Explore Music 9: Singer/Songwriter

Contents

Singer/Songwriter

The instructional hours indicated for each unit provide guidelines for planning, rather than strict requirements. The sequence of skill and concept development is to be the focus of concern. Teachers are encouraged to adapt these suggested timelines to meet the needs of their students.

To be effective in teaching this module, it is important to use the material contained in *Explore Music Curriculum Framework* and *Explore Music: Appendices*. Therefore, it is recommended that these two components be frequently referenced to support the suggestions for teaching, learning, and assessment in this module.

Icons Used in this Module

| Formative Assessment | Summative Assessment | Listening | Key Point | Extension | Cross Curricular |

Explore Music 9: Singer/Songwriter
(13 Instructional Hours)

Overview

NOTE: Although 13 hours are suggested for completing this module, you are encouraged to spend more time developing these concepts if time is available.

Rationale

Traditionally, music in Nova Scotia's junior high schools has focused primarily on instrumental music, with the school band being the most prominent "vehicle" for instruction. This curriculum is designed to meet the needs of those students not enrolled in the course *Band Instruments 9.* Students who register in *Explore Music 9* should have completed the Introductory Modules for *Explore Music 7* and *Explore Music* 8, or have a strong background in rhythm, melody, harmony, as well as composition.

Taking into consideration the current research on the brain and how it constructs meaning in the early teenage years, this module is designed to be interactive, applicable with authentic learning experiences, and based on a discovery approach. Students at this age construct meaning in ways similar to the pre-school child, making neural connections through trial and error, and discovering new insights as they build on their learning over time.

Grade 9 students are not content to be passive learners, confined to desks where they listen, respond, practice, and drill. They are excited to receive new information that has meaning for them – the hook – and to learn how it fits into their existing repertoire of knowledge. They want to play with this new information, tinker with it, try it out, experiment; just as toddlers explore their world as they discover new things in their immediate environment. Our task is to allow students the flexibility to apply their new learning, and to encourage them to take it to new limits – the meta-cognitive domain.

The challenge begins with the teacher. Constructing meaningful experiences will excite students and diminish behavioural issues that may cause havoc in the music classroom. Constant reflection throughout this module will allow the teacher to modify the activities that work best, differentiate the curriculum to meet diverse learning needs, and create a dynamic learning environment that will motivate students to continue to develop musical understanding.

Glossary

- verse
- chorus
- intro
- outro
- bridge
- songwriters circle
- hook
- harmonic rhythm
- slash chords
- lead sheet

Introduction

Singer/Songwriter is designed to build on students' improvisation and composition skills that have been developed from the early elementary years. In the beginning stages, songwriting may appear to be a daunting task for students, but as they gain confidence in their abilities, teachers should take a "back seat" to the writing process and allow students to take ownership of their learning.

The literature indicates that often teachers themselves feel inhibited in leading activities that require students to write their own music, and this attitude may be transferred to students. It is very important that teachers are aware of this tendency, and that they portray a positive attitude toward student composition so as not to stifle the creativity that will become apparent when the process begins. Equally important, teachers should stay current with the newest music in the pop music genres by consulting the *Billboard* website. *Billboard* is a weekly magazine devoted to the music industry and publishes recent top hits in various popular music genres, including pop, country and rock. It can be useful to consult at least once a week to listen to music and to be aware of current trends.

Improvising songs is a natural process. When we observe toddlers in their earliest stages of development, it becomes apparent that there is a natural tendency in us all to "create" songs that reflect personal feelings and attitudes. Although this is evident in very young children, as they grow – particularly after they enter a structured environment in public schools – they may lose their spontaneity in songwriting. This is why it is very important for teachers to allow students to rekindle their interest and ability in songwriting, and not be stifled by inhibitions – an important teacher role and one that is critical for the success of this module.

It is expected that all students registered in *Explore Music 9* will have an extensive musical background through their prior experiences in *Explore Music 7* and *Explore Music 8*. However, teachers may exercise flexibility in determining who takes this course, based on students' musical literacy and practical background in music. In other words, if students have a strong background in music literacy and performance, they may be appropriate candidates for this course even if they have not taken *Explore Music 7* and *Explore Music 8*.

Knowing the nature of young teens, teachers must be aware of the limitations they may face with students in the class. We know that peer pressure influences how students react to new learning. Moreover, because of changes taking place at this stage of development, young teens often experience challenges with discovering their singing voice. Teachers must be sensitive to these issues and not place students in situations where they will "shut down" because of embarrassment among their peers. By grade 9 students should have more confidence in their singing abilities, but teachers need to understand that the boy's changing voice may not settle until age 16 or 17.

The range of learners is amplified when one considers the prior learning experiences outside the school that some students may have had. There may be some students in this course who have a strong background through private instruction. Similarly, there may be other students who have extensive experience in songwriting and performing in garage bands but may be limited in their musical literacy skills. Teachers need to be aware of this range of abilities and differentiate instruction to ensure that all students are challenged and are able to achieve success.

Songwriters learn by doing, and so each lesson, if possible, should include some aspect of composition, whether that is allowing a student to sing a song they're writing, or write chord progressions, or create lyrics. Teachers may wish to consider setting up a password-controlled website that allows students to post their songs for other students in the class to listen to. "Songwriters' Circles" have been utilized in the plan that follows, and it might help if students have an opportunity to listen to the songs that will be presented in an upcoming class before that day.

Encourage students to bring a guitar or a keyboard if one doesn't exist in the music room. Also, keep in mind that some young musicians have experience using sequencers and computers.

In this module, five e-books by Gary Ewer are referred to by the following abbreviations:
  a. ESS: "The Essential Secrets of Songwriting, 2nd edition"
  b. HTHAM: "How to Harmonize a Melody"
  c. ECP: "Essential Chord Progressions"
  d. MECP: "More Essential Chord Progressions"
  e. CPF: "Chord Progression Formulas"

> *Tips for Teaching Success*
> It should be noted that many of today's hits include explicit language, but there are "clean" versions available for most of these songs, and these are clearly labeled on YouTube. When choosing songs to play for your students, go to Apple's iTunes app and place the title in the search field in the Store. Songs that use explicit language will be indicated. When you return to YouTube, type in "clean" after the song title.

