

Lee Pat's

# **SONGWRITING MANIFESTO**



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# **INSTRUMENTAL INTRO**

When I was a kid, my parents signed me up for music lessons.

Piano and solfège in grade school, then some classical guitar.

A little jazz improvisation in high school.

Each time, after a few years, I would see how much work it took to actually become good and I would gradually tune out.

Then, one day, high school was over and I was off to college on my own, all lessons and parental guidance behind me.

It happened too quickly or I was too slow.

My band split up before I could put it together.

Adolescence was over before I could get the upper hand.

All I had left were a few songs, learned and written, and a few chords and scales.

Learning the guitar coincided with Guns'n'Roses, Nirvana, Led Zeppelin, with my voice breaking, my heart breaking, my first poem attempts, my first songwriting attempts...

In a way, songwriting was one of the ways I acquired of dealing with stress, on a par with eating Snickers or watching TV.

In fact, songwriting was the perfect solution for my lazy ass.

It did not require hours of practice to be able to play the guitar while I sang and by all accounts even bad poems made for passable lyrics.

The rewards too appeared sweeter — looking cool, skipping school, simply being original!

Whatever people thought about my songs, I felt fulfilled writing and singing them.

I felt good.



Then, one day, university was over, looking for a job was over, getting married was over and I was off to adulthood with a family to support, all daydreams of rock stardom tucked away in an “Old Notebooks” cardboard box.

It happened too quickly or I was too slow.

Except...

I still couldn't stop thinking about music.

I would dream about it, worry about it, feel good about it, feel bad about it, steal time to write it, hide places to record it...

No one has put it better than Mr Morski with whom we share a hometown and a disposition for goofy lyrics about animals.

In his Musician's song, he admits that despite having heard the “musicians can't feed a family” adage, he keeps reaching for the guitar.

As is often the case with the best songs in our lives, this one was written about me.

I grew up hearing that adage from my parents, even as they paid for my music lessons.

Malleable as I was at that point in life, I managed to devote enough effort to the instrument to be able to play it at parties but not enough to make a living out of it (that was already established as impossible!).

Sure enough, I turned into a grown-up, with a family, living, by all accounts, a comfortable life, well-sheltered from the artist's financial predicament.

So why did I keep reaching for the guitar?

And, more importantly, was there a grown-up thing to do about it?

After years of soul-searching, I decided that yes, there was.

First, I wouldn't feel bad about it. I would embrace it.

Apparently, it was a big part of me, and it made no sense to live at war with myself.

Second, I would learn more about it. I would study the subject that was too silly for school but too interesting for me to neglect anymore.

And third, I would share all I know about it. I would be a helper, a co-writer, a teacher, a muse and a nuisance.

## **ACT I — EMBRACE IT!**

You breathe, bleed and breed music. Even if you only know two chords.

You hate stuff on the radio. Even if you secretly love some of it.

You sing in the bathroom. Even if everyone tells you to stop howling.

You love an instrument. Even if you can't carry it around.

You play an instrument. Even if you lack discipline.

Your body is an instrument. Even if you don't realize it.

You have tried to find chords by ear. Even if you gave up and ended up googling them.

You make your own chords. Even if you don't know what to call them.

You call them your song. Even if you might be wrong.

You form words for your song in your mouth. Even if they don't make sense.

You are in love with your song. Even if it's quite trite.

You feel giddy when you finish it. Even if it feels unfinished.

Your throat dries up when you play it for someone. Even if your eyes are quite wet.

Your heart skips beats. Even if you can't skip.

You like putting stuff together. Even if it falls apart a second later.

You make a mess. Even if you hate cleaning up.

You fear putting yourself out there. Yet you can't resist making a fool of yourself.



How can you keep singing about heartache when there is a war at your doorstep?

Isn't there a more responsible thing to do than howling at the moon and staring at the sun?

Why don't you try and fix things for a change?

Why don't you go into law or politics or teaching or shoemaking?

Because you are a songwriter.

So embrace it!

Don't make my mistake!

Don't wait until you've got mouths to feed and mortgages to pay, roofs to repair and bosses to cater to!

Better yet, make YOUR mistakes!

Make your mistakes while the stakes are still low.

Trust your gut before life guts your trust.

Be a fool for love before life rules out foolishness.

Feed your soul before it becomes just another RSS feed.

