

The Creative Mind

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["The Singer Songwriters Toolbox - Book 1"](#)
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The creative mind

The creative mind is a fascinating and important part of your brain that is constantly being researched. In simple terms your creative side is developed in the right side of your brain with the left side of your brain being responsible for more logical and rational thought.

Some songwriters have been known to believe in theories such as divine intervention, natural talent and the existence of an elusive and esoteric inspirational creature called 'the muse'. Whichever theory you subscribe to, the creative mind is an important part of human development.

Essentially your creative mind is the engine driving your songwriting and, like an engine, it must be constantly maintained and protected. An important concept to be aware of at this early stage of your songwriting development is the shift in mindset required to become a successful songwriter.

The fact that you may work a steady day job in an office or shop has no relevance to your creative mind. By thinking of yourself as a songwriter first you will begin to observe people closer and listen harder to conversations.

I cannot count the number of jobs I have had where, although I was physically at work, my creative mind was free to explore and invent new songs and melodies. A songwriter is what you are not what you do.

Start thinking like a songwriter and pay special attention to the positive and negative internal and external stimuli that can affect your creative mind.

Protecting and feeding your creative mind

The creative mind is a highly sensitive sponge that is continually absorbing un-filtered internal and external stimuli. It is therefore important to your songwriting that you have a filter in place to avoid the negative influences that can destroy your creative process.

Your creative mind is the child-like side of your brain that needs constant mental stimulation to avoid boredom. With this in mind you can begin to avoid passive mental activities (such as watching TV) and replace them with positive activities such as books, poetry and art.

Essentially your creative mind is a garden that needs constant nurturing if it is to yield the results you desire. The more time spent away from your creative garden increases the chance of song ideas lying fallow and undeveloped.

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Books

A good book is like fresh fruit for your mind. To maintain a healthy creative flow we must exercise our imaginations regularly by reading as many books as we can.

Books are not mentally passive like TV and require us to engage our minds in absorbing different situations and experiences that can fuel our imaginations and provide us with the inspiration needed to create songs.

Books fill our creative minds with an increased vocabulary, descriptive passages, interesting turn of phrases and a love of beautiful words. Books can be thought of as the gymnasium where we can tone up our creative mind and fill our head with the inspiration and energy to write.

The art of reading can also take the form of newspapers and magazines which can provide an unlimited source of inspirational articles and subject matters for your songs.

Music

Music is the lifeblood of your songwriting career. Surround yourself with music that speaks to your soul.

It is essential to your songwriting that you are able to open yourself up to experimenting with different musical styles and looking at other ways of expressing human emotion.

You may find, through researching other musical styles, that you will take elements of the style that you like and incorporate it into your own music. For example, you may gain an appreciation of the phrasing techniques in hip hop, the instrumentation in jazz or the down-to-earth lyrical technique of country.

The more open minded you are to different musical styles, the more diverse and interesting your songs will become.

Films

A good film can provide a challenging storyline and situation that you can draw upon for inspiring subject matter in your songs.

One method you can use for writing songs is to turn the sound down whilst the film is going and play your guitar over the film, providing a soundtrack to the events on screen.

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This is a great way to experiment with creating an atmosphere with your songs and to opening your creative mind up to new lyrical ideas. The more atmospheric and strong the storyline is the better.

Try to choose films that challenge your thinking and that contain an excellent standard of cinematic imagery.

Road movies of the 1970's such as 'Midnight Cowboy', 'Vanishing point' and 'Paris, Texas' can provide an exciting sense of movement and diverse characters to fuel your creative mind.

1960's British new wave cinema such as 'A taste of honey' and 'Saturday Night, Sunday Morning' will provide dramatic working-class storylines and a grim sense of realism.

Art

Absorbing a variety of different visual art forms such as paintings, photographs, sculpture, dance and theatre will refresh your creativity with new and exciting ways of looking at life.

Take the time to treat your mind to creative excursions where the emphasis is on pure inspiration and pay special attention to how other art forms convey emotion.