Outcomes Addressed

CREATING, MAKING AND PRESENTING

Students are expected to

1.1   using appropriate terminology, demonstrate an understanding of rhythm by creating and performing rhythmic compositions in a variety of meters

1.2   by performing repertoire in group music making, demonstrate an understanding of melody (e.g., melodic direction, tonal centre, contour)

2.1   maintain a part within a variety of textures and harmonies using a range of musical structures and styles

2.2   use a variety of notational systems to represent musical thoughts and ideas

2.3   apply skills and attitudes appropriate to a range of group music making activities demonstrating audience etiquette, performance skills, and responsibility to the group

2.4   perform, alone and with others, music expressing a broad range of thoughts and feelings

UNDERSTANDING AND CONNECTING CONTEXTS OF TIME, PLACE AND COMMUNITY

Students are expected to

3.1   demonstrate respect for, discuss, and compare music from various historical and cultural contexts

3.2   examine and describe ways in which music influences and is influenced by local and global culture

4.1   examine ways in which music enhances and expresses life's experiences

PERCEIVING AND RESPONDING

Students are expected to

6.1   examine and explore a range of possible solutions to musical challenges

6.2   use processes of description, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation to make and support informed responses to their own and others' music and musical performances

6.3   critically reflect on ideas and feelings in works of music, and identify patterns, trends, and generalizations

7.2   explore technology applications to creating, making, and presenting their own and other's music

7.3   demonstrate a thorough understanding of a chosen software program for writing music and for ear training purposes

8.1   evaluate choices of the elements of expression in musical compositions based on the composer's intent

8.2   use feedback from others to examine their own musical works in light of the original intent

8.3   analyse performances and provide critical commentary on aspects of musical presentation in light of the performers' intent

Teaching, Learning and Assessment Process

The activities that follow are written in a sequential order and allow for flexibility with the time spent on each section as well as the entire module.

Although this module does not focus on vocal production, teachers should stress with students, the proper use of the voice, in-tune singing, good breath control, clear diction. Before you begin you may wish to review web sites on vocal production, the mechanics of singing, and how the body facilitates the ability to sing freely. This information will help in the teaching and learning process and should be shared with students throughout the module. Above all, it should be noted that sometimes the vocal quality of pop singers is not appropriate, and in many case can bring harm to the vocal cords. Therefore, it is also important that you take time for students to listen to good singing from a range of vocal styles. Combined with the listening, discuss the sound of these voices, what it is about the singing they like, and any qualities that make them good or mediocre singers.

Because this module is 13 hours in length, there is not enough time to discuss in detail copyright issues associated with songwriting. This does not diminish the importance of this concept, and even from a young age students should be aware of the need to protect their own songs. Therefore, it is strongly suggested that teachers incorporate copyright issues – particularly mechanical and performance rights – throughout the module. Information on this can be found in Gary Ewer's *The Essential Secrets of Songwriting*, Chapter 8.

Unit 1: Cornerstones of Songwriting (3 hours)

Introduction

This unit provides an opportunity for students to review the skills and concepts taught in the Introductory Modules of *Explore Music 7* and *Explore Music 8* within the context of songwriting. Teachers should begin the unit by reinforcing the fact that songwriting is an art as well as a skill. In order to effectively express one's thoughts, feelings and emotions in a song, it is necessary to understand the basic concepts in melody, harmony, rhythm, form and texture.

In addition, students discover the importance of listening to music of various genres. As they develop the basics of "good music," they will learn how to analyze and critique music using the basic vocabulary of songwriting, such as verse, chorus, hook, etc. You should prepare for the teaching of this unit by reading *The Essential Secrets of Songwriting (ESS)* Chapters 1 and 2 which discusses these topics.

Key Concepts

- music has personal significance
- to be a good songwriter, it is important to develop good listening skills

Teaching, Learning and Assessment Process

PART A: THE IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING

It is important that songwriting students learn how to properly critique popular songs, and to use appropriate musical vocabulary to do so. Play four or more songs and encourage students to articulate what they are hearing. Encourage them to feel free to mention anything and everything they are hearing. To help students make the connection between listening and understanding the songwriting process, write on the board or chart paper in advance, the basic vocabulary used by songwriters: form, intro, verse, chorus, bridge, solo, hook, outro, etc. As students listen to the selections you will play for them, add their ideas to this list, and continue to build as they progress through the unit.

The following list contains a selection of popular songs that have been recognized as a hit at one time or another. Select at least 4 songs to play in class (choosing from this list or adding your own selections) and lead a discussion of each one.

Song 1: "We Found Love" 2011 (Wiles Adam Richard, performed by Rihanna. Album: *Talk That Talk*)

- Guiding questions to lead the discussion:
    - What is the form of the song? (Verse – Chorus)
    - When you compare the verse to the chorus, are the melodies the same or different? (Same)
    - What is the style of this song? (Dance)
    - Do you notice different dynamic levels throughout the song? (Yes)
    - Would you describe the instrumentation as "real" or "synthesized"? (synthesized). Elaborate.

- If students do not mention the following observations, you should highlight them.
    - Electro house, dance-pop song
    - sparse, syncopated intro
    - dance tune
    - much repetition: verse and chorus use identical or very similar melodies
    - some parts are louder, some parts softer
    - instrumentation is entirely synthesized
    - no vocal harmonies

Song 2: "Softly as I Leave You" 1960 (Hal Shaper, Antonio De Vita, performed by Matt Munro and others. Album: *The Best of Matt Munro*)

- Guiding questions to lead the discussion:
    - Use a word to describe the style of the song (ballad, crooning, slow, gentle, etc.).
    - When do you think this song may have been written, and how can you tell? (written in 1960; can tell because of chord choices, melodic shape, singing style, etc.)
    - Do you hear a verse/chorus format? (not really)
    - Tell me about the melody. Do you hear anything repeating? (The melody repeats throughout the song. The melody consists of a short 2-bar idea that gets moved up, etc.)

If students do not mention the following observations, you should highlight them:
- ballad
- orchestral accompaniment
- melodies are compiled of a short melodic idea that repeats at different pitches.
- there doesn't seem to be a clear verse-chorus format. Many repeated melodies which sound like verse-following-verse
- changes key throughout

Song 3: "For Emma" 2007 (Justin Vernon, performed by Bon Iver. Album: *Bon Iver*)

- Guiding questions to lead the discussion:
  - In what style is it written? (ballad)
  - What instruments do you hear? (acoustic guitar, electric guitar, brass instruments, bass, drums).
  - Describe the singer's voice (male singer using falsetto voice)
  - Compare this song to "Softly As I Leave You." What indications would lead you to believe that this song was written 50 years later than "Softly"? (singing style, instrumentation choices)

- If students do not mention the following observations, you should highlight them:
  - ballad
  - acoustic guitar intro with electric guitar long tones, some brass
  - mainly falsetto voice
  - light percussion, repeating backing rhythms
  - occasional backing vocals
  - strange scratchy sound effects

Song 4: "Lonely Boy" 2011 (Daniel Auerbach, Brian Joseph, Patrick Carney, performed by The Black Keys. Album: *El Camino*)

- Use similar questions as in the above examples.

