

# Songcrafters Coloring Book

by Bill Pere

## SONG MAPPING: The Key to a Solid Song Structure (Part I)

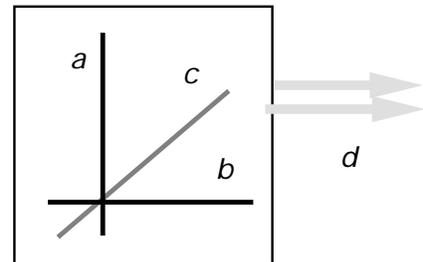
### What is Song Mapping?

Mapping a song is a technique of examining the details of its structure (Note: *Structure* refers to the way that specific elements like rhyme, meter, imagery, Etc., work together from line to line and verse to verse. This is not to be confused with *form* which refers to the sequential order of major sections of a song, e.g., verse, chorus, and bridge). A tight structure is what makes a good song great. It makes every bit of crafting work for maximum effect and causes every image, rhyme, and point of interest in a song to hit the listener with extra punch. Flaws in structure can be very subtle, and can cause the listener to have that sense of “something is wrong, but I can’t say what...”. In critique sessions, this is often expressed as “I felt let down...” or “I was expecting more from that verse...”.

### Time to look at Rhyme....

To begin our discussion of mapping, let’s look only at one aspect of songcrafting, the rhyme scheme. Of all the elements of song, the rhyme scheme is very to see. Rhyme is a fundamental piece of a song’s structure, because it can work four ways to pull things together:

- A -- Line to line within a verse (a vertical pull)
- B -- Internal rhyme within a single line ( a horizontal pull)
- C -- Verse-to-Verse rhyme (a pull across the time dimension)
- D -- External rhyming ( a pull to a common reference outside the song)



A quick review of four important concepts of rhyming:

- 1 -- Unlike free verse poetry, a song must have rhyme to help make it memorable and cohesive for a general listening audience
- 2 -- Do not bend the meaning or grammar of a line by forcing it to rhyme just for the sake of using a rhyming word. The meaning must always be the primary consideration. A perfect rhyme makes the strongest impact, but it is better to have a weaker rhyme if it means preserving the sense and grammar of the line. Some notable writers, such as Rupert Holmes (*The Pina Colada Song*, *Him*, and others) strongly prefer using perfect rhymes (time, mine) as opposed to near rhymes (time, mine). The advice offered here is to clearly define in your own mind what information the line must convey and try for a perfect rhyme. If you just cannot get a good rhyme, then use the best possible set of words to communicate that meaning. Don't change the meaning to manufacture a rhyme.
- 3 -- Avoid excessive use of common, trite rhymes (moon/ June; bad/had; you/blue).
- 4 -- Do not force an accent onto the wrong syllable just to make a rhyme (me/tenderLY; yes/happiNESS);

Now, assuming you follow those guidelines, let's look at the first three kinds of rhyming "pulls" described above. Solid structure comes from consistent patterns. This means the rhyming within a verse should be consistent from verse to verse. Corresponding lines of corresponding verses should have the same relationships to each other. For example if a 4-line verse has lines 1 and 3 rhyming and lines 2 and 4 rhyming, (*abab*) then all verses should have that same pattern. However, this is only half of a correct map; the other half is that ideally, the rhymes should fall on the *same beat* (or off-beat) from verse to verse (we will look at this in the next chapter). Here are several examples of structure analysis, looking only at the rhyme scheme.

## Variations on Rhyme Patterns

Instead of just rhyming the ends of lines, use interesting patterns of rhyme placement (but keep it consistent from verse to verse). The most common pattern next to end-line rhymes, is internal rhyme. Here's an example from Harry Chapin's *Mercenaries*

It's a slow motion **night**, in the hot city **lights**, (a/a)  
Past nine when the good folks are snoring in **bed** (b)  
On a loose jointed **cruise** to recolor your **blues** (c/c)  
With illegal notions alive, alive in your **head** (b)

You are back from some **war** that you've been fightin' **for** (a/a)  
Some old blue-blood bastard in a dark pin-stripe **suit** (b)  
And the word from your **loin** has your mind in your **groin** (c/c)  
And your back pocket burnin with blood, blood money **loot** (b)

This pattern continues through the many verses of the song, with internal rhymes appearing in the first and third lines of each, in addition to the usual end-rhymes on lines 2 and 4. In story songs which have many verses and which have a lot of cinematic elements, tight structure helps keep listeners connected to the flow of the story.

Still more intricate patterns can be employed:

The alarm clock says it's **dawn**, (a)  
I creak up out of bed and put my work boots **on** (a)  
For another day of working in that same old **place** (b)  
I slip out, but she doesn't **hear** (c)  
She's not heard for eighteen **years** (c)  
The only thing that's different from yesterday (d)  
Is another tough of **gray** and a wrinkle on my **face** (d/b)

(From "Another Touch of Gray" by Bill Pere)

Another example of an intricate rhyme scheme:

Do you hear it **there**, in the children's **laughter**? (a/b)  
Their kites dance in the **air** and avoid the wire **rafter**. so **free** (a/b/c)  
The old man hears the **sound**, and today he's kind of **smilin'** (d/e)  
The squirrels gather **'round**, and watch his shadow sway **silently** (d/e/c)  
Like the twisting of an old cypress **tree...** (c)

(From "Born of a Smile" by Bill Pere)

Not only does this have an unusual rhyme pattern, but the rhymes themselves contain multi syllables and even a rhyme split in the word "silently". Even though the "-tly" of "silently" rhymes with "tree", the first parts, "silen" are rhymed with "smilin'", so the primary accent correctly remains on the first syllable (SI-lent-ly) instead of being forced onto the third (si-lent-LY).

