



# THE CONTEMPORARY MUSIC CENTER

a program of the Council For Christian Colleges & Universities

## SYLLABUS ESSENTIALS OF SONGWRITING

**Instructor: Rick Elias**

[rick@cmcnashville.com](mailto:rick@cmcnashville.com)

COURSE HOURS: M/T/W 10:30 a.m. - Noon

CREDIT: 3 semester credits

These recommended credits will be granted by your home institution. They will not be considered for transfer credits.

COURSE EQUIVALENCY:

This course may meet the requirement of an upper-level class in Songwriting, English, or Poetry.

OFFICE HOURS:

Our "physical and virtual doors are always open." If you have a question please don't hesitate to ask. If you would like to set up an appointment, we can do that too. As a courtesy, try not to call after 11PM or before 9AM, unless there is an emergency.

CATALOGUE DESCRIPTION:

This is the practical application and technique of the working songwriter. Melody, lyrics, "hooks," points of view and song logic will be covered. Solo writing as well as the concept of collaboration are introduced. Participants will work individually and in small groups.

OBJECTIVES

- Learn and employ both conventional and unconventional song structures.
- Establish the difference between simple expression and communication through song, and how to establish a musical dialogue with the listener.
- The fundamentals of lyric writing through the usage of rhyme and meter.
- Employing various writing devices to help make a song more effective - POV, object writing, tension and release, prosody.
- How to use technology to organize your thoughts and help complete a song.
- How and when to employ "loops".
- Charting your songs using the "Number System".
- The symbiotic relationship between live performance, studio production, and modern songwriting.
- Write, critique, and rewrite 2 master songs and 4 assignment songs.



# THE CONTEMPORARY MUSIC CENTER

a program of the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities

## METHODOLOGY:

The student is required to write 6 songs total over a 12 week period - the first week is orientation and the last week is finals. We consider a finished song to be the work equivalent of a 15-25 page research paper. Each song will go through a life cycle similar to the one shown below:

- First draft - this is a fully complete song with lyrics and recognizable song form
- Second draft - after faculty and peer review, the song is brought back with edits
- Demo - song is recorded in the studio in demo form which means one instrument and vocal unless a loop is required to realize the song's groove
- Rehearsal - the song is taken to rehearsal and various parts are created and "orchestrated" by the band
- Hammer-time - the live version of the song is critiqued by faculty and students
- Hammer-time follow-up - faculty meet with band two days later and hear the edits
- CMC Live - the song is performed live at the Thursday night CMC Live
- Game Tape - the song is reviewed on tape the next day and further suggestions are made
- Master - song is considered for the master recording cycle and recorded
- Master Playback - if song is approved for master recording, it is reviewed during the Master Playback period by faculty and outside adjudicators
- Tour song - if song makes it to this stage, it is included in the live set for Road Tour

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- Attendance: Woody Allen has said, the key to success is showing up. We agree. Students are required to attend all classes. Habitual tardiness or absence, defined as 5 or more tardies/absences, will result in the reduction of one full letter grade.
- Preparation: Students are expected to come to class fully prepared to discuss all relevant materials.
- Participation: A successful student will regularly participate in classrooms discussions and Q&A periods. Mere passive observation will negatively impact your grade.
- Assignments: Songs are due on the due date - there are no incomplete or unfinished assignments. If you have to come in and hum nonsense for 120 bars, so be it.
- Reading, Listening and Viewing: Extensive reading, listening and film viewing will be required. Student participation will be monitored via discussions, reports, quizzes and papers.

## REQUIRED READING:

"Songwriters on Songwriting" by Paul Zollo

The Lefsetz Letter ( <http://www.lefsetz.com/lists/?p=subscribe&id=1>)

"Ripped" by Greg Kot

"Outliers" by Malcolm Gladwell



# THE CONTEMPORARY MUSIC CENTER

a program of the Council For Christian Colleges & Universities

## GRADING:

It is important to note that grades are not an assessment of your soul, your potential, or even hard work. They are an assessment of the quality of your work in this class. We also place great value on your attitude and demonstration of improvement.

The following is the CCCU Student Programs grading policy. This policy is administered by all CCCU Student Programs worldwide. The CCCU prides itself on the competitive nature of its admissions and its courses. Please note that a "B" is a good grade that represents "competent and complete" work. "A" grades are earned only by "superior" work. By that definition, "A" grades are a minority of grades earned by students. It is not impossible to earn an "A," but it is difficult.

A = Excellent creative and integrative work, revealing superior analysis and content.

B = Good work, competent and complete

C = Adequate work

D = Less than adequate work

F = Completely fails to meet expectations

We are always open to discussing any concerns over grading. If you have any questions or concerns, please come see me.

## FINAL GRADE BREAKDOWN

20% Attendance, preparation and participation in class

60% Accuracy, creativity and professionalism of completed classroom and practicum assignments

20% Faculty review

## GRADE PERCENTAGE VALUES

Letter grades have the following percentage values:

A 93-100

A- 90-92

B+ 87-89

B 83-86

B- 80-82

(same pattern continues for other letter grades)

## REPORTING GRADES

Final grades for the course will be mailed to students and their home institution after the completion of the semester.

## ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

In the event of plagiarism, no credit will be granted for the assignment. Other disciplinary action may follow.



# THE CONTEMPORARY MUSIC CENTER

a program of the Council For Christian Colleges & Universities

## COURSE SCHEDULE

- Week 1: Work ethic vs talent, Masterwriter demo (organizing your songs and ideas), Song structure (SongBlox™), Song 1 critique  
Weekend assignment - rewrite Song 1 per critique
- Week 2: Song 1 review, Fundamentals of Rhyming and Meter, Object writing exercise  
Weekend assignment - write Song 2 to picture
- Week 3: Song 2 critique, Master Song (1) critique  
Weekend assignment - rewrite Master per critique
- Week 4: Master Song review, Small group co-writing  
Weekend assignment - collaborate with your group and write Song 4
- Week 5: Song 4 co-write review, Born to Run documentary, Chord progressions and Melody exercise
- Week 6: Review 1st Master Recording, POV and Subjective/Objective writing exercise, Hooks
- Week 7: Guest speaker, Prosody, Metaphors and Symbols  
Weekend assignment - Song 5, write lyric to famous melody
- Week 8: Rhythm Section clinic, Song 5 review, Troubadours documentary
- Week 9: Master Song (2) critique, Writer/Publisher panel.  
Weekend assignment - rewrite Master Song (2)
- Week 10: Master Song (2) review
- Week 11: Tour
- Week 12: Tour review, break.
- Week 13: Student evaluations, Guest speaker
- Week 14: Review 2nd Master Recording, Final Exam week