



**SONGWRITING WORKSHOP**  
***Bridging Worlds: Between Loss & Love***  
**May 16, 2009**

**Co-leaders:**

Sarah Gorback, Vani Kannan, Heather Kristin, Maura Kutner and Nancy Shapiro

**Special Guest Speaker:**

Marianne Pillsbury, Willie Mae Rock Camp for Girls

**Acknowledgements:**

Chipotle  
Frommer's  
Random House  
Skyline Studios  
Teen Ink

**Pre-Workshop**

11:00-11:15      Arrival and Sign-In

11:15-12:00      Year-End Evaluations

**Workshop Session I**

12:00-12:15      Icebreaker: *The I Want My \_\_\_\_\_ Blues*

12:15-1:00      Intro: *The Art and Craft of Songwriting*

1:00-1:30      Exercise 1: *Finding the Words for Loss and Love*

1:30-2:00      Lunch!

**Workshop Session II**

2:00-2:15      Community Announcements

2:15-2:25      Warm-Up: *Fun 'n' Goofy Singing*

2:25-2:45      Guided Listening: *Forms of Musical Expression*

2:45-3:45      Exercise 2: *Free Verse Songs*

3:45-4:15      Warm Fuzzy: *Our Song!*

**ICEBREAKER: *THE I WANT MY \_\_\_\_\_ BLUES***

**“I Want My Milk (And I Want it Now),” by Woody Guthrie**

I want my rattle and I want it now  
I want my rattle and I want it now  
Want my rattle and my rattle, skattle, skattle,  
I want my rattle and I want it now

I want my nipple and I want it now  
Want my nipple and I want it now  
Big nipple, little nipple, middle-size nipple, all kinda nipples  
I want my nipple and I want it now

I want my bottle and I want it now  
I want my bottle and I want it now  
I want my bottle and I want my bottle now  
I want my bottle and I want it now

**Please fill in the blanks with things you want, NOW! Make each line different.**

I want my \_\_\_\_\_ and I want it now!

I want my \_\_\_\_\_ and I want it now!

I want my \_\_\_\_\_ and I want it now!

I want my \_\_\_\_\_ and I want it now!

I want my \_\_\_\_\_ and I want it now!

I want my \_\_\_\_\_ and I want it now!

I want my \_\_\_\_\_ and I want it now!

I want my \_\_\_\_\_ and I want it now!

**INTRO: THE ART AND CRAFT OF SONGWRITING**

Maine native **Marianne Pillsbury** attended Brown University where she showed her first signs of rock & roll rebellion by writing her senior honors English thesis, "Pop Icon Prince's Dual Obsession with Sexual Ecstasy & Religious Salvation: A Textual & Cultural Analysis."

In 2004, after escaping a harrowing career as an advertising copywriter, she released her debut album, *The Wrong Marianne*, on her own indie label, Average White Girl Records. Produced by award-winning songwriter Bonnie Hayes (Bonnie Raitt's "Have A Heart"), the album received enthusiastic reviews from *The New York Times*, *Time Out New York*, *The Boston Herald* and *The San Francisco Chronicle*, eliciting comparisons to the best work of Liz Phair, Juliana Hatfield and Jill Sobule. *The Wrong Marianne* was named a Top 12 D.I.Y. Pick in *Performing Songwriter Magazine*. The song "Boo Hoo" from the album won Best Alt/Rock Song in The Great American Song Contest and was selected for inclusion on *ROCKRGRL Magazine*'s Discoveries compilation CD. In 2005, Marianne's Brooklyn-based band, The Marianne Pillsburys, released *The Hot EP*, which captured even more of the raw-yet-sweet brattiness that seems to be Marianne's formula for success.

In 2007, Marianne started teaching songwriting workshops at the Willie Mae Rock Camp for Girls, a non-profit music and mentoring program that empowers girls and women by encouraging them to explore self-expression through music. Her work with Willie Mae inspired her to start writing an autobiographical pop-rock musical, "Depression: The Musical," which was selected as a sponsored project of the New York Foundation for the Arts in 2008. In her spare time, Marianne likes to eat, sleep and breathe.