- If students do not mention the following observations, you should highlight them:
  - mainly distorted electric guitar to start; drums and keyboards play a hook
  - verse – chorus format
  - verse uses solo male voice; chorus uses back-up children's voices in unison with the solo
  - song's intro serves as a short bridge after the 2nd chorus, before the final repeat of the chorus

Song 5: "Another Brick in the Wall" 1979 (Roger Waters, performed by Pink Floyd. Album: *The Wall*)

- Use similar questions as in the above examples.

- If students do not mention the following observations, you should highlight them.
  - no introduction, song starts immediately
  - light instrumentation (guitars, bass, drums)
  - repeating melodic idea forms the verse
  - verse 2 identical to verse 1, with children's choir singing along with lead singer
  - after 2 verses and choruses, ends with a guitar solo (Dorian mode) with organ back-up chords
  - vocal/sound effects at end over drums; ends with phone ringing

Song 6: "All of the Lights" 2011 (Kanye West, Shawn Carter, Patrick Reynolds, Mike Dean, William Roberts, performed by Kanye West (with Rihanna and others)

- Use guiding questions similar to those in the above examples.

- Some observations students should be recognizing by now:
  - brass "hook" intro
  - starts with chorus (Rihanna)
  - Kanye West verse (rap)
  - very active snare drum
  - verse lyrics outline a story of man estranged from wife and child
  - lyrics use theme of "light"
  - we hear the woman's point of view later
  - tempo suspends before final choruses, gradual build

Song 7: "Good Golly Miss Molly" 1958 (Robert Alexander Blackwell, John S. Marascalco, performed by Little Richard. Album: *Little Richard*)

- Some observations students should be recognizing by now:
  - 12-bar blues form
  - piano, guitar, bass, drums instrumentation
  - intro highlights Little Richard's piano skills
  - starts with chorus; verse is a short 4-bar phrase in "stop-time" style
  - after 2nd chorus, tenor sax solo over 12-bar blues progression
  - lyrics are repetitious

Song 8: "Hide and Seek" 2005 (Imogen Heap, performed by Imogen Heap. Album: *Speak for Yourself*)

- Some observations students should be recognizing by now:
    - unaccompanied (a capella)
    - vocal effects are created by vocoder
    - chord progressions are a little more complex than found in typical pop song genre
    - verses appear to be more "energetic" than the choruses, which is not typical of most "pop" songs
    - chorus is generally pitched higher than verse

Song 9: "You'll Never Walk Alone" 1945 (Richard Rogers, Oscar Hammerstein, performed by: various. Album: Hits of Broadway, Vol. 2)

- Some observations students should be recognizing by now:
    - intro is spoken dialogue from the musical, *Carousel*
    - orchestral accompaniment
    - verse (no chorus)
    - melody starts low, moves higher, then lower before the climactic moment at the start of the final phrase
    - melody ends on the dominant note
    - rousing lyrics, meant to uplift
    - starts with solo voice, ends with choir

Song 10: "She's Leaving Home" 1967 (Paul MacCartney, John Lennon, performed by: The Beatles. Album: *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*)

- Some observations students should be recognizing by now:
    - harp intro
    - light orchestral accompaniment
    - lyrics recount a story of a young girl leaving home
    - at times, the lyrics are written as a narration, at times from the parents' point of view
    - never hear the story from the girl's point of view
    - highest notes are found in the chorus

Ask students to bring to class a recording of a song that they like. They should be prepared to discuss it including many of the ideas that were highlighted in this class. Be sure to set very clear guidelines as to what is and is not acceptable, paying special heed to language and message contained in the song. Each day of the unit, select a few students to play their selection at the beginning of the class, and to discuss it briefly.

Tips for Teaching Success
Although this may seem redundant after several lessons, it is important to impress upon the students that the key to good songwriting is to be a good listener and to know the intricacies of good music writing. As you go through the lessons, be sure to add to the vocabulary list that you started in this lesson.

PART B: SONG ANALYSIS

In this lesson, choose a song from a range of genres, including pop, folk, country, blues, etc. A Beatles' tune has been selected as an example to describe the process because the compositions of the Beatles are strong examples of pop music-writing at its finest.

Before beginning the listening portion of the activity, review the following elements for song analysis with students.
- melody and lyrics
- rhythm
- harmony / chords
- form
- instruments and tone colour

Hard Day's Night (John Lennon)

Background Information

This song, recorded in 1964, was written overnight by John Lennon and crafted with the help of Paul McCartney for a film about the Beatles originally called "Beatlemania" and changed to "A Hard Day's Night". With the class, brainstorm a list of questions they would like to investigate to learn more about the Beatles. In small groups, students can conduct their research. Their questions may include these and others.
- Who were the members of the band?
- Where and when were they born?
- When did they first play in North America?
- Which members of the Beatles are still alive?
- Who were the songwriters in the group?

Form

The form of this song is not a typical verse/chorus; rather, it is a combination of verses (2) that repeat, a bridge that repeats, and an instrumental interlude. To help the students discover the form, have them listen to the song as many times as necessary. In small groups they can determine the form. Questions such as the ones listed below may help to inform their listening.

- Choose from the following to best describe the form that you are hearing in this song. "A" represents a verse, "B" represents a bridge, and "C" represents an instrumental interlude.
    - A1 B A2 C A3
    - A1 B B A2 A2
    - A1 A2 B A1 B A1
- What is the time signature in this song?
- How many measures are in a verse?
- How many measures are in the bridge?
- What is the phrase structure of the lyrics within the verse?
    - ababc
    - aabbcc
    - aabbc
- What is the phrase structure of the bridge?
    - abc
    - aabbcc
    - ababc
- Which section of the song has the most driving energy, the bridge or the verses?
- Try to describe why you made that choice.

Lyrics

- Are the lyrics written in the first or third person?
- What part of the lyrics would make you think that the singer is home from work?
- What part of the verses is repeated the most?
- Why do you think verse 1 might sound more like a chorus?
- Do you think that the song is meant to be a happy one? Why or why not? Give examples from within the lyrics to justify your statement.
- What 2 phrases in the lyrics would you describe as "cliché"?
- Do these clichés help or hinder this song? In what way?
- What words stand out the most in the bridge?
- Why do think that is?
- Do you think the mood of the bridge is happy? Why or why not?
- What makes the lyrics of this song easy to relate to for most people?

Melody

- If the melodic phrase is 4 measures long, how many phrases are in each verse?
- In which phrases of the melody do you hear many repeated notes?
- How many interval skips are in the first phrase?
- Which phrases are exactly the same?
- This 3-line phrasing is unusual, but it works here because of the clever writing in the last line. What observations can you make about the last line of the verses?
- In the bridge section, there is a lot of tension created. Circle the devices that you think helped to create that tension.
  - The melody jumps all over the place
  - There are many repeated notes
  - The melody is smooth and relaxing
  - The melody ends on a relaxed sound
  - The melody ends on a note that feels unfinished and wants to move on
- How many measures are in the bridge?
  - 16
  - 8
  - 6

Tone Colour

- What instruments do you hear in this recording?
- How many singers do you hear?
- Can you describe any special effects that either the instrumentalists or singers create with their sound?

