

The concepts discussed in this article are a part of the comprehensive analysis of songwriting presented in the complete book "Songcrafters' Coloring Book: The Essential Guide to Effective and Successful Songwriting" , by Bill Pere. For additional information or to order a copy, visit <http://www.songcrafterscoloringbook.com>

SONGCRAFTERS' COLORING BOOK

The Concrete-Abstract Balancing Act **by Bill Pere**

It's been said many times many ways that a successful lyric must communicate, and to do this it must be a balance between the concrete and the abstract; the sensory and the intuitive; the tangible and the conceptual. From the abstract realm of ideas, a song gets its meaning, its message and its overarching metaphor. From the concrete realm of the senses, a song gets its grounding in reality and its ability to be understood by the mainstream audience.

People are by preference either Sensors or iNtuitives. Unless a person expends energy to access the less used side of themselves, their songs will either lack conceptual coherence or be too conceptual and vague. It is important to note that 70% of the general population (record buyers, publishers, producers, recording artists) are Sensory oriented. Only three out of ten are preferentially iNtuitive, oriented toward concepts and ideas. Not everyone can access both sides of themselves well enough to write balanced lyrics. This one of the best areas in which to seek a collaborator who is your opposite.

An essential skill for effectively critiquing your own songs in order to rewrite for better balance is to recognize on which side of the continuum your current version lies. An easy way to do this is to look at the nouns and see if they are concrete or abstract. The simple test of a concrete reference is to ask if the thing referred to is readily accessible any one of your five senses (the more sensory paths, the better). If you use the word perfume, it is concrete because it is detected by the sense of smell. "Fire" is detectable by sight, sound, touch and smell.

Seems simple, but there are some deceptive words that can trip up writers who are very iNtuitive or who are not experienced at this type of analysis. Is the word "beauty" concrete or abstract? It's easy to say you can "see" beauty, so it's concrete. However, this isn't true... you

don't "see" beauty; you interpret beauty. You see a face, lips, a flower, a sunset, and choose to consider it beautiful, while someone else may see those same concrete things and not consider them beautiful. What about "love"... is it concrete because you "feel" it? No, because love, like beauty, is interpreted. An emotional-based feeling is not the same as the tips of your fingers caressing concrete things like silk or velvet or sandpaper.

As a tool to help you balance your lyrics try the S/N see-saw. (see example below) On one side list clearly concrete references. If you have a specific song idea, choose words that might relate to that idea. On the right, develop a list of abstractions. Take note of which side is easier for you to develop. (If you have trouble with one side or the other, this indicates you have a strong preference for one specific side and may benefit from a collaboration).