## **Anatomy of a Song**

**Intro:** Introduces the musical feel and tone of song, draws the listener in, usually instrumental/no vocals, usually 2-4 bars (bar = 4 beats)

**Verse:** Begin to tell your story in the 1st verse, following verses develop the idea of your song or present a new angle on it, vocals usually come in, often instrumentation is sparser

**Pre-Chorus:** Also known as "the climb," builds momentum to chorus, different feel than verse

**Chorus:** Also known as "the hook," usually most memorable part of song (gets stuck in your head), usually repeated a few times during song, often includes title of song, often contains main message/central theme of song, musically — increase in energy, fuller sound (more instruments come in), catchy melody or instrumental riff

**Bridge:** Musical (change in key, tempo, feel) and often lyrical departure, usually happens once in song

**Re-intro, instrumental break, outro:** instrumental sections

### **“The Wrong Marianne”**

**Music & lyrics by Marianne Pillsbury**

VERSE 1:

my brain is like mashed potatoes  
you can scoop some out to put on your happy birthday cake

PRE-CHORUS:

and i'm sorry if i poison your well  
but i'm stuck like stucco as far as i can tell

CHORUS:

but he doesn't understand  
he's talking to the wrong marianne  
he doesn't understand  
he's in love with the wrong marianne

VERSE 2:

my heart is like a hard-boiled egg  
that's alright you can mix it up and spice it up and maybe you'll like the taste

PRE-CHORUS:

and i told you it was bad for you  
high in cholesterol, too

CHORUS:

but he doesn't understand  
he's talking to the wrong marianne  
he doesn't understand  
he's in love with the wrong marianne

BRIDGE:

and he looks like he's got something to say  
and he looks like he's just a little afraid  
he says relax relieve revitalize  
relax relieve revitalize

CHORUS:

but he doesn't understand  
he's talking to the wrong marianne  
he doesn't understand  
he's in love with the wrong marianne  
he doesn't understand  
he's in love with the wrong marianne

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**“Seether”**

**By Veruca Salt**

**As you listen to this song, try to identify the different parts—verse, pre-chorus, chorus, and bridge.**

Ow!

Seether is neither loose nor tight,  
Seether is neither black nor white.  
I tried to keep her on a short leash,  
I tried to calm her down.  
I tried to ram her into the ground, yeah.  
Can't fight the seether x3  
I can't see her till I'm foaming at the mouth.  
Seether is neither big nor small.  
Seether is the center of it all.  
I tried to rock her in my cradle,  
I tried to knock her out,  
I tried to cram her back in my mouth, yeah.  
Cant fight the seether ( seether ) x3  
I can't see her till I'm foaming at the mouth.  
Keep her down, boiling water,  
Keep her down, what a lovely daughter.  
Oh, she is not born like other girls,  
But I know how to conceive her.

Oh, she may not look like other girls,  
But she's a snarl-toothed seether, seether!  
Cant fight the seether ( seether ) x3  
I can't see her till I'm foaming at the mouth.  
Seether  
Cant fight the seether ( seether ) x3  
I can't see her till I'm foaming at the mouth.  
Yeah.

**Discussion Questions:**

- What's the big idea? The main message of your song?
- What's the tone? Examples: Serious, funny, poetic, conversational
- What's the point or view? 1st, 2nd, 3rd person?
- What's the intent? To inspire, entertain, speak to a specific person or group?
- What's the voice? Talking, thinking, reflecting, demanding, pleading?

**EXERCISE 1: *FINDING THE WORDS FOR LOSS AND LOVE***

Write down any word associations you have with the two words below:

**LOVE**

**LOSS**

## **Literary Elements of Songwriting**

**Simile:** A comparison of two things that uses “like” or “as”  
(*Love is like hell. Love is as sweet as a Georgia peach.*)

**Metaphor:** A comparison of two things that does not use “like” or “as”  
(*Love is hell. Love is a Georgia peach.*)

Take two minutes to write a line for a song. Feel free to use simile or metaphor in your line. Refer to the words we’ve collected together, and write a line about love or loss **without using the words “love” or “loss.” Think about how it might connect to the chorus below.**

The “love” group and the “loss” group will combine their lines to form verses of six lines that will come before and after the chorus, creating a song!

### **Chorus of the GWN Song** *Courtesy of Vani*

We speak our words so easily  
But in love or loss, we have to sing  
To show the world our pain and glee  
To prove we’ll heal from anything

**My song line is:**

**VOCAL WARM-UPS: FUN 'N' GOOFY SINGING**

Practice these exercises before any performance or reading to get loosened up!

**1. Yawn-Sigh**

Inhale slowly on a yawn. Feel the air in the back of your throat. Keep your jaw hanging relaxed and your tongue relaxed on the floor of your mouth. Make sure your shoulders are low and relaxed, too. Exhale slowly. Repeat. Vocalize as you exhale. Repeat and vary the pitch as you vocalize. Repeat and count 1 to 5 as you exhale.

**2. Using the HMMMMM**

Produce a gentle “hmmmm” on an exhalation at a pitch that is comfortably positioned in the lower range. Repeat and change the hmmm to “ahhhh” halfway through the exhaled breath. Try to change nothing but the opening of the mouth. Stay relaxed and breathe through the belly, not the shoulders. Experiment with the pitch. Produce while sweeping the pitch from high to low and then low to high.