## Parenthetical Rhymes

A parenthetical rhyme encloses rhyme pairs within an outer rhyme as follows:

We'll pray to God **above** (a)  
Keep you safe through the **night** (b)  
As you **fight to build** a world that's **filled** with **love**.. (b/c/c/a)

(from "Heart of the Storm" by Bill Pere)

Here, the "a" rhyme encloses the "b" and "c" pairs, like parentheses

## Expanded Rhymes

Rhymes are most commonly single syllables. One way to tighten the structure and add interest is to step backwards one syllable at a time from the main rhyme and see if you can rhyme preceding syllables as well. This is particularly useful when two lines which are related musically or logically are separated by several intervening lines. It may take more than just an end rhyme to make them feel connected. Expanding the rhyming points in the line is like building a structural "crossbrace" to firm up the framework. Here are two examples:

My **tears and the tide** are both salty **water** , (a/b/c)  
Come back to Jenny, I've been such a **fool** (d)  
I was blaming **you** for something you didn't **do** and that was **cruel**.. (e/e/d)  
All these **years I've cried** for you and our **daughter** (a/b/c)  
Come back to me Jenny, you're still my **wife** (f)  
I could never **see** how good you were to **me**, I guess I was blind all my **life** (g/g/f)

(from "My Tears and the Tide by Bill Pere, from the album "Crest of a Wave")

Here, "water" and "daughter" form a primary rhyme pair, but backtracking the line, it was possible to match up "tide" with "cried" and "tears" with "years" to tightly bind those lines together, even though they are four lines apart. Here's another example:

**A child** is an **ocean** full of wonder, **always sure** (a/b/c)  
That God is glad to share what's on the **beach**.. (d)  
**A wild** kind of **notion** that the water's **always pure** (a/b/c)  
And to touch the sky, you only have to **reach**.. (d)  
I wonder what this world would be (e)  
If we all learned what our children **teach**.. (d)

(from "What Our Children Teach" by Bill Pere)

Because there is a two-measure musical interlude between the first two lines and the second two lines, the rhymes, expanded well beyond the "sure/pure" match at the ends, serve to closely link the two couplets. Also, "wonder" and "water" are assonant (same vowel sounds) and alliterative (same initial sound) adding still more glue.

It is possible to build even a more unified structure by expanding the rhyming cross-braces to span across verses. Let's look at the two verses which go with the chorus presented just above:

The **ocean waves goodbye**,  
**The child walks into the sunset**  
He's carrying a bucket full of pebbles, shells and sand  
 The twinkle in his eye  
 Like the **first star of the evening**  
 The joy of simple pleasures, simple treasures in his hand...

(connect to line 1 verse 2 via rhyme)  
 (connect to line 2 verse 2 via identity)  
 (connect to line 3 verse 2 via identity)  
 (connect to line 4 verse 2 via rhyme)  
 (connect to line 5 verse 2 via identity)  
 (connect to line 6 verse 2 via internal rhyme structure)

The **ocean waves are high**,  
**The child walks into the sunset**  
He's carrying a bucket full of pebbles, sand and shells  
 He watches seagulls fly  
 To the **first star of the evening**  
 They spread their sails, he hears the tales and stories each one tells

(connect to line 1 verse 1 via rhyme )  
 (connect to line 2 verse 1 via identity)  
 (connect to line 3 verse 1 via identity)  
 (connect to line 4 verse 1 via rhyme)  
 (connect to line 5 verse 1 via identity)  
 (connect to line 6 verse 1 via internal rhyme structure)

Thus in this song, each line of one verse shares some kind of cross-link with the corresponding line of the other, making a very tight structure.

Here's another example from Herbert Kretzmer's "At the End of the Day", from the award winning *Les Miserables*:

At the end of the day you're another day **older**  
 And that's all you can say for the life of the poor  
 It's a struggle, it;s a war  
 And there's nothing that anyone's giving  
 Every day standing about, what is it for?  
**One more day to be living**

Again, the cross-links between verses are evident, and serve to give a very unified feel to the lyric. In addition to the cross braces, there is very active internal rhyming within each verse (see the underlines). We will look at the beat alignment of this structure in the next chapter.

At the end of the day you're another day **colder**  
 And the shirt on your back doesn't keep out the chill  
 And righteous hurry past  
 They don't hear the little ones crying  
 And the winter is coming on fast, ready to kill..  
**One day nearer to dying**

As a final example, here is one of the the simplest, yet most effective uses of cross-verse rhymes ever written, from Harry Chapin's "WORLD":

**Hello, honey, it's me**

What did you think when you heard me back on the radio?  
What did the kids say when they knew it was their long lost Daddy-o?

*Intro*

*Verse 1 + Chorus*

*Verse 2 + Chorus*

*Bridge*

*Verse 3*

**Okay, honey, I see**

I guess he's better than me. Sure old girl, I understand  
You don't have to worry, I'm such a happy man

*Tag*

Thus, after several verses and several minutes, that simple link to the initial line of the song brings listeners full circle and reminds them that they are hearing a telephone conversation, and that the verses are really a story-within-a-story (a technique often used by Harry Chapin). It is perhaps the ultimate parenthetical rhyme.

Our next chapter will deal with examining the alignment of rhymes and beats, and show how to do this in a way which lets you literally "see" the song's rhyme structure, and we will also look at the fourth type of rhyming, external referencing.

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