Rhythm

- Describe the most common rhythmic motif heard.
- How does this help make the song work so well?

Harmony

Before you begin the discussion on harmony, review the key of G major, and then discuss the mixolydian mode of G which has a flattened 7th note. Have students write the G major scale and the G mixolydian scale.

Have students play each of these scales on every melodic instrument you can find in the room.

A very recognizable part of this song is the opening G7 suspended chord. This means that it would normally have a *g b d f#* with the 4th note of the g scale added (*c*). Have students try playing this chord on a keyboard or guitar. Then have them play the "d" in the bass, leaving out the root or "g."

- Have students describe the effect this has when it is played.

- The key is G major, and uses the G chord (1) to the C chord (1V) and returns back to the G. It then goes to the mixolydian which gives it a flat 7th (a typical "blues" sound). Then you hear a C7 chord which has a Bb in it and gives an even more bluesy sound. Where in the song do you hear this "bluesy" sound? Use bar numbers to explain the chord sequence.
- Have students describe the effect that this blues feeling has when combined with the lyrics?
- Do you feel that the harmonies chosen to match the lyrics well? Why or why not?

Students' answers to these and other questions will inform their song writing skills later in the module.

You may wish to have students compare and contrast the songwriting of John Lennon and Paul McCartney. Their findings might include such things as
- the lyrics that Lennon wrote were very memorable tunes, using wit, very little melodic movement, and more rhythmic interest. His lyrics were often personal and usually in the first person, e.g., *Across the Universe* or *A Hard Day's Night*.
- McCartney used wider intervals jumps within his melodies, creating more drama and less tension. His rhythm and blues influence is apparent, such as in *Yesterday* and *Hey Jude*. His songs were often more storytelling and in the third person.
- You may wish to play and discuss these and other examples. If time allows, students could review other songs that Lennon and McCartney wrote to see if these statements are consistent.

If the above analysis was done in small groups, have each group present their findings.

Have students, again in small groups, do a presentation on the analysis of another song from the Beatles collection. Have them use the guiding questions above as a framework for their presentation. Alternatively, they could choose another song, and use the generic guiding questions found in the Appendix.

PART C: THE PRINCIPLES OF SONGWRITING

Popular songwriting has existed for decades, and it's impossible to say exactly how to write a song. Nevertheless, it is possible to look at hit songs from the past five or six decades and agree on principles that tell us why certain songs are successful and why others are not. While the success of some songs is due more to the popularity of the singer, most successful songs adhere to basic principles. In this lesson, students will look carefully at each one of these principles and see how most popular songs exhibit those principles.

Gary Ewer in *The Essential Secrets of Songwriting* identifies several "Principles" of good songwriting. Discuss these with the class and have them investigate their own song choices to find songs that clearly demonstrate each principle. You may wish to have some examples ready to play for them. Another idea is to have these principles readily available and visible for the duration of the module so students will be able to refer to them as they write their songs.

Principle 1: Songs without contrast risk being boring.
You must have some level of contrast to make important elements stand out from the others. "Another Brick in the Wall" is a good example, as well as "All of the Lights" by Kanye West" as these show contrasting dynamic and orchestrational sections.

Principle 2: In general, the energy of the end of a song should equal or exceed the energy at the beginning.
Most songs will get louder, fuller, and more rhythmically active as they progress. Songs that don't show these qualities will probably focus on lyrics as their strongest quality. One song that clearly demonstrates this is "Solsbury Hill," by Peter Gabriel.

Principle 3: Songs need to use mostly `strong` progressions, with few `fragile' ones.
A strong chord progression is one that clearly points to one chord as being the key (tonic). A fragile progression is one that is tonally a bit unclear or ambiguous; i.e., it feels like it could be in one of several possible keys. Most pop songs will use mainly strong ones. "Good Golly, Miss Molly" is a good example of this principle.

Principle 4: Use fragile progressions in the verse; use strong progressions in the chorus.
Many verses can use strong progressions, but almost *all* choruses will use them all the time. Not every song follows this principle, but many do. If you are going to use fragile progressions, use them in the verse. Play "Need You Now" by Lady Antebellum as a good example of this.

Principle 5: The best chord progressions are often very predictable, and shouldn`t include too many chords.
Songs need to repeat chord progressions throughout. Chords help take the listener on a journey, and that journey only lasts 4-6 minutes. Therefore, shorter chord progressions often work better than longer ones. Almost any hit song from the Billboard Hot 100 would be a good example of this.

Principle 6: A melody needs to be planned with vocal range, harmony, and text in mind.
Nothing operates independently in a song; everything relates and affects something else. It would be a good exercise to look at "You'll Never Walk Alone" and discuss how the rising melody affects the impact of the song's text.

Principle 7: (A) A verse should tell a story, describe someone or recount a situation, and can use many fragile chord progressions; (B) A chorus usually displays emotions, tells the audience how they are feeling, and uses stronger chord progressions.

It's important to get the order right: Describe first, and then emote. As an example of this, play and discuss "She Loves You" by the Beatles.

Principle 8: The tonic note should happen in the melody of the chorus, rather than in the melody of the verse.

The tonic note gives a strong foundation to the harmonic structure or a song and is a subtle way of strengthening choruses. Simon & Garfunkel's "Bridge Over Troubled Water" is a good demonstration of this principle.

Principle 9: Chorus notes are often higher than verse notes.

This works hand-in-hand with the building of energy. In general, listeners use the range of melodies to help perceive the energy design of a song. You'll often notice verse melodies rising as they approach the chorus. A good example of this principle is Taylor Swift's "You Belong With Me."

Principle 10: A hook should be short and memorable.

If it's not short, it's probably not going to lock in, and if it's not memorable, it's not a hook!
Examples of this include the opening clarinet riff of "Superstition" by Stevie Wonder, or the opening whistle motif of Maroon 5's "Moves Like Jagger."

Principle 11: Adding a hook to a bad song gives you a bad song with a hook.

Hooks don't save songs; any more than a tie clip will make a bad tie look good. You must solve your song's structural problems by getting to the source of the problem. Hooks make good songs sizzle!

Assign one of the above principles to pairs/trios and have them find an example of a recording that demonstrates the principle, and one that violates it. Have students share and discuss their findings.

Unit 2: Chord Progressions (2 hours)

Introduction

In this unit students will gain a basic understanding of chords, their structure within a song, and how to build them in both major and minor scales. Specifically, In Part A they will discover that chords can be categorized as strong or fragile, with most songs using strong chords. In addition, they will learn how to create the seven chords that naturally occur within a given key.