**3. Working on Breath Support System with “HUH!”**

After a slow deep inhalation, expel sharply by contracting the abdominal muscles hard with a loud “HUH!” The larynx and throat should stay relaxed and open. Increase with speed and repeat.

**4. Lip Buzzing**

Put your lips loosely together and exhale by vibrating your lips like a motor boat. Make sure your tongue is relaxed as you exhale. Repeat the inhaled yawn, and vocalize as you till your lips. Repeat again, and sweep up in pitch then back down.

**5. Two Octave Pitch Glide**

Inhale slowly on a yawn. Keep your shoulders low and relaxed. Vocalize gently from high to low, low to high and moderately softly using the “ee” vowel. Repeat using other vowels.

**6. Articulation, Flexibility and Buzz**

Repeat Mumula Mumula Mumula. Focus on the buzz in the front of the face. Experiment with pitch high and lower as you repeat the exercise.

**GUIDED LISTENING: *FORMS OF MUSICAL EXPRESSION***

Consider the following questions, and as you listen to the songs, take notes on what you hear:

- What does this song taste like?
- What place does it remind you of?
- Who is the singer singing to, and why?
- What is the poetry in this song?
- What is the structure of the song?

1. BLUES: “Billie’s Blues,” by Billie Holiday

2. STORY/ COUNTRY: “44 Stories,” by Rosanne Cash

3. NEW WAVE/ PUNK: “Call Me,” by Blondie

4. HIP HOP: “The Lost Ones,” by Lauryn Hill

5. FOREIGN LANGUAGE: “La Vie En Rose,” by Edith Piaf

## **EXERCISE 2: FREE VERSE SONGS**

Songwriting offers the same range of forms as poetry. You can write it in structured forms, like sestinas and villanelles, and you can also write it in free verse. Suzanne Vega’s “Tom’s Diner” is an example of a FREE VERSE song.

In “Tom’s Diner,” the songwriter is in a diner and she lists the things she sees around her. As you listen to “Tom’s Diner” jot down any details of the song that jump out at you.

Now, choose a setting for a song of your own—maybe a place that was called to mind as you were listening to the various clips. It could be your family room, the place you meet your mentor, a park, anywhere that is special to you.

### **Place:**

Next, choose five specific objects you’d find in that place:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Write your own free verse song, about the place and objects you have chosen. If you speak a language other than English, feel free to write in that language.

You may also use one of the styles we've just listened to, such as blues, country or hip hop. Think about rhythm and imagine a beat, if that helps you.

### **Sharing in Pairs**

Share your song with your mentee/mentor and discuss each other's songs in the context of the other songs we've heard today.

### **WARM FUZZY: *OUR SONG!***

Recording our GWN song...

## **SONGWRITING APPENDIX**

### **“Billie’s Blues,” by Billie Holiday**

Lord I love my man, tell the world I do  
I love my man, tell the world I do  
But when he mistreats me  
Makes me feel so blue

My man wouldn't give me no breakfast  
Wouldn't give me no dinner  
Fought about my supper and put me outdoors  
Had the dark clay make black spots on my clothes  
I didn't have so many  
But I had a long, long way to go

Some men like me talkin' happy  
Some calls it snappy  
Some call me honey  
Others think I got money  
Some tell me baby you're built for speed  
Now if you put that all together  
Makes me everything a good man needs

### **“44 Stories,” by Rosanne Cash**

Baptize her with bitter tears till she knows your pain is real.  
Next time you see her on her knees, don't try to make a deal.  
Don't stare her into silence, with frozen point of view.  
'cause she's got 44 stories: she wants to tell them all to you.

Welcome her to all your fears and trust that she will cope.  
Give her one day of satisfaction for a thousand years of hope.  
Don't turn to dry your eyes, and lose your chance to look.  
'cause she's got 44 stories: she wants to write them in a book.

Instrumental break.

Wait until your mem'ry clears, then welcome her to rome.  
The desert of your misspent years that led you to her home.  
Don't hold her up to sunlight; she'll melt into the blue.  
Don't make her shout through static if you want hear the truth,  
'cause she's got 44 stories;  
She's got 44 stories;  
She's got 44 stories: she wants to tell them all to you.

