

*Praise For*

# THE YOUNG MUSICIAN'S GUIDE TO SONGWRITING



"Lisa makes all aspects of songwriting (form, harmony, rhythm, lyrics, titles, etc.) amazingly easy in this book! Next time I do a songwriting class, it will be with Lisa's book!"

—*Wendy Stevens, M.M., NCTM, composer, pianist, and teacher,*  
[www.composecreate.com](http://www.composecreate.com)

"As a successful songwriter and much-in-demand piano instructor who specializes in teaching children, Lisa was the perfect person to write this book. And the end result proves it: a treasure chest full of ideas, strategies, examples, and exercises that are bound to help and inspire kids and teachers alike.

In the section on musical styles, Lisa includes this quote by Oscar Wilde: "Be Yourself. Everyone else is already taken." And that's what her new book does—empowers each of us, through writing music and lyrics, to say what only we can say.

Thanks, Lisa, for filling this important need! I look forward to using *The Young Musician's Guide to Songwriting* with my own students."

—*Bruce Siegel, private teacher and creator of DoctorKeys.com Piano Tutorials*

"Lisa Donovan Lukas's book, *The Young Musician's Guide to Songwriting*, boils songwriting down into accessible, clear-cut blocks of information. Reading this book is like having a personal tutor at your side during your songwriting process.

I especially love how Lisa puts her own creative process on display for the benefit of the reader, displaying examples from her own songwriting experience.

Lisa, thank you for this invaluable resource!"

—Adam Bendorf, Founder of Alberti Publishing and independent music teacher,  
[www.bendorfpianostudio.com](http://www.bendorfpianostudio.com)



## WHY NOT WRITE YOUR OWN SONGS?

Take your ideas and turn them into songs. Music and lyrics are a creative way to express what you feel and think. Here is your ultimate songwriting guide that you will want to come back to time and again.



### **You will discover how to:**

- ♪ Take advantage of daydreaming
- ♪ Tap into your experiences for concepts
- ♪ Build rhythm, harmony, melody, and words
- ♪ Use time-honored song structures as templates for your own songs
- ♪ Invent songs by going to movies, reading books, and living life!
- ♪ Generate creativity with listening skills
- ♪ Play with tools of the trade: a rhyming dictionary, a thesaurus, and your mind!
- ♪ Construct original songs from creative exercises included within each chapter
- ♪ Apply traditional techniques of composition to the art of songwriting





# The Young Musician's Guide to Songwriting

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How to Create Music and Lyrics

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(For Music Students and Teachers)



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**Lisa Donovan Lukas**

MUST WRITE MUSIC, California

THE YOUNG MUSICIAN'S GUIDE TO SONGWRITING  
How to Create Music and Lyrics  
(For Music Students and Teachers)  
By Lisa Donovan Lukas

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Every effort has been taken in the preparation of this book. However, there may be mistakes, both typographical and in content. The purpose of this manual is to educate and to entertain. Therefore, this text should be used as a general guide. The author and Must Write Music shall have no liability nor responsibility whatsoever to any person or entity with respect to any loss or damage caused, or alleged to have been caused, directly or indirectly, by any part of the content, information, or the instructions contained in this book.

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With special thanks to Ed (“Eddie Arms”) Willumsen, my first piano teacher, who taught me to appreciate Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin, Debussy, Ravel, Schumann, Rodgers and Hart, Rodgers and Hammerstein, Burt Bacharach and Hal David, Leonard Bernstein, Stephen Sondheim, The Beatles, Joni Mitchell, Stevie Wonder, and Bob Dylan (to name just a very few, in no particular order)—and all at the same time.

I give additional thanks to my nephew, Harrison Long. He promised he would read this book for me and he kept his word, even in the face of his own practice schedule, band rehearsals, and late-night gigs! I very much appreciated his input and perspective.

~ Support Our Young Creators ~

10% of all author royalties are donated to music educational not-for-profits, including The Music Teachers’ Association of California Foundation and Westside Music Foundation



(Piano lessons—back in the day—with “Eddie Arms”)

*This book is dedicated to my husband and treasured friend Ron, to my most loved son, Jack – and to my mother and father, who got me started with music and lyrics and fanned the flames every step of the way.*

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# 1

## LET'S GET STARTED

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*"Imagination is the key to my lyrics. The rest is painted with a little science fiction...All I'm writing is just what I feel, that's all."*

—Jimi Hendrix

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*"I tend to be a subscriber to the idea that you have everything you need by the time you're 12 years old to do interesting writing for most of the rest of your life—certainly by the time you're 18."*

—Bruce Springsteen



### HELLO...

This book is for kids who read music and play an instrument really well and for kids who are just beginning to learn an instrument. It's also for kids who might be someplace in the middle of these two scenarios.

Whether you're an accomplished musician, or just starting out; whether you have musical training, read music, and play an instrument; whether you're just getting your feet wet; or whether you stand somewhere in between, now is the time to begin if you want to write your own material.



Why is it a good time to begin? If you want to learn and have something to say, you can write a song. Maybe you've seen other kids write songs and wondered: "Can I?" Well, I'm going to say, you can!

Have you ever wondered how to write songs? Maybe you are:

1. A terrific musician and have studied your instrument for quite a few years—maybe even longer.
2. Just beginning to learn an instrument and your future feels bright with all that possibility.
3. Somewhere in the middle of those two scenarios.

Maybe you've written some tunes before, or maybe you've always just sort of wondered how to get down to it. Either way, you've got some creative energy, musical interests, and the desire to write your own material.

This is the perfect time to crack open my book on songwriting and take a look around. At any rate, I want to welcome you to my guide dedicated to the creation of words and music for young people.

Personally, I think you're in for a lot of fun! And, if this grabs you, you just might be in for more than a lifetime of magic and beyond.