In Part B students will explore harmony and the relationship that exists in a song between strong chord progressions and harmonic rhythm. Specifically, students will learn that I, IV, V, and VI chords are very important in creating strong progressions and are used in many pop songs. They will also explore how to choose chords that properly harmonize a melody.

In preparation for this unit, you might familiarize yourself with the following material found in Gary Ewer's songwriting materials.

- Chapter 4 of ESS and pages 4 – 12 in *Chord Progression Formulas* (CPF), pages 11 – 19 of *How to Harmonize a Melody* (HTHAM), and the preamble in each chapter of *Essential Chord Progressions* (ECP), and *More Essential Chord Progressions* (MECP).

Key Concepts

- strong and fragile chords
- harmonic rhythm
- slash chords (chord inversions)

Teaching, Learning and Assessment Process

PART A: STRONG AND FRAGILE CHORD PROGRESSIONS

Most songwriters spend a great deal of time looking for "the killer chord progression," but many of the world's most successful songs use very simple, predictable chord progressions. Chord progressions can be loosely categorized as being *strong* or *fragile*. A strong progression is one that clearly and unambiguously points to one chord as being the tonic chord. For example, the progression C F G7 C makes it clear that C is the tonic chord. The progression Am G D Em could be termed fragile because it is not immediately clear what key the progression belongs to. It could be C major, G major, or it might be modal (D Dorian), etc. In any case, no chord seems to be obviously acting as a tonic chord. We call it fragile because, like glass, fragile progressions can be beautiful, but they don't support a key very well.

As we learned in the previous unit, if a songwriter is going to use fragile progressions in songs, they should be used mainly in the verse and/or in the bridge sections, which occur after the 2nd chorus. Choruses should almost always use strong progressions.

One of the ways that strong progressions point unambiguously to a key is by the fact that they often use chord roots that are a 4th or 5th away from each other. The circle-of-fifths progression (ex: C F Bdim Em Am Dm G C) uses chords for which all roots are a 5th away, and this is considered the strongest of progressions for that reason.

Short 3- or 4-chord progressions can be labelled as strong or fragile, but longer progressions can have parts that sound strong while other parts sound fragile. In such cases, it is possible to think of a progression as being "mainly fragile," or "fragile moving to strong," etc.

To develop an understanding of the differences between strong and fragile chords, begin the lesson by having the following progressions displayed on a chart or handout. A template is provided in the Appendix at the end of this unit. Demonstrate these progressions by playing them on a guitar or keyboard instrument. Elicit from students their opinion on whether each chord progression is strong, fragile, or a mixture of both.

Chord Progressions

1. C F Dm G C (strong. There is much evidence of root movements of 4ths and 5ths)
2. F Em F Em Am G Am G F (fragile. There is mostly root movements of tones and semitones, no clear tonic.)
3. Dm A Dm C F Bb C7 F (mainly strong. However, the first part points to the key of D minor, then the second half points to key of F major.)
4. G Am G C D Em C G (strong)
5. C Eb Dm Em Fm7 Gm7 Abmaj7 Gmaj7 (fragile)
6. Am Dm F E F E7 Am (strong)
7. D Em7 Am G A7 D Em D (mixture, but mainly strong)
8. Bb Gm Cm Dm Eb F Bb (strong. Even though many of the chord roots move by step, the progression that leads from Cm up to the dominant chord F strongly points to the key of Bb.)
9. Am G Am Dm Am Em Am (strong. It is written in the Key of E minor, using a minor V-chord)
10. F Dm Eb F C G Am Em (fragile. No key is being clearly pointed to by the progression. It passes through several possible key centres.)

In your research for this lesson, identify songs that use mainly strong progressions (found mainly in most early rock & roll, at least up to 1965). Then try to find songs that feature "fragile" progressions. Many progressive rock groups, such as early Genesis, Gentle Giant, etc., tended to write music based on chord progressions that "meandered" freely.

Using guitars and keyboards, have students create progressions in class and try them out.

You may also consider the activities found in Lesson 7 of ESS (*The Essential Secrets of Songwriting Lessons)*.

PART B: CHORD PROGRESSIONS

Play melodies for students, and use the principles learned in Ewer's HTHAM to apply chords to the melodies. Experiment with different harmonic rhythms and discuss how the frequency of chord changes affects the energy we perceive. For example, faster chord changes raise the energy of a song.

Depending on the class's musical experience, you might discuss how using chord inversions, or "slash chords" as they are sometimes called, affects the strong-fragile balance of a progression. Inversions push a progression more toward the fragile end of the spectrum.

Now provide time for students to work on the activities found in ESS-Lessons, Lesson 8.

With students, co-construct a rubric in advance that will be used to assess learning in this unit.

In small groups have students write an 8-measure phrase in C Major and identify chords to accompany it. Students who have taken *Explore Music 7* and *Explore Music 8* will have experience with this in the Introductory Modules which were required. However, they may need a quick review, as well as some key ideas. Examples include:

- written in $\frac{4}{4}$ time and in the key of C
- begin and end on a specific note
- include at least three note values
- include an appropriate rise and fall to the melody

Tips for Teaching Success
In the interest of time, and depending on the ability level of the students, you may want to begin the phrase as a class (example first four measures) and then have them add chords for that and complete the phrase with four more measures that they write on their own.

Unit 3: Lyrics and Melodies (3 hours)

Introduction

In this part of the module, students will move from harmony to melody, making the link between the two concepts. In this unit they will discover how melodies, lyrics, and harmonies are closely related. They will also learn about the difference between verse and chorus as they relate to lyrics and harmonies. Most importantly, they will learn that good lyrics are not necessarily good poetry, and that they use common everyday words. To prepare for this unit, you should be familiar with the content of Chapter 5, ESS.

Key Concepts

- lyric shift
- lead sheet
- songwriters circle

Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategies

PART A: LYRICS

Give the class a short text and see if they can produce a text that "completes" it. For example, the line they're given might be, "I held your hand and looked into your eyes." See if they can create another line that rhymes, and then one that doesn't. Discuss the difference in impact. For many examples of ideas for this exercise, see ESS-Lessons, Lesson 2.

To get a sense of what it is like to write lyrics that have meaning and fit well with a melodic and rhythmic structure, have students experiment with switching lyrics. Divide the class into pairs or small groups. If possible, in each group ensure that there is at least one student who can play piano or guitar.

> *Tips for Teaching Success*
> The following activities may be challenging for many students in the class depending on their previous experiences with composition and music literacy. It may be wise for you to determine the groups to ensure that there are strong students in each group to help those who may be experiencing difficulty.