### **“Call Me,” by Blondie**

Color me your color, baby  
Color me your car  
Color me your color, darling

I know who you are  
Come up off your color chart  
I know where you're comin' from  
Call me (call me) on the line  
Call me, call me any, anytime  
Call me (call me) my love  
You can call me any day or night  
Call me

Cover me with kisses, baby  
Cover me with love  
Roll me in designer sheets  
I'll never get enough  
Emotions come, I don't know why  
Cover up love's alibi

Call me (call me) on the line  
Call me, call me any, anytime  
Call me (call me) oh my love  
When you're ready we can share the wine  
Call me

Ooo-oo-oo-oo-oo, he speaks the languages of love  
Ooo-oo-oo-oo-oo, amore, chiamami, chiamami  
Ooo-oo-oo-oo-oo, appelle-moi mon cherie, appelle-moi  
Anytime, anyplace, anywhere, any way  
Anytime, anyplace, anywhere, any day-ay

Call me (call me) my love  
Call me, call me any, anytime  
Call me (call me) for a ride  
Call me, call me for some overtime  
Call me (call me) my love  
Call me, call me in a sweet design  
Call me (call me), call me for your lover's lover's alibi  
Call me (call me) on the line  
Call me, call me any, anytime  
Call me (call me)  
Oh, call me, oo-hoo-hah  
Call me (call me) my love  
Call me, call me any, anytime  
[fade]

**“The Lost Ones,” by Lauryn Hill**

It's funny how money change a situation  
Miscommunication leads to complication  
My emancipation don't fit your equation  
I was on the humble, you - on every station

Some wan' play young Lauryn like she dumb  
 But remember not a game new under the sun  
 Everything you did has already been done  
 I know all the tricks from Bricks to Kingston  
 My ting done made your kingdom wan' run  
 Now understand L. Boogie's non violent  
 But if a thing test me, run for mi gun  
 Can't take a threat to mi newborn son  
 L's been this way since creation  
 A groupie call, you fall from temptation  
 Now you wanna ball over separation  
 Tarnish my image in your conversation  
 Who you gon' scrimmage, like you the champion  
 You might win some but you just lost one

You might win some but you just lost one  
 You might win some but you just lost one  
 You might win some but you just lost one  
 You might win some but you just lost one

Now, now how come your talk turn cold  
 Gained the whole world for the price of your soul  
 Tryin' to grab hold of what you can't control  
 Now you're all floss, what a sight to behold  
 Wisdom is better than silver and gold  
 I was hopeless now I'm on Hope road  
 Every man want to act like he's exempt  
 When him need to get down on his knees and repent  
 Can't slick talk on the day of judgment  
 Your movement's similar to a serpent  
 Tried to play straight, how your whole style bent?  
 Consequence is no coincidence  
 Hypocrites always want to play innocent  
 Always want to take it to the full out extent  
 Always want to make it seem like good intent  
 Never want to face it when it's time for punishment  
 I know that you don't wanna hear my opinion  
 But there come many paths and you must choose one  
 And if you don't change then the rain soon come  
 See you might win some but you just lost one

You might win some but you just lost one  
 You might win some but you just lost one  
 You might win some but you just lost one  
 You might win some but you just lost one

You might win some but you really lost one  
 You just lost one, it's so silly how come

When it's all done did you really gain from  
What you done done, it's so silly how come  
You just lost one

Now don't you understand man universal law  
What you throw out comes back to you, star  
Never underestimate those who you scar  
Cause karma, karma, karma comes back to you hard  
You can't hold God's people back that long  
The chain of Shatan wasn't made that strong  
Trying to pretend like your word is your bond  
But until you do right, all you do will go wrong  
Now some might mistake this for just a simple song  
And some don't know what they have 'til it's gone  
Now even when you're gone you can still be reborn  
And, from the night can arrive the sweet dawn  
Now, some might listen and some might shun  
And some may think that they've reached perfection  
If you look closely you'll see what you've become  
Cause you might win some but you just lost one

You might win some but you just lost one  
You might win some but you just lost one  
You might win some but you just lost one  
You might win some but you just lost one

You might win some but you really lost one  
You just lost one, it's so silly how come  
When it's all done did you really gain from  
What you done done, it so silly how come  
[repeat to end]

**“La Vie En Rose,” by Edith Piaf**

Des Yeux Qui Font Baisser Les Miens  
Un Rire Qui Se Perd Sur Sa Bouche  
Voila Le Portrait Sans Retouche  
De L'homme Auguel J'appartiens

Quand Il Me Prend Dans Ses Bras,  
Il Me Parle Tout Bas  
Je Vois La Vie En Rose,  
Il Me Dit Des Mots D'amour  
Das Mots De Tous Les Jours,  
Et Ca Me Fait Quelques Choses  
Il Est Entre Dans Mon Coeur,  
Une Part De Bonheur  
Dont Je Connais La Cause, C'est Lui Pour  
Moi, Moi Pour Lui Dans La Vie

Il Me L'a Dit, L'a Jure Pour La Vie,  
Et Des Que Je L'apercois  
Alors Je Sens En Moi, Mon Coeur Qui Bat...