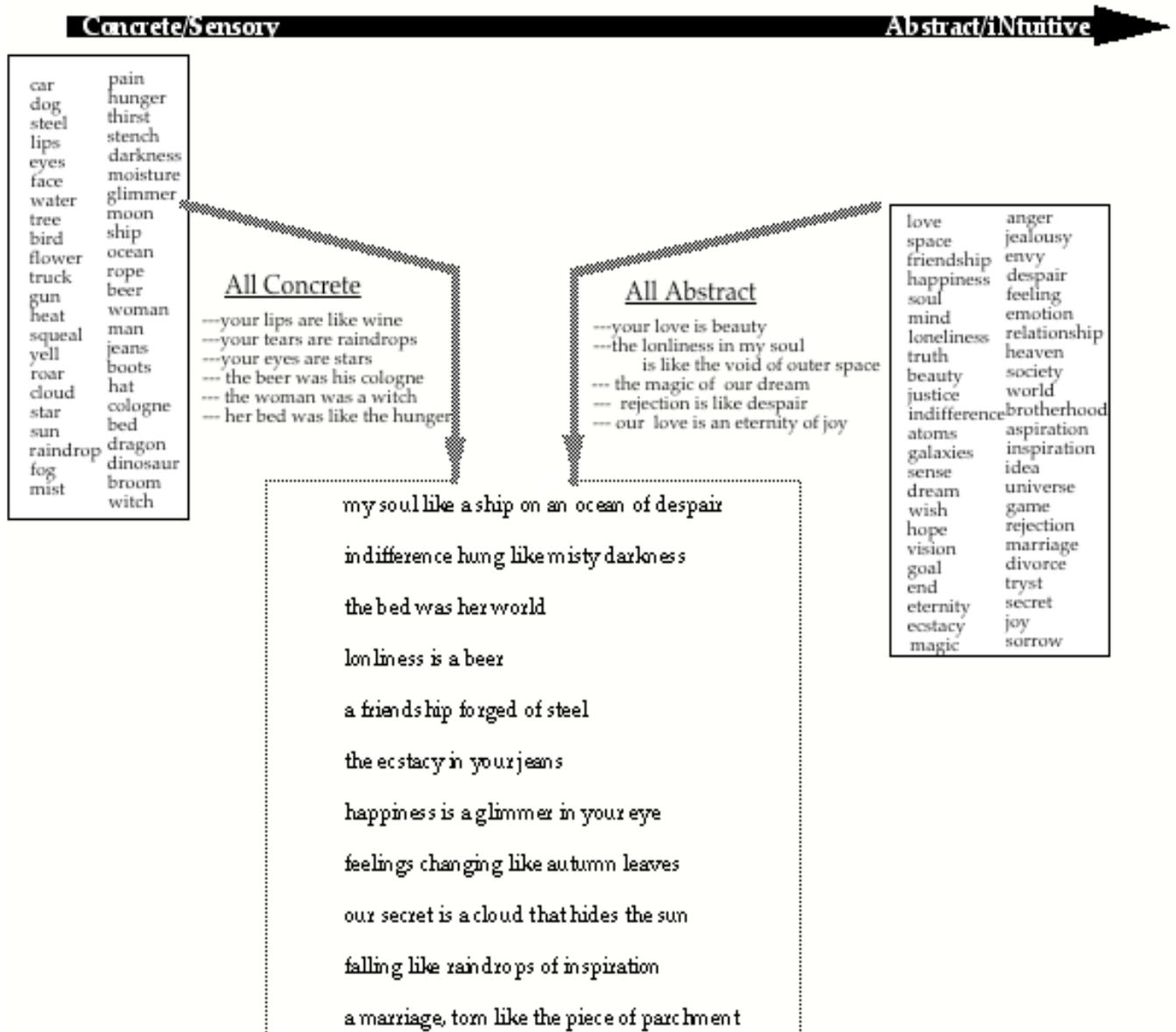
Then construct some metaphors using all concrete words, all abstract words, or one of each. You'll notice that the all-concrete metaphors won't have any driving idea to weave them into a coherent whole. The abstract metaphors will sound vague and spacey.... Think of how many lyrics of each type you've heard at critique sessions from new writers who have not yet mastered the balancing act.

In order to use all-concrete metaphors, you'll need an over-arching implied metaphor that translates the concept/message of your song into a down-to-earth reference that people can relate to. In Terry Kirkman's "Requiem For the Masses", racism (abstract) is equated to a bull (concrete) and our society (abstract) is equated to a matador (concrete). These are never stated, but all the concrete references are tied together. When the matador turns his back to please the crowd (three concrete references), it's also saying that our society ignores racial injustice to please an elite few (all abstract ideas). Shel Silverstein's country classic "Queen of the Silver Dollar" equates a bar room (concrete) with a medieval court (abstract) and then uses concrete-to-concrete metaphors such as wine glass=scepter and bar stool=throne.

The type of writing which is most difficult for a listener to understand is abstract-to-abstract metaphor. It almost never works in mainstream writing. A clear exception to this is in spiritual or Gospel tunes which can successfully remain in the abstract realm because of the nature of the subject (i.e., God=love, heaven = joy, etc).

Another related tip for helping to get your references balanced is to ask your self three questions when you are writing any song...(a) What do I want to say ? (b) Whom do I want to say it to ? (c) How do I want to say it? If you can't clearly answer all three of those questions, it will probably be very difficult to write a lyric that communicates effectively.

A SENSORY-ININTUITIVE SEE-SAW of Simile and Metaphor



The information presented here on S-N perception is based on the MBTI (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator), a well researched and globally used indicator of personality preferences. For more information and to learn how to determine if you are a sensory or intuitive perceiver, refer to: *Type Talk* by Otto Kroeger and Janet Thuesen, Delta/Tilden Press, and *Please Understand Me*, by Kiersey and Bates, Prometheus Books.

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Bill Pere was named one of the "Top 50 Innovators, Groundbreakers and Guiding Lights of the Music Industry" by Music Connection Magazine. With more than 30 years in the music business, as a recording artist, award winning songwriter, performer, and educator Bill is well known for his superbly crafted lyrics, with lasting impact. Bill has released 16 CD's , and is President of the Connecticut Songwriters Association. Bill is an Official Connecticut State Troubadour, and is the Founder and Executive Director of the LUNCH Ensemble (www.lunchensemble.com). Twice named Connecticut Songwriter of the Year, Bill is a qualified MBTI practitioner, a member of CMEA and MENC, and as Director of the Connecticut Songwriting Academy he helps develop young talent in songwriting, performing, and learning about the music business. Bill's song analyses and critiques are among the best in the industry.

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