

The answer is simple and basic – quality. Great songs. The songs are like cars to GM, computers to Apple, or food to McDonald's. These companies have great brand awareness, but have faltered when there was a perception that their quality was compromised or did not measure up to competitors. The ultimate success of a company (i.e. you), is bring a *quality* product into a wide awareness.

I meet many young artists who want me to tell them all I know about marketing, but who never ask for analysis or critique of their songs. They've spend large amounts of time and money recording songs that have never been critiqued by objective professionals, or developing graphics that have never gone before a test audience, and then they wonder why all their best efforts at marketing and promoting yield little results – OR – they get some degree of results from their marketing efforts and never think to ask how much MORE they would have gotten if they had a better product (see the discussion of *Ullage* in "Songcrafters' Coloring Book").

There was an amazing online poll conducted by Derek Sivers in early 2009. He asked how folks get input on their songs during the development stage. A huge number of aspiring Independent Artists wrote (sometimes emphatically!) that they *never* seek out nor *ever* need critique. Not for *their* songs! Could you imagine any company today investing all the time and money it takes to launch a new product or service without including focus groups and market testing as part of the product development? We all remember the Ford Edsel... (See "Songcrafters' Coloring Book" discussion on Expression vs. Communication).

If much of your competition is not spending time and effort in maximizing the quality of their songs, it is good news for you – it means that if you take the time to work on the crafting of your songs, then your subsequent efforts at promotion and marketing will be that much more effective.

A typical response to avoiding critique is that "I want to be different! My music doesn't fit any type of category" Let's take a moment to look at when 'different' works for or against you. (See previous articles on the Von Restorff Effect).

At my workshops, I usually ask 100 people in a room what song they think about when I say the word "love", and I usually get 100 different answers. Then I ask what song they think of when I say "centrifugal" – and there are only two kinds of responses – either nothing, or "This Kiss", as recorded by Faith Hill, written by Beth Nielsen Chapman, Robin Lerner and Annie Roboff (yes, it sometimes takes a village to raise a great song).

There is no question that this song "works", across different styles, tastes, demographics, and cultures. Besides being a #1 international Country hit and a Top-10 crossover hit on multiple-genre charts on three continents, "This Kiss" became the signature song for the 1998 movie *Practical Magic*. It won the Video Of The Year awards at the 1998 [Country Music Association](#) awards. This was the first time in her career that Faith Hill had international success with a hit – success due to the *song*, not the artist. (She had had four previous #1 hits, but nothing of this magnitude).

Why does this song "work" so well, as opposed to the vast number of other songs that are also about love and kisses? Clearly it's not just what the song is "about". There is more at work.

Song lyrics have three main sets of components: Semantic (having to do with meaning), Phonetic (having to do with the sound of the words), and Prosodic (having to do with the rhythm of the words). (*These are all discussed at great length in "Songcrafters' Coloring Book"*)

When you look at the chorus of "This Kiss" :

(Chapman, Lerner , Roboff © Almo Music, HFA T14952)

It's the way you love me

It's a feeling like this

It's centrifugal motion

It's perpetual bliss

It's that pivotal moment

It's, ah, impossible

This kiss, this kiss, unstoppable

This kiss, this kiss

you see that it's not *what* is being said that is so memorable -- a million songs say the same thing. It's not any unique use of metaphor or any memorable story. It is the sound of the words, their cadence, and the unusual choice of words. The incredible international success of this song is shaped primarily by five words: *centrifugal, perpetual, (that)pivotal, impossible, unstoppable*". These five words show tremendous interaction between semantic, phonetic, and prosodic elements. The sonic activity (use of phonetics) here is extremely high: a five-fold alliteration on "p"; all the words end in the "ul" sound; assonant syllables in "cen" "per" and "pet"; a sonic reversal in "pos/"stop"; and a rhyme in "tual"/"fugal".

Prosodically, all the words have the exact same cadence (accent pattern) of 4 syllables with the accent on the second: soft-LOUD-soft-soft, and the same rhythmic timing. The five lines of this rhythmic pattern set up a real perception of motion -- and then -- the spondee pattern of the words "this kiss" (LOUD LOUD) moved to musical off-beats totally changes the sense of motion and makes the title really stand out, far more so than if the words just continued the fast-moving pace of the previous lines. It is truly good songcraft on all levels.

Finally, the semantic choice of the particularly unusual word (for a song) "centrifugal" put the icing on this lyric, using the Von Restorff effect to uniquely brand the song.

The Von Restorff Effect is the cognitive principle that makes things stand out and be more easily remembered by being different . This same principle is at work with the music in songs as well. Ask 100 people what well known band they think of when you say "guitar", and you'll get 100 answers. Same for "keyboard". But ask what band they think of when you say "French Horn" and you'll get one – The Who. Ask about "flute" and you'll get Jethro Tull, and perhaps some Moody Blues. Ask about "cello" and it's the Harry Chapin Band. The Von Restorff Effect is clearly at work musically as well as lyrically.

The bottom line of all of this is simple: it's not enough to just be different, nor to be technically proficient. You have to have an above-average song in order for uniqueness and technical artistry to have optimum effect. And if you're going to be "different" it has to be in a way that is in a space of its own, without other competing songs or artists or styles. You can only determine this with some market testing. Don't just assume. Always strive for maximum Awareness, but be sure you have a well crafted, quality song to hold Attention.

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