "real life" experiences, and our responses to, and interpretations of, those experiences. Each day we spend on the planet, observed through the prism of songwriting, offers innumerable creative possibilities. The seeds of brilliant songs often lie just beneath the surface, but the writer must be willing to nurture their growth.

Let's say you're starting with a blank slate: germ of an idea brewing, recording device turned on, and instrument, voice or blank page ready and waiting. How do

you go about extracting the proverbial Killer Hook from your precious "nuggets of truth":

- First, ask: what is true, real, intensely felt RIGHT NOW in your life? Be attentive to those flickers of realization, your "aha! moments."
- What experiences do you have a burning yearning to share?
- What contribution do you want to make to the world?
- What makes your angle on life unique, compelling, interesting?
- In the movie "Walk The Line," Sam Phillips asks Johnny Cash what song he'd sing if he was dying in a ditch on the side of the road and only had 3 minutes left. What hook would you sing in that situation?
- How can you arrange words and/or musical notes to get your "soul" down in song?
- Get crazy, be bold, bare your deepest truth or your silliest notion.
- Your job as a songwriter is to express what others can't express. Go overboard!

Now take a few minutes and blurt out what comes up for you. Really dig in there and fearlessly sing, write or play something, anything, as long as it rings true. This is a great exercise to try any time you have 10 minutes to spare.

Next, start to put that spark of inspiration into song form. Stay connected with the essence of your personal experience as you begin to experiment with lyrics and music.

Ways to Enhance the Impact of Your Song's Hook(s)

In the Verse/Chorus song form – the most common form these days – the chorus, and especially the hook, is where you "deliver the goods." It's the equivalent to the summation to the jury, the punch line of the joke, the revelation on the mountaintop. Every verse, every pre-chorus, every bridge, every line and every note leads up to this ultimate payoff. A great hook (and chorus) is packed full of meaning, fun, passionate intensity... or all three! It can't be overemphasized that your hook has to really Rock Their World. But first, it has to rock YOURS. It has to ring true to you.

- Boil your Big Idea down into the smallest possible expression of its essence:

your hook.

- Stay simple-yet-elegant. Less is usually more.
- Don't pussyfoot around. Be bold and risky. Always take a strong point of view!
- A great line bears repetition. If it's worth saying, it's usually worth saying again.
- Make your song move rhythmically. People want to be SWAYED in more than one way by your song.
- Think of it this way: your hook is the hub of the wheel, and the other song elements are the spokes.
- Marry your melody to your lyric so that each intensifies and deepens the other.
- If you are thrilled by your hook, "they" probably will be too. And if you're holding back, they probably will too!
- Show off your "money" note, your slammin'-est groove, your cleverest line, your most unusual concept in your hook. Aim for the bleachers, emotionally and creatively.

Give Your Hooks Mass Appeal

Singles are distinguished from album cuts by their catchiness, accessibility and freshness. And the hook is the key to that mass appeal. Most listeners and People Behind Desks couldn't sing all of a song's verses back to you if they tried. But most CAN remember a killer hook or chorus. For those of you who are driven by thoughts of financial gain, singles are also where the money is. (But remember: selling doesn't mean selling out!) When you get to your main hook, hit us with fresh language, chords and melodic movement to wake us up physically, emotionally and spiritually. The might mean:

- An impassioned title or lyrical line: a twist of phrase, an unforgettable image, or an emotional outpouring that rings true
- A peak moment for the vocalist. This could be a high note, a long note, a rhythmically cool pulse or movement, a fresh interval, a repeated pattern or melodic sequence, etc.

- A catchy-as-hell instrumental riff or chordal pattern
- An underlying rhythm or groove that sweeps up all in its path
- Enough repetition to be catchy without becoming boring
- A striking contrast to whatever comes before and after (verses, pre-choruses, bridge), so that your hook stands out in an obvious way

Remember, more Hooks-Per-Square-Inch is better! In this day and age of sensory overload, listeners thrive on intense songs that cut through the clutter. We WANT to be moved on all levels. We're hungry for depth, for truth, for emotion, for humor. Strive to discover the universal within the personal, the specifics of real life. Make your song paint a picture or create an environment people can live in.

By following these guidelines, and learning from songs that are hits in your chosen genres, you can make your songs more accessible, satisfying and commercially viable.

Happy songwriting!