Des Nuits D'amour A Plus Finir  
Un Grand Bonheur Qui Prend Sa Place  
Les Ennuis, Des Chagrins S'effacent  
Heureux, Heureux A En Mourir

**TRANSLATION:**

Hold me close and hold me fast  
The magic spell you cast  
This is la vie en rose

When you kiss me heaven sighs  
And though I close my eyes  
I see la vie en rose

When you press me to your heart  
I'm in a world apart  
A world where roses bloom

And when you speak...angels sing from above  
Everyday words seem...to turn into love songs

Give your heart and soul to me  
And life will always be  
La vie en rose

**“Tom's Diner,” by Suzanne Vega**

I am sitting  
In the morning  
At the diner  
On the corner

I am waiting  
At the counter  
For the man  
To pour the coffee

And he fills it  
Only halfway  
And before  
I even argue

He is looking  
Out the window  
At somebody

Coming in

"It is always  
Nice to see you"  
Says the man  
Behind the counter

To the woman  
Who has come in  
She is shaking  
Her umbrella

And I look  
The other way  
As they are kissing  
Their hellos

I'm pretending  
Not to see them  
Instead  
I pour the milk

I open  
Up the paper  
There's a story  
Of an actor

Who had died  
While he was drinking  
It was no one  
I had heard of

And I'm turning  
To the horoscope  
And looking  
For the funnies

When I'm feeling  
Someone watching me  
And so  
I raise my head

There's a woman  
On the outside  
Looking inside  
Does she see me?

No she does not

Really see me  
Cause she sees  
Her own reflection

And I'm trying  
Not to notice  
That she's hitching  
Up her skirt

And while she's  
Straightening her stockings  
Her hair  
Has gotten wet

Oh, this rain  
It will continue  
Through the morning  
As I'm listening

To the bells  
Of the cathedral  
I am thinking  
Of your voice...

And of the midnight picnic  
Once upon a time  
Before the rain began...

I finish up my coffee  
It's time to catch the train

## **SONGWRITING GENRES DEFINED**

Definitions from Wikipedia.

### **BLUES**

#### **EXAMPLE: "Billie's Blues," by Billie Holiday**

Blue notes are sung or played at a slightly lower pitch than that of the major scale for expressive purposes. Blues emerged at the end of the 19th century as an accessible form of self-expression in African-American communities of the United States from spirituals, work songs, field hollers, shouts and chants, and rhymed simple narrative ballads. The use of blue notes and the prominence of call-and-response patterns in the music and lyrics are indicative of African influences. The blues influenced later American and Western popular music, as the blues form became a basic pattern of jazz, rhythm and blues, bluegrass and rock and roll. In the 1960s and 1970s, blues evolved into a hybrid form called blues rock. In the 1990s, punk blues appeared as an outgrowth of the blues rock and punk movements. The term "the blues" refers to the "the blue devils", meaning melancholy and sadness; an early use of the term in this sense is found in George Colman's one-act farce *Blue Devils* (1798). Though the use of the phrase in African

American music may be older, it has been attested to since 1912, when Hart Wand's "Dallas Blues" became the first copyrighted Blues composition. In lyrics the phrase is often used to describe a depressed mood.

## **STORY/ COUNTRY**

### **EXAMPLE: "44 Stories," by Rosanne Cash**

Country music (or country and Western) is a blend of popular musical forms originally found in the Southern United States and the Appalachian Mountains. It has roots in traditional folk music, Celtic music, gospel music, and old-time music and evolved rapidly in the 1920s. The term country music began to be used in the 1940s when the earlier term hillbilly music was deemed to be degrading, and the term was widely embraced in the 1970s, while country and Western has declined in use since that time, except in the United Kingdom and Ireland, where it is still commonly used.

## **HIP HOP**

### **EXAMPLE: "The Lost Ones," by Lauryn Hill**

Hip hop music is a music genre typically consisting of a rhythmic vocal style called rap which is accompanied with backing beats. Hip hop music is part of hip hop culture, which began in the Bronx, in New York City in the 1970s, predominantly among African Americans and Latin Americans. The term rap music is often used synonymously with hip hop music. Rapping, also referred to as MCing or emceeing, is a vocal style in which the performer speaks rhythmically and in rhyme, generally to a beat. Beats are traditionally generated from portions of other songs by a DJ, or sampled from portions of other songs by a producer, though synthesizers, drum machines, and live bands are also used, especially in newer music. Rappers may perform poetry which they have written ahead of time, or improvise rhymes on the spot with or without a beat. Though rap is usually an integral component of hip hop music, DJs sometimes perform and record alone, and many instrumental acts are also defined as hip hop.