Poetry

Finding your favourite poet or poem is also an exciting and rewarding exercise for your songwriting mind.

From the classical styles of the European poets to modern American poetry, the world of poetry can be inspiring, introspective and intuitive encompassing such human emotions as anger, love, sadness, loss and hope.

The rhythmic and exciting jazz inspired styles of the 1950's American 'Beat' poets such as Gregory Corso, Alan Ginsberg and Lawrence Ferlinghetti will provide your creative mind with a beautifully articulated understanding of the pains and joys of urban life.

Some other poets that are required reading for any songwriter are e.e.cummings, Charles Bukowski, Robert Frost, Walt Whitman and William Carlos Williams.

Poetry is a vital medium to explore in your development as a songwriter as it will provide you with rhyme, rhythm and reasons to write.

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Yoga and Meditation

The best exercise for the alignment of body, mind and heart is the spiritual discipline of yoga. Yoga improves posture, increases the intake of oxygen, and enhances the functioning of the nervous, respiratory, digestive, endocrine, reproductive, and elimination systems.

For songwriters, yoga provides an opportunity to gaze inwards and examine our perception of life, our own identity and our spiritual nature.

Yoga is about transformation. Through the disciplined practice of held postures known as 'asanas' synchronized with breath control or 'pranayama', we can acquaint ourselves with the workings of the subconscious mind and thus allow our creativity to flow freely through our voice and instrument.

Meditation through the practice of yoga works remarkably well in achieving harmony and helps the mind work in sync with the body. This in turn creates a remarkable calmness and a positive outlook helping the person become more compassionate; it helps the person become kinder and gentler and more ethical.

Thus meditation and yoga both work together in achieving the common goal of unity of mind, body and spirit – a state of eternal bliss.

The five main yoga styles are listed below:

1. Hatha Yoga - Is an element of Raja yoga, deals mainly with physical postures and breathing and gives the practitioner a truly radiant health, manifested through increased flexibility, strength, stamina, and improved circulation of one's blood and other vital fluids through the body's organs and glands.

Hatha Yoga also strengthens the immune system.

2. Karma Yoga – Emphasizes spiritual practice to help the individual unify body, mind, and heart through certain practices in one's daily life and work.

3. Bhakti Yoga – Is a devotional form, generally encompasses chanting, reading of scriptures and worship practices.

4. Iyengar Yoga – Is a balanced system using a few basic standing poses to 'open up' the body, freeing the joints, stretching the muscles and allowing blood to circulate. It's very good for the spine, and keeps all your joints mobile.

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5. Ashtanga Yoga – Involves synchronizing the breath with progressive series of postures combining strength, endurance and flexibility.

Ashatanga is a yoga practice producing intense internal heat and a profuse, purifying sweat that detoxifies muscles and organs. The result is improved circulation, a light and strong body, and a calm mind.

Walking

Physical exercise promotes increased blood flow to the brain and increases feelings of well being through the release of endorphins. The act of repetitive exercise will free your mind to work over lyrical ideas and melody lines while at the same time maintaining health and fitness.

One of the simplest and best exercises to clear your mind of external worries and focus on your creative thought patterns is the humble walk.

The rhythmic and relaxed pace of walking and the slow change of scenery will allow your subconscious mind to work on song ideas while the fresh air will invigorate your body allowing the maximum creative time on your return home.

To increase the effectiveness of your songwriting walk you should run through your latest song ideas prior to your walk so that your mind can focus on creating new lyrics or melodic directions.

Other low-impact and rhythmic physical activities that can induce a meditative mental state include swimming, cycling, driving, and martial arts such as tai chi.

Taking care of your body

To gain maximum time in your songwriting room you must be aware of the negative food groups such as chocolate, processed and refined food and unhealthy snacks that can produce feelings of sluggishness and poor concentration that are anathema to a serious songwriter.