Have a list of familiar songs with lyrics ready, e.g., *Rock Around the Clock*, *Under the Sea*. For additional examples, you may wish to explore the resources, *100 Canadian Albums*, *Rock and Roll*, *The New Rolling Stone Album Guide*, or you can use any pop, children's or country song with a solid structure. Have each group choose one song from the list that they already know. They must keep their selection a secret.

Now, have the groups move to a quiet area away from the others and write a new set of lyrics that would fit with the melody and rhythms of the song that they have chosen. This will provide them with a structure for the phrasing and form already built in. For example: "Hey Jude, don't be afraid" could become, "You know, I loved you so." Before creating the new lyrics, it may be helpful for students to identify a subject matter or theme in advance. This can be brainstormed within each group first, and then they can proceed with the lyrics.

In advance, co-create a rubric with students that will be used to assess the project at the end of this unit. This will enable students to understand the expectations, and work towards the successful achievement of them.

Upon completion of this activity, have students complete a self and/or peer assessment form that describes their contributions to this process. Examples can be found in Appendix D in *Explore Music 7 – 9: Appendices*.

Have students pass in the lyrics, with their names and song title attached on a *separate* sheet for your records. It is important for them not to leave clues on the lyric as to which group has written them.

As extensions to this lesson or for additional activities to reinforce lyric-writing, you may wish to try activities from Lessons 1, 2, 3, and/or 6 of ESS-Lessons.

PART B: MELODIES

In this part of the unit, students will learn how verse, chorus and bridge melodies differ (ESS pages 139 – 147, and 171 – 172). For background information on this concept, read Chapter 5 of ESS.

Begin the lesson by listening to music that demonstrates how melodies move upward. A great song to model this is "Big Green Tractor" by Jason Aldean. The verse dwells mainly around one pitch, then the chorus shifts to a higher pitch, and the bridge moves even higher. Because this song uses lots of repeated notes, it's easy to hear.

Tips for Teaching Success
For this part of the module, it is advised that a timeline be established in advance, so students are aware of the time required to write their new melody. This should take place over several classes, with frequent "song writers' circles" to allow students time to report back on progress and get advice from the other students.

Throughout the process, encourage students to try ideas and let their song evolve through changes that will be become obvious. They should not be content with the first thing that comes to mind, but rather they should experiment with all aspects of the process.

Using the same groups as the previous class, distribute the *new* lyric sheets that students completed in the previous lesson. Ensure that each group receives a set of lyrics written by a different group. Their task now is to write a new melody and set of chords to go with the lyrics that another group has written. This is why it is so important to have a guitarist and/or keyboard player in each group. Remind them of simple chord structures, such as those found in blues form, or any basic structure used in many pop songs. In the interest of time, you may want them to begin with the new words to the chorus, and if there is time, ask them to write the melody for the verse.

Tips for Teaching Success
For some students, they may prefer to take on the challenge of writing a melody alone. This is fine and should be encouraged. It is also a great way to differentiate instruction and allow for individual differences with regards to ability level.

After students have had sufficient time to get a framework for their new song, bring them together in a songwriters' circle. An explanation of this concept can be found in the Appendix. Have each group perform their "work in progress" and have the other students provide constructive feedback.

Invite students to write a reflection in their journals. They should take into consideration the comments from the songwriters' circle, their experiences in working in a group context, and their overall ease/challenge with writing melodies. Tell them to highlight in their response what they need assistance with to take their melodies to the next level.

Building on the progress of the melody that they have begun working on in their groups, this is a good time to invite a local songwriter to class to discuss the process that they use to create a song. Before the songwriter arrives, brainstorm with students a list of questions that they will ask in a discussion on song writing. These questions will probably be inspired by challenges that they are having in their groups as they write their own melodies.

Have students continue working on their melodies, encouraging them to not only get the notes on paper, but to sing the melodies as they are developing them. This is very important, as they will be performing these tunes when everyone has completed the assignment. Once again, you should bring students together from time to time in a songwriters' circle format so there is constant feedback that will help inform good decisions in creating their melodies.

When the melodies are ready, have each group write a lead sheet that has the lyrics and chords written above the melody. In addition, have them add rhythm instruments, and if time permits, ostinati, motifs, counter melodies, etc., depending on students' abilities. They should be encouraged to experiment with the overall arrangement. Have students write the melody and arrangement using a software program that they are familiar with based on their experiences with *Explore Music 7* and *Explore Music 8*. During this part of the lesson, you are encouraged to spend time with each group, monitoring the process and making notes on individual student's progress.

Using the rubric created earlier, have students complete their self-assessment for the song that they have just written.

You may wish to video tape their performances and use that to elicit from students an objective view of their own song, as often performers are not fully aware of the impact it is/is not having on an audience.

The above activities in Part B should be done over two or more classes. Although 3 hours are suggested for this unit, remember that you can use flexibility to modify this. For example, your students may need more practice with creating effective lyrics and melodies.

Additional activities are available in Lessons 1, 2, 3 and/or 5 of ESS if you have time to reinforce the concepts.

Unit 4: Song Design (2 hours)

Introduction

One of the basic elements that determine the success of a song is the design used by the songwriter. In previous modules from *Explore Music Grade 7* and *Explore Music 8*, form in music was discussed. This term refers to the overall blueprint or map of the song, with repeated and contrasting sections. For example, Rondo form (ABACA) refers to a section that is repeated (A) while contrasting sections are heard between them (B, C, etc.). In songwriting style, this can be compared to verse/chorus form. Gary Ewer in *The Essential Secrets of Songwriting* states that

> If your songs somehow feel boring, and you can't figure out why, it is usually related to the absence of enough contrast. It's like staring at a flat field with nothing to distinguish one part of it from another. Contrast sets things apart. Contrasting elements within a song brings out beauty, in much the same way that landscapers create contours on flat land to create beauty. (p 51)

In this unit students will discover the role that contrast plays in songwriting as they explore various song designs – verse/chorus, verse only, etc. In addition, they will learn how form and song energy are linked. To prepare for this unit, you should have a thorough understanding of song design as explained in ESS Chapter 3.

Key Concepts

▪ song design as it relates to form

Teaching, Learning and Assessment Process

To begin this part of the module, have copies of the book, *Learn to Speak Music* by John Crossingham available to students. In groups, have students discuss Chapter 3: Write On! This chapter speaks about the songwriting process and gives students suggestions for writing an original tune. Moreover, it shows the various "sections" of a song that are possible, and usually if a song is well-written, each of these sections will build contrast in the music thus making it more interesting.

When discussing the book chapter, have them pay attention to the suggestions for the design as depicted on pages 32-33: Intro, Verse, chorus, Bridge, Final Chorus, Outro. Also, they should discuss pages 38-39 as possible steps to take when doing the next assignment.