## **ROCK**

### **EXAMPLE: "Girlfriend," by Avril Lavigne**

Rock music is a loosely defined genre of popular music that entered the mainstream in the mid 1950s. It has its roots in 1940s and 1950s rhythm and blues, country music and other influences. In addition, rock music drew on a number of other musical influences, including folk music, jazz, and classical music. The sound of rock often revolves around the electric guitar or acoustic guitar, and it uses a strong back beat laid down by a rhythm section of electric bass guitar, drums, and keyboard instruments such as organ, piano, or, since the 1970s, synthesizers. Along with the guitar or keyboards, saxophone and blues-style harmonica are sometimes used as soloing instruments. In its "purest form", it "has three chords, a strong, insistent back beat, and a catchy melody."

## **POP**

### **EXAMPLE: Kelly Clarkson's "Since U Been Gone"**

Pop music is a music genre that features a noticeable rhythmic element, melodies and hooks, a mainstream style and a conventional structure. The term "pop music" was first used in 1926 in the sense of "having popular appeal" (see popular music), but since the 1950s it has been used in the sense of a musical genre, originally characterized as a lighter alternative to rock and roll.

**R&B (RHYTHM AND BLUES)****EXAMPLE: “Superwoman,” by Alicia Keys**

Rhythm and blues (also known as R&B, R'n'B or RnB) is the name given to a wide-ranging genre of popular music first created by African Americans in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The term was originally used by record companies to refer to recordings bought predominantly by African Americans, at a time when "urbane, rocking, jazz based music with a heavy, insistent beat" was becoming more popular. The term has subsequently had a number of shifts in meaning. Starting in the 1960s, after this style of music contributed to the development of rock and roll, the term R&B became used - particularly by white groups — to refer to music styles that developed from and incorporated electric blues, as well as gospel and soul music. By the 1970s, the term rhythm and blues was being used as a blanket term to describe soul and funk. Since the 1990s, the term Contemporary R&B is now mainly used to refer to a modern version of soul and funk-influenced pop music.

**FREE VERSE****EXAMPLE: “Tom's Diner,” by Suzanne Vega**

Free verse - also known as vers libre - is a term describing various styles of poetry that are written without using a strict rhyme scheme, but still recognizable as poetry by virtue of complex patterns of one sort or another that readers will perceive to be part of a coherent whole.

**SONGWRITERS ON SONGWRITING****Suzanne Vega tells how she got the idea for “Tom's Diner”****Tom's Essay****By Suzanne Vega**

From <http://measureformeasure.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/09/23/toms-essay/>

In my last blog, I was discussing the idea of being a two-hit wonder, and wrote about the song “Luka.” The other hit AOL cited in its story (called “Two-Hit Wonders”) was “Tom's Diner,” which was a hit for me in 1990. This wasn't just a plain ordinary hit, if there is such a thing. To this day it is sticky with the modern issues of technology and copyright law.

I got the idea for “Tom's Diner” in 1981, but I wrote it in the spring of 1982, making the song 26 years old now. When I was at Barnard College in Manhattan, I used to go to Tom's Restaurant for coffee, and after I graduated I also ate there before going to work. It was then a cheap, greasy place on 112th and Broadway, and it still is, in spite of its celebrity. (Sorry, but I have never been to the one in Brooklyn, though I hear it's really cute. The real one isn't cute, and isn't atmospheric. It's just plain, which is why I liked it.) And yes, it is the same one they use in the Seinfeld credits — the neon sign that says “RESTAURANT.” I actually once saw Jerry Seinfeld right near there!

I have a photographer friend, Brian Rose, who has taken pictures of the Lower East Side of Manhattan and the Berlin Wall. He told me once long ago that he felt as though he saw the world through a pane of glass. This struck me as romantic and alienated, and I wanted to write a song from this viewpoint.

I had been taking classes at Barnard with titles like “The Dramatic Monologue.” I was in Tom’s and I thought it would be fun to write a song that was like a little film, where the main character sees all these things but can’t respond to any of it unless it relates to him directly. The part about the actor dying was true — it was William Holden. Some fans recently looked up the day he died and named the next day Tom’s Diner Day. (In addition, see here.) I made up the part about the woman who was fixing her stockings.

The part where I sing about the “midnight picnic” is from an actual picnic I had with the songwriter Jack Hardy on the steps of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine one night.

The melody hit me as I was walking down Broadway, fast. I wanted something jaunty. I remember liking the near rhymes of “diner” and “corner,” “sitting” and “waiting.” Although it is actually Tom’s restaurant I changed it to diner as it sings better that way.

I was imagining it as a kind of French film soundtrack, something vaudevillian on piano, like a background to a Truffaut film. But I didn’t play piano and didn’t know anybody who did. So I kept it a cappella, and began to sing it this way in my live show. This detail, singing the song alone with no accompaniment, affected everything to come.