By simply maintaining a healthy diet of fresh fruit, vegetables, pulses and brain food such as fish and omega-3, you will in turn increase your physical and mental energy for effective songwriting. You should also be aware of the effects of rest and sleep on your minds ability to maintain the prolonged concentration necessary for creating music.

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Musicians keep odd hours. It is important to find out what time of the day or night your creative mind is the most active and work your sleep patterns around that.

Some people find that they work best in the freshness of the early morning and some work best in the quietness of the last thing at night.

There is no right or wrong time for writing. As long as you are maintaining a healthy flow of songs and ideas then keep doing it. Your physical health will always have a direct influence on your mental effectiveness as a songwriter. It is therefore vital that you approach your diet and exercise routine with commitment and focus.

You are what you eat and how you sleep.

Protecting your creative mind – The mental diet

As we have learnt, the creative mind has no conscious defenses and thus passively accepts everything you feed it in the form of external stimuli.

It is therefore extremely important to your longevity as a creative being that you carefully filter the stimuli that is passed through to the creative idea factory inside your mind. You can think of this filtering process as a form of mental 'diet'.

By feeding your mind an excess of unhealthy passive mental activities, your creativity will become lazy and sluggish and thereby unable to light the spark of song writing inspiration.

We can now explore some of these negative influences to your creative mind in more detail starting with that old enemy of creativity, television.

Television – the drug of the nation

Television is one of the worst offenders for defusing your creative impulses. The passive mental attitude that pervades excessive TV watching is like throwing water on a fire as far as your imagination goes.

TV is like junk food for the creative mind. With no mental involvement, your mind is left to get fat and lazy, ultimately killing off your chances of inspiration. A strictly controlled diet away from TV is essential for maximising your songwriting time and building up your creative muscles.

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By replacing your mental diet of TV watching with the far healthier option of reading books or taking a songwriting walk you will find that your creative mind will begin to wake up and start to buzz with melodic ideas. As we have learnt, your creative mind is like a child that constantly needs stimulation to develop ideas.

By regularly sitting your mind in front of the box you will quickly and effectively destroy its curiosity and wonderment and leave it in a state of electronic hypnosis.

Becoming a songwriter means that you have a special responsibility to protect your creativity from harmful external stimuli and to begin to attune yourself to the exciting inspirational flow of an uncluttered mind.

Worry

This brings us to an important concept to be aware of in the art of songwriting. It is a common myth that you need to be unhappy to be creative.

The truth is that in reality the opposite is true. While we are depressed, obsessing about or just simply worried about a specific unresolved issue in our lives, then that problem will take up all of our mind's energy, creatively and rationally, until that particular problem is dealt with.

The image of the depressed writer in a lonely bed sit being a prolific source of creative energy is a romanticised idea.

It is true that any powerful experience can fuel a burst of creative energy, but it is only after we have had time to reflect upon the experience that we will have the freedom of mind to transfer it into words and music.

There is absolutely nothing wrong in drawing upon old experiences good or bad, the trick is to try not to place any negative energy physically into your creative space.

Writers block

The theory of writers block is defined by prolonged and frustrating periods of uncreative thought. The fear of staring at an empty page and the feeling that your creative muse has vanished has struck fear into the hearts of artists for centuries. Fortunately in reality the concept of writer's block does not exist.

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The feelings of emptiness you may feel at various stages of your songwriting career are simply indicators that you need to rest and recuperate your creative mind.

Your creative mind is a child that experiences high degrees of boredom and excitement and refuses to be forced into work. In these stages of slow creativity you must learn to appease your inner child and treat your creative side to positive mental stimulation such as traveling, listening to music and people-watching.

It is important that you re-connect with the reasons that you write songs in the first place. Creative holidays away from your writing room will allow your inner child to absorb the fascinating scenery and situations that will later become songs.

The inner critic

The inner critic is a complex and creatively dangerous facet of your conscious mind. If left uncontrolled, the inner critic has the potential stop your creative process dead.