Ask students if anyone has written a song before taking this module. If so, invite them to prepare it for a performance with the class. Tell them that you will use it as a demonstration piece, and hopefully they will be comfortable with having you analyze it constructively so they can learn how to improve their songwriting skills. For avid songwriters or for those aspiring to perform in bands of folk groups, this

should not be intimidating as they will realize that the secret of appealing to a listening audience is to refine their skills and learn the techniques of the best songwriters. For those who may be shy about sharing their previous songwriting publicly, encourage them to continue on their path to success and hopefully by the end of this module they will have a better understanding of effective techniques to use when writing songs.

As an alternative to the above activity, play a range of songs that use various forms. In ESS Chapter 3, Ewer provides many examples of familiar tunes that can be used for this activity. Whether you use familiar songs or students' compositions, be sure that you spend sufficient time on this activity. The design element is critical to the success of a song. It can be helpful if you play songs that demonstrate where things like dynamics are used, then not used, etc., to demonstrate the power of contrast.

In *The Essential Secrets of Songwriting,* Gary Ewer describes two basic principles of form in songwriting:

> *Principle # 1:* Songs without contrast risk being boring.
> *Principle # 2:* In general, the energy of the end of a song should equal or exceed the energy at the beginning.

Using the examples described in ESS Chapter 3, discuss each principle and play examples to demonstrate to students the importance of having a good design. Now in their same groups from the previous unit on lyrics and melody, have students take enough time to analyze the form they used in their song, and ask them to assess the level of interest for the listener. In their discussion they should decide what changes need to take play in order to make it more interesting.

Ask students to bring to class an example of a song that uses verse and chorus and one that uses verse only. Ask them to be able to articulate their own feelings about the song and provide justification for their overall impression of it being boring or appealing.

In their groups, have them discuss the songs they have brought to class. Once they have heard each one, ask them to identify the best example for each of the two principles. As a class, listen to the songs selected by each group and discuss them in relation to the principle that it demonstrates.

Now, have them go back to their song from the previous unit and analyze it more thoroughly making any necessary changes to make it more appealing. This may be an appropriate time for another songwriters' circle.

For additional activities to support their learning of the Principles of Form, see lesson 9 of *The Essential Secrets of Songwriting- LESSONS.*

Unit 5: The Finishing Touches (3 hours)

Introduction

Throughout this module we have been exploring the elements of effective songwriting. By now students should have a general idea of the challenges with writing songs that have appeal to a range of listeners. It is difficult to know when a song is actually "done," and the songwriter is satisfied with the finished product. Many successful singer/songwriters make changes to their songs up to and including the time spent in the recording studio. They are always looking for more perfection, as it could make or break their overall success.

In Part A of this unit, we will explore the last two components of good songwriting – the hook and writer's block. Students will come to understand the different kinds of "hooks," as well as the tricks used to create them. They will also learn that not all songs require an "obvious" hook as they explore the difference between a hook and a motif.

Perhaps by now your students will have experienced one of the biggest challenges to overcome when writing songs: writer's block. In Part B they will learn about the insignificant role inspiration plays in the process and the importance of getting as many ideas down as possible. Moreover, they will discuss various ways to overcome writer's block.

Although there will not be enough class time to plan a formal "concert" of the songs that students created, you may want to host an event outside of class for this purpose. Maybe it is during a talent show for the student body, an event during Winter Carnival, or an evening with parents. The last hour of this unit is designed to bring "closure" to the module by providing an opportunity to hear the final creations by students, and to discuss the learning that took place throughout the module. It could also be a time to discuss copyright issues in songwriting, such as mechanical and performance rights.

In preparation for this unit, you should be familiar with the content of ESS Chapter 6 and 7. In addition, it would be helpful to read the Ewer's material on "Hooks and Riffs". A google search may also offer information on resolving writer's block.

Key Concepts

- hook
- writer's block

Teaching, Learning and Assessment Process

PART A: THE HOOK

Gary Ewer in *The Essential Secrets of Songwriting* describes a hook as

> ...any aspect of a song. It can be a part of the melody, the lyric, the harmony, or some combination of any of these aspects. More often than not, hooks appear in choruses; whatever the songwriter has done to set the chorus words is often a hook. (p 161)

Using examples of songs described in ESS Chapter 6, demonstrate the various types of hooks in a songs, i.e., part of a melody, the lyric, the harmony, or some combination of all of these.

- *25 or 6 to 4* (Chicago)
- *Downtown (*Petula Clarke)
- *Fifth Symphony* (Beethoven)
- *Pretty Woman* (Roy Orbison co-writer)
- *Superstition* (Stevie Wonder)
- *Baker Street* (Gerry Rafferty)
-

Next, display and discuss the two basic principles for creating good hooks (Ewer)
Hook Principle # 1: Make it short and memorable.
Hook principle # 2: Adding a hook to a bad song gives you a bad song with a hook.

Divide the class up into small groups. Once again, try to ensure that each group has a guitarist or keyboardist, and percussion instruments. In these groups, have students develop a short, catchy hook that could serve the basis for a song (Principle # 1). It needs to be something that works well when repeated over and over. It needs to be melodically and rhythmically interesting and can include lyrics.

After students have had enough time to work on these, have them perform them for the class and ask the other students to respond. You may wish to take anecdotal notes at this point to inform the final marks for the module.

Now put students back in their original songwriting groups from Unit 2 and 3 and have them decide if they have a good hook in their song. If it is not evident or if they feel they could create a better one, give them time to do this.

PART B: WRITER'S BLOCK

As a class, discuss writer's block and encourage students to talk about past experiences they have had with it. They should be encouraged to think not only in terms of songwriting, but also in creative writing assignments, writing reports, writing personal letters, and entering comments in their journals. Reinforce with them that many songwriters go through periods of time where writing is difficult.

Gary Ewer describes songwriting as a craft, and suggests four steps in developing it to its fullest potential (*The Essential Secrets of Songwriting*, pages 173 – 175):

1. Set aside a regular time every day for writing.
2. Listen to recordings of other writer's songs every day.
3. Record your music and listen to it.
4. Give yourself songwriting challenges.

As a preliminary exercise and to reinforce the first and last steps (above), have students write for a specific period of time. In English Language Arts, we call this "stream of consciousness" writing. The idea is to pick a topic and write *non-stop* for the time allotted. In this exercise, students should pay no heed to grammar, sentence structure, punctuation, etc., but merely get thoughts on paper.

When they have done this exercise, tell them that they are now going to use the ideas to write a song, but there is a time limit. Ask them to write a song (any style, any form) in 30 minutes. At the end of the exercise, ask for volunteers to present their work. This is meant to be a fun activity to reinforce the steps that Ewer suggests, so do not get pre-occupied with the mechanics of songwriting.

PART C: THE FINAL BOWS

In this part of the unit, allow time for each group to perform the final edition of their songs, and encourage them in preparation to present it as in a concert format. This is a time to celebrate their accomplishments in songwriting, and to enjoy their own performance as well as those of the other students.