I noticed right away, at my shows, that whenever I opened my mouth and sang, “I am sitting, in the morning...”, people would stop drinking and talking, and immediately whirl around and stare at the stage. So I used it as an opening song. I can’t think of a single time that this didn’t work. Even at the Prince’s Trust concert in 1986, in front of 10,000 people, I went onstage as the opening act and began the entire concert with that song — and it worked!

It was a short step to recording it that way and opening my second album with it, since it was such a successful song live.

For the album we created a reprise, which I hoped sounded sort of Brechtian.

As I mentioned before, the single “Luka” was on the same album, “Solitude Standing,” which ended up selling three million copies around the world. So it was a widely available album that led off with an a cappella song. I had heard some people used it to test their speakers — not just that song, but the whole album, because of the sonic quality. (I know for sure that Philip Glass used it at his sound checks and Karl-Heinz Brandenburg told me he knew people used it to test their speakers...)

A few years later, in 1990, I was on tour promoting “Days of Open Hand,” our follow-up. It wasn’t going that well, to put it bluntly. We had devoted a year to creating the album, spent a lot of money, thought and rethought every note and syllable. But the reviews were mixed. In the end, it sold “only a million, which these days would of course be considered a miracle.

We were backstage at the Arsenio Hall show when my manager told me that some boys calling themselves DNA, in England — Bath, to be specific — had taken “Tom’s Diner” and put a dance track to it. They had “re-mixed” it. (I don’t remember what we called that type of music back then — house? rap? hip-hop? It wasn’t “disco” or “thrash-metal.”) My manager, Ron Fierstein, told me that A&M and Polygram were considering taking legal action against them for copyright violation.

I thought, well, let me listen to it — and immediately liked it. It made me laugh. It wasn't a parody, which is what I was afraid of. The song is the same, my voice is still my voice, the story still the story, even though they left out the very end (they told me later they thought it sounded weird, musically, to keep the ending).

**Rosanne Cash tells how to write a song via e-mail.**

**'So It Goes': How It Went**

**By Rosanne Cash**

(<http://measureformeasure.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/04/21/so-it-goes-how-it-went/>)

Joe Henry and I had been talking about writing together for ages, and even tried it once, circa 2000, with uneven results. But now seemed the right time. He started the engine, so he gets to take the wheel. I wrote him an e-mail.

I am hesitating with the disclaimer I want to issue here, about how I never let anyone see my lyrics this early in the game, and how I haven't written for a long while, so maybe it's a little awkward and stiff . . . Oh. There's the disclaimer.

I wrote one to Joe, too:

February 28, 2008

Joe,

this is SO rough and even a little juvenile, but there's something here to pull out I think.. really. this is just an IDEA.. not a song yet.

**SO IT GOES**

I lost two friends, and each stood alone  
 one died by the hand of God, one by his own  
 I loved them both but  
 so it goes,  
 so it goes

Love and madness go hand in glove  
 first the madness, and then the love  
 I want you but you'll never know  
 so it goes  
 so it goes

No one drives me like I drive myself  
 I want to rest and put me on a shelf  
 but just ahead are the lights of home  
 so, so it goes  
 so it goes

We have in common an uncommon grace

to live in this time, this ??, this place  
 New York and everyone we know  
 So it goes  
 so it goes

Many years and many friends  
 Never pass this way again  
 The last one standing is the first one home  
 so it goes, so it goes  
 so it goes

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A note: It is not in my nature to co-write; I would rather go deep into the underworld alone, like Persephone looking for the pomegranate. The solitude and the simple satisfaction of having my own phrases laid out like beads on a necklace, while fine-tuning my melodies, suits me entirely. But I have pushed myself to be a co-writer more often in recent years and to force myself to forgo both the arrogance and the insecurity of the solo voice. My songwriting style is a synthesis of my strengths and my limitations, and occasionally it behooves me to borrow from someone else's strength, and offer a key to the locked door of someone else's limitations. I had to give up the pride of thinking myself only a journalistic songwriter, in order to become a better writer overall.

Joe and I have already weathered the most uncomfortable moment in co-writing: the take-back. Last year, he had asked whether I minded if he took a prose work of mine called "What Did You Dream This Time?" to use some of the lines and ideas in a song, which we would co-write. I agreed, but when he actually did it, and I heard my lines inside his song, I felt suddenly and acutely territorial. It took me a couple weeks, but I gathered the courage to tell him that I wanted those lines back, and that he couldn't use them in the song. We got through it, preserved our friendship, and got back around to writing together again.

Not only that, but I changed my mind a few months later when he sat in my living room and played me the song both ways — with my lines, and with his revision. I asked him to put my lines back in.

That experience made this one, writing "So It Goes," easier, and more compatible. I'm not afraid of him, and he's not afraid of me. We know we can say anything, even though we may writhe in paroxysms of insecurity while we're saying it.