The inner critic is the storehouse for all of our life experience both good and bad. When used properly, this internal critic will happily guide us through life using the lessons we have learnt to avoid repeating mistakes.

The inner critic will advise us when we are not using our full ability and opting for an easy road. This facet is particularly useful in motivating us to write better songs and expanding our song writing focus.

The inner critic only becomes harmful to our creativity when we begin to trust its advice without question and blindly listen to its unbalanced view of past experiences.

The inner critic works upon the dangerous logic that 'you failed last time, you shall therefore fail again'. When this mentality takes hold you avoid taking risks, become too insular and protective and your creative mind shuts down.

Song writing is a risky business. For your entire writing career you will be wearing your heart not only on your sleeve but as a complete jacket. You must therefore learn how to control the negative whisperings of your inner critic.

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It is essential that you develop a protective bubble around your song writing. Do not be swayed by the opinion of others. People will always put you down. Whether it is through jealousy, fear and malice, never allow the negativity of others to harm your creative mind.

The best way to build up immunity to negative and unconstructive criticism is through building up a healthy self-belief. Be good to your creative mind and associate only with supportive and positive people. Join a songwriting club where you can perform and discuss your song writing with like minded people. It is absolutely vital in the early stages of your song writing that you are allowed to grow and develop your craft in a healthy creative environment.

Even the great singer/songwriter Tim Buckley was moved to change a line of his most famous song 'Song to the siren' after his producer's wife laughed at it.

No matter how successful we become, songwriters and musicians are sensitive souls who will react to even the smallest put down. Choose your friends carefully and always protect your creative mind.

Affirmations

As we have learnt, the inner critic can be a relentless and damaging facet of our conscious mind. One of the most effective ways to negate the constant negative whispering of your inner critic is by the positive thinking technique of affirmations.

Affirmations have been a part of eastern philosophy for generations and are a simple principle with the potential to create real change in your songwriting focus and direction.

Essentially, affirmations are selected positive phrases that are repeated verbally to embed themselves into your subconscious mind. The subconscious is the ideas factory that acts upon information sent to it by the conscious mind.

Thus, if we constantly feed the subconscious negative information such as 'I will never be able to write a song' the subconscious will act accordingly until it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The subconscious mind cannot discriminate between negative, damaging thoughts and positive, healthy ones.

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Affirmations work upon the principle that if you feed more positive thoughts than negative thoughts into your subconscious mind then you will strengthen your positive mindset and create confidence where there was doubt and self-belief where there was self-harm.

Affirmations can be tailored to your own personal situation but must always be phrased positively and in the present tense.

Some examples would be:

'I am becoming the best songwriter I can be'
'I believe in myself'
'Each day I am becoming a better and better songwriter'
'I am happy, calm and focused to write'
'I love to create'

Affirmations need to be repeated constantly both verbally and mentally if they are to enter your subconscious mind.

Always be aware of the thoughts you are sending to your subconscious mind. Monitor any negative thoughts and replace them with a positive affirmation. It will take time to discipline your mind to avoid dwelling on negative thoughts. Affirmations can be your strongest ally in becoming a confident, creatively focused and positive songwriter.

Buddha once said 'With our thoughts we change the world'.

Brain washing

Brain washing is one of my own personal techniques for clearing my head for songwriting.

It is a rather unusual technique so be prepared. Brain washing is a mental exercise where you close your eyes and visualize your brain covered in dirt and mud with the dirt representing mundane external distractions such as work, shopping lists, bank payments etc.

In the brain washing exercise you can visualize cleaning off the clogged up mud from your brain and letting the dirty water run out of your ears. You can also clean the inside of the skull until both the brain and the 'brain room' looks clean.

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Once you have finished, you can visualize massaging the brain with your fingers whilst feeling the intense relaxation and calmness wash over you.

I have found the brain washing exercise to be second to none in revitalizing my thought processes, allowing me to write with clarity and without distraction.

Brain washing is also an exercise that can be done anywhere and at anytime. It may be unusual but it is highly effective.

Try it.

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