If time allows, discuss the progress of students from the beginning of this module to the end. You may wish to open the discussion by asking, "How has your level of confidence for songwriting changed as a result of this module?"

The last class might also be an appropriate time to discuss and/or reinforce copyright issues in songwriting, as they now have finished products that they legally own. In particular, you may wish to discuss mechanical and performance, rights, and branding their songs with a copyright symbol to indicate that it is someone's work. Information on copyright is provided in *The Essential Secrets of Songwriting*, Chapter 8.

Well in advance of this final sharing, with students, co-create a summative rubric. This can be a revision of one of the formative rubrics. If you prefer a different tool for this evaluation, be sure that students have co-created the tool with you, to ensure they know the expectations for successful completion of this module.

As a final exercise, invite students to share their learning process and progress in a journal entry.

Appendix

Unit 1: Cornerstones to Songwriting

GUIDED QUESTIONS FOR LISTENING

Background

Form
 	
 1. Write the form of the song you are listening to where A is the Chorus, B is the verse, C is a bridge, and D is an instrumental interlude.
 2. What is the time signature in this song?
 3. How many measures are in a verse?
 4. How many measures are in the bridge?
 5. What is the phrase structure of the lyrics within the verse?
     a) ababc
     b) aabbcc
     c) aabbc
 6. What is the phrase structure of the bridge?
     a) abc
     b) aabbcc
     c) ababc
 	
 7. Which section of the song has the most driving energy, the bridge, the chorus, or the verses? Tell why you think this is so.

Lyrics

1. Are the lyrics written in the first or third person?
2. What part of the verses is repeated the most?
3. Why do you think verse 1 might sound more like a chorus?
4. Do you think that the song is meant to be a happy one? Why or why not? Give examples from within the lyrics to justify your statement.
5. Are there phrases in the lyrics that you would you describe as "cliché"?
6. Do these clichés help or hinder this song? In what way?
7. What words stand out the most in the bridge?
8. Why do think that is?
9. Do you think the mood of the bridge is happy? Why or why not?
10. What makes the lyrics of this song easy to relate to for most people?

Melody

1. If the melodic phrase is 4 measures long, how many phrases are in each verse?
2. Is there a phrases of the melody where you hear many repeated notes? If so, which one?
3. How many interval skips are in the first phrase?
4. Which phrases are exactly the same?
5. What observations can you make about the last line of the verses?
6. In the bridge section, there is often some tension created. Circle the devices that you think helped to create that tension.
    a. The melody jumps all over the place
    b. There are many repeated notes
    c. The melody is smooth and relaxing
    d. The melody ends on a relaxed sound
    e. The melody ends on a note that feels unfinished and wants to move on
7. How many measures are in the bridge?
    a. 16
    b. 8
    c. 6

Tone Colour

1. What instruments do you hear in this recording?
2. How many singers do you hear?
3. Can you describe any special effects that either the instrumentalists or singers create with their sound?

Harmony

1. Describe the overall harmonies do you hear.
2. Do you hear a "bluesy" sound in the harmony?
3. If so, describe the effect that this blues feeling has when combined with the lyrics?
4. Do you feel that the harmonies chosen to match the lyrics well? Why or why not?
5. Do you recognize the chord structure in the harmony? If so, talk about it.

Unit 2: Chord Progressions

Strong and Fragile Chord Progressions

1.   C F Dm G C

2.   F Em F Em Am G Am G F

3.   Dm A Dm C F Bb C7 F

4.   G Am G C D Em C G

5.   C Eb Dm Em Fm7 Gm7 Abmaj7 Gmaj7

6.   Am Dm F E F E7 Am

7.   D Em7 Am G A7 D Em D

8.   Bb Gm Cm Dm Eb F Bb

9.   Am G Am Dm Am Em Am

10. F Dm Eb F C G Am Em

Songwriters' Circle

Once the students have been introduced to the basics of songwriting it is time to let them perform and be critiqued. Playing for one's peers is an excellent learning experience as it is sometimes difficult for young musicians to listen objectively to their own music. The professional venue for this type of activity is called Songwriters' Circle, and it is one that students should be familiar with from earlier grades.

To set the atmosphere, have students establish a performance space and arrange a semi-circle of chairs that will allow for a friendly and relaxed atmosphere. As each group performs, every student is required to articulate a brief reflection – either verbal or written – that describes the performance. If it is written, the reflection serves as reminders when the class discusses the piece together.

The most important aspect to reinforce is that their reflections should be positive and constructive. For example, it is not enough for students to merely say, "I liked it." They must inform their response based on the principles of songwriting, and what they know about the mechanics of composing. It is extremely important for the teacher to set the tone for this activity, and in so doing provide many examples of comments that are appropriate, as well as those that are inappropriate. Remember, students of this age are extremely self-conscious and very vulnerable. The Songwriters' Circle cannot be threatening in any way, as this will stifle the students' creativity and destroy their self-esteem.

When setting up the Songwriters' Circle, select as many students to perform as class time will allow without being rushed. You want sufficient time to hear their songs, and to allow for second attempts if requested. Moreover, the reflection time needs to be sufficient enough to allow for appropriate responses to each song.

You should direct and encourage discussion after each performance by asking the class to comment, using proper musical vocabulary, on the musical ideas contained therein. Depending on the level of sophistication of the students, the following are examples of what you may wish to consider:

- Could you sense energy generally growing as the song progressed? If not, did that negatively impact on the song?
- Did the lyrics move from descriptive in the verse to emotive in the chorus?
- In what way was *contrast* a factor in the structure of the song?

If students are not quite at the point where they can comment critically on these areas, you may want to begin by telling students to name one thing that they really liked about the song, and one suggestion that they may wish to try next time. Above all, insist that comments be positive, and you must curtail inappropriate comments.

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- The Essential Secrets of Songwriting, 4th edition
- Essential Chord Progressions, 2nd edition
- More Essential Chord Progressions, 2nd edition
- How to Harmonize a Melody
- Chord Progression Formulas
- The Essential Secrets of Songwriting 9-Lesson Course
- From Amateur to Ace: Writing Songs Like a Pro
- Fix Your Songwriting Problems – NOW
- Hooks and Riffs: How They Grab Attention, Make Songs Memorable, and Build Your Fan Base
- Writing a Song from a Chord Progression

MUSIC

Oh, what a feeling: *A vital collection of Canadian music.* (4-CD box set)
- Set 1 Released in 1996
- Set 2 released in 2001
- Set 3 released in 2006

WEBSITES

- Billboard
- Official sites of artists
- Rock Hall of Fame and Museum
- Rolling Stone
- School Alliance for Student Songwriters

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Songwriters in the community