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Joe wrote back right away ("i quite like the tone you've established with this one, rose"), with changes to the lyrics:

I lost two friends, each one alone  
 One by the hand of God, one by his own  
 Oh, I loved them both, that same God knows—  
 And so it goes,  
 So it goes

Wisdom and madness go hand in glove  
One falls to the other, like need into love  
I want you in ways that nobody knows—  
And so it goes,  
So it goes

We have in common an uncommon grace  
Taught us by time, revealed by the face of  
Beauty in even the worst that we know—  
And so it goes,  
So it goes

(Sung as a bridge?)  
There's No one who drives me like I drive myself  
Once more around before I rest on the shelf  
Home is just one step beyond what I see  
And darkness the thing one step behind me...

Many years pass, and so many friends  
And none of us ever may pass here again  
The last of us standing the first one who knows—  
So it goes, so it goes  
So it goes, so it goes

Although I missed my line about New York, as I thought it gave a sense of physical weight to the song, I understood intuitively why Joe had eliminated it, and I let it go without saying anything. (I do love geography in songs, however. It gives me a special thrill. My own songs that are tied to a particular place include “Seventh Avenue,” “Sleeping in Paris” and “House on the Lake” — among many others.) I liked how he made the last line “the first one who knows,” rather than “the first one home,” and overall he gave the lyrics a rhythmic structure that just worked better. I was delighted.

From: Rosanne Cash  
To: Joe Henry

oh wow... you made it a real song.  
I love it. thank you thank you thank you.  
and I like the alternate verse better, with ‘revealed by the  
space.’ . I love the two lines that carry over... adds so much  
fluidity. Didn't Shakespeare do that??  
Yeah.  
xxxRose

Soon Joe wrote me back as follows:

still playing with this some, as i really like the shape and feel. one thing i find i like sometimes -  
and think it might work here- is to create a form of 2 verses, a bridge, then a 3rd verse; have an

instrumental break, and then sing a variation of the 3rd verse over a repeated bridge form; then conclude with a final verse. did i describe that right? what it does is puts a different spin on a particularly pivotal verse...makes it like a hinge in the song...allows something important to repeat and still be heard as an evolving thought.

i'll show you what i mean shortly if it works; but i DO think it works having a pair of couplets — unresolved by the refrain line — as a bridge. and i like that one about driving yourself in particular being the bridge...it swings to the personal in a way that the other verses are a little more objective.

thanks for the good words.

love,

joe

ps. and yes...shakespeare dabbled with this sort of the thing . . . amazing how good he remains . . . just flip through the sonnets.

I felt very comfortable letting Joe guide this song to completion, and the whole experience was so easy and fluid that it boded very well for our future co-writing endeavors.

From: Rosanne Cash

To: Joe Henry

it's become very elegant, I think.

I love that you reprised the verse into a bridge. Do you need the word 'thing' ? ["But I see in you the best thing that I am"].

could it just be 'best that I am' and scan correctly?

\*\*\*\*\*

It was time to think about a melody, but I was so sick of my own melodies that I was hoping to get Joe to do the heavy lifting on that as well. I thought if I wrote one more song with a 1-4-6 minor progression I was going to have to shoot myself, or let all the other songwriters of the world do it for me, which they probably would be keen for.

From: Rosanne Cash

To: Joe Henry

Subject: So It Goes

Joe, Just reading the lyrics to So it Goes... this is really good.

have you tinkered with a melody yet? I want so much for YOU to write the melody because you know more chords than me. you know what I mean— you would take it someplace I probably wouldn't know how to.

also— first bridge: what if the last line was truncated, if it worked with the melody, so it had only 4 syllables or so— does that work? Or is it not necessary?

I hope I am looking at the last set of lyrics you sent.

Joe wrote back, and sent an attachment (you can play the song — see above):

rose,

here's a really rough run through this (with dinner waiting). see if this is anything like what you'd imagined.

i'm tough as nails...give it to me straight. is this something you can work with?

Joe

From: Rosanne Cash  
To: Joe Henry  
Subject: Re: so it goes

I'm listening with tears. I loved it from the fourth bar.

Joe was coming to New York from his home in southern California in the next week. We made plans to meet in the studio and demo the song together.

## **TAKE-HOME EXERCISES**

1. Look back through your GWN journal for a poem or short story you've written this year. Try to organize it into a song that has at least one verse, pre-chorus, chorus, and bridge. Remember that this is only one way to write a song!
2. Pick one of your favorite songs, and see if you can identify the verse, pre-chorus, chorus, and bridge.
3. Try re-writing the lyrics to one of your favorite songs, maintaining the melody but making the words all your own.
4. Co-write a song with your mentor or a friend over email—or even IM or text messaging.