There will always be work to do and time to lose.

But there will never be another you and all you have is now.

So choose!

## **ACT II — STUDY IT!**

People will tell you about money and people will tell you about rules.

People will tell you about good songs and bad songs.

People will tell you how to write relatable lyrics, irresistible hooks, exquisite melodies, timeless hits.

People will tell you to analyze this and not to overanalyze it.

People will tell you you need theory and people will tell you you need to practice.

People will tell you to imitate and people will tell you to be original.

People will tell you not to listen to others in order to become unique and they will tell you the only way to be unique is to listen to others.

But you are already unique! And you do listen to others, whether you like it or not.

Nothing is new and yet nothing is quite the same for others as it is for you.

Everything is new to you, and you are new to everything and everyone.



So take it all in!

You don't have to believe it! You don't have to understand it!  
You don't have to implement it!

Just listen to what people have to say.

Let it sink in.

Whether you do what they say or not is irrelevant.

Just let it happen.

Be a sea of other people's advice.

Be a whirlpool of learning.

Analyze your favourite songs and don't analyze them.  
Write from a formula and write from unformed feelings.  
Write the chorus first and write the chorus last.  
Write without a chorus, write with only a chorus.  
Write a bad song and a good one. Write a sad song and a happy  
one.  
Write many songs and help many songs be written.  
Write one song a year. Write one song a day.

You are free to listen to advice and not to listen.  
Free to imitate bestsellers and not to imitate them.  
Free to follow the rules and fool around with them.  
Free to use formulas and abuse them.  
Free to be self-indulgent and self-conscious.  
Free to analyze what you write or let others worry about that.  
Free to be sad and not to be sad.  
Free to be mad and not to be mad.  
Free to be silly or smart.  
Free to write bad songs and like bad songs.  
Free to know theory or ignore it.

Be open and be brave.

Try everything and let everything try you out.

And then you will know.

## **ACT III — SHARE IT!**

Just don't wait until you understand it all before you start doing it.

Don't wait until it's perfect before you start sharing it.

Don't wait until you learn it all before you start teaching it.

Some things are certain.

You'll always have one more thing to learn, one more chord to fit in, one more finishing touch to add.

And it's never going to be perfect!

That's the beauty of it!

It never stops!

And if you choose it, and make it yours, you'll always be full of it — in the best possible way.



But this is not about you, your cool or your genius.

Be honest — did you get into this to be alone?

Or like me — to be liked by the girls?

Well, sometimes we get into things for the wrong reasons.

And sometimes, if we stick with things long enough, we find a right reason.

After a while, I found out it didn't matter anymore if the girls liked me.

What mattered was that I liked me!

What mattered was the excitement in looking for the next word or note, the joy in building something out of nothing, brick by brick, bird by bird.

What mattered was the postpartum orgasm I felt when a song had just come out of me.

What mattered were these marvellous babies around me that needed all the love in the world and none of its advice —

these wondrous new creatures just waiting to leave the nest, get into trouble and have babies of their own.

We are social animals, whether we like or not.

We depend on each other.

We are wired to be together.

We survive best when we're the most surrounded.

And songs are the ultimate sharing experience.

A social medium for the ages.

An orgy for virgins.

Is there a more innocent way of communicating with total strangers?

A more eloquent way of uttering the ineffable?

A fuller communion?

We're in this together.

We do this for ourselves, so that we can be fulfilled, but our only fulfilment comes from sharing our work with others.

Our only joy — from giving freely to those who we instinctively know we are one with.

So when you learn a tune — sing it to someone!

When you discover a chord — show it to someone!

And when you finish a song — give it to someone!



Better yet, when you start a song — ask someone to finish it with you!

They say it's when you leave your comfort zone that the magic happens.

And there's nothing quite as magical as crossing the boundaries of your perceived self.

It takes courage to open yourself up to migrant ideas, feelings, criticisms — to make yourself permeable.

But it's the way of life and the way of growth.

Isolated cells die, no man is an island and all that jazz.

So if you want to take your craft and art to the next level, give it to the world and take all that it throws back at you.

Share it in every way you can and soak up all that you are given in return.

Acknowledge your originality as the unique way you combine all the unoriginal bits that comprise and surround you.

Surround yourself with all the bits you want to absorb and mould into life and song.