If you want to express yourself in song, you can learn to write both music and lyrics. If you don't want to write both, you can find a partner. For example, your partner might work on music while you create lyrics, or vice versa.

Maybe you're a terrific musician and have spent years playing other people's music—and now you want to create some of your own. Or maybe

you're just beginning to learn an instrument and want to express yourself in song.

Are you an accomplished musician who plays other people's music most of the time? Do you want to try writing your own?

Maybe you're a poet but never thought about writing a song. Are you worried that you can't come up with lyrics?

BTW: You can use these ideas if you're older too. I won't stop you. Really.

What if I'm not a kid? It's okay, it's not too late! The tools I give you here will work for you too.

So, how does this work and why this book?

I will give you:

- ♪ Ways to begin quickly
- ♪ Easy-to-use ideas
- ♪ Methods to jumpstart songs
- ♪ Techniques for accomplished musicians as well as beginners
- ♪ A step-by-step approach, so you can pick up wherever you are
- ♪ Guidance for anyone with something to say
- ♪ Exercises from basic to advanced
- ♪ Lessons to create structure, lyrics, melody, harmony, and rhythm

Whatever level you're at and whatever kind of learner you are, I have a pathway in for you. With simple step-by-step guidance, you will be writing your own songs.

Important side notes:

If you're just getting going with learning an instrument and reading music, don't worry. You can still work this out and start from where you are. As you learn more about music and acquire more skills with your instrument, you can always revisit some of my exercises with chords and harmony. *And if you hang on to this book long enough, after a while, you will find different things in it that speak to you at different times on your musical path.*

Meanwhile, you might:

1. Find that you have a great melodic sense.
2. Collaborate with another writer who knows chords and harmony already.
3. Create the tune and have someone else show you how to write it down and/or help you decide on the chords.
4. Write the lyrics and collaborate with someone else who will write the music.

Musical Factoid:

- ♪ One of the greatest American songwriters of all time was Irving Berlin.
- ♪ He did not read music and was a self-taught pianist.
- ♪ He even played most of the time in the key of F sharp so that he could stay mainly on the black keys!
- ♪ George Gershwin said that Irving Berlin was one of the all time greatest songwriters that ever lived (and George Gershwin would know 😊).
- ♪ Berlin wrote approximately 1500 songs in his lifetime, and many of his songs became major hits.
- ♪ Some of Berlin's songs were nominated for Academy Awards.

Personally, I think that if you learn all you can about music, it will only contribute to your creativity and to the quality and quantity of your material. The more you know, the more you can control your creations. Also, the more you will be inspired.

Maybe you practice with your instrument one day to work on scales, harmony, or a piece. You make a mistake and miss a note. Then you think: Hey, that's nice—that sounds good to my ear! Sometimes mistakes can turn into inspiration. This mistake could be the beginning of a new song. Then again, maybe not! Maybe you just want to practice some more to get the notes right! 😊

One of my piano and songwriting students was worried because she thought that if she learned to read music and understand music theory, it might interfere with her creativity. My belief is that the more technique and knowledge you can master, the better. Everything you take in, every skill you have, contributes to your ability to create.

But we all have to start somewhere.

This isn't "One Size Fits All." You are unique, and the path you choose will be unique too.

I heard somewhere recently that when Paul McCartney from The Beatles was a kid, he used to take the chords from Rodgers and Hart songs and write his own new melodies and lyrics to those chords. If that's true, it makes perfect sense to me because it's a wonderful way to learn how to write songs. It's just one way, but it's a really good one!

Speaking of Paul McCartney, let's talk a little bit about learning from the greats.



## LEARN FROM THE MASTERS...

Now. We've got *amazing* singer-songwriter performers—like say, Carole King, Bob Dylan, Paul Simon, Billy Joel, Stevie Wonder, and Joni Mitchell, just to name a few. They have their own style, their own voice. They write both music and lyrics and perform their own material. Other people may eventually cover their tunes, but still, when we hear these original songwriters, we know who they are right off the bat.

Kurt Cobain was a wonderful singer-songwriter, guitarist, and performer. He wrote the lyrics and collaborated with his band Nirvana on the music. Alanis Morissette writes and performs her own material as well. Some of her early albums are songwriting collaborations, and some of her later material is all Alanis Morissette—both words and music. She has the ability to write on her own and to collaborate as well.

In addition to singer/songwriter/performers, we have other kinds of songwriters:

1. Some songwriters do not necessarily perform or even play an instrument all that well. (Remember Irving? We're not going to quibble with Irving, right?) These songwriters may write songs for musicals or songs for other people to cover.
2. Some songwriters are writing teams like Rodgers and Hart, Rodgers and Hammerstein, Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil, Burt Bacharach and Hal David, and Eric Lowen and Dan Navarro.
3. Others write *both* music and lyrics for other people, such as Diane Warren, Stephen Schwartz, Stephen Sondheim (who also wrote lyrics for Leonard Bernstein's music), and Cole Porter.
4. Then there are bands with writing members like The Beatles, Coldplay, Eagles, The Beachboys, Grateful Dead, OneRepublic, Linkin Park, U2, Blink-182, and on and on—lots of combinations!
5. We also have songwriter/performers like Elton John, who perform and sing and write the music for someone else's lyrics (Bernie Taupin's lyrics, in Elton John's case.)

Songwriting is a deep and vast subject. There's structure and form to consider, as well as lyrics, melody, harmony, and rhythm. There's also performance, recording, demoing, leadsheets, computer programs, arranging, and the coordination of other players. There's the whole business aspect of songwriting too.

What I want to address in my guide is not the commercial, or the recording and producing aspects. I want to talk about the principles involved in the creative process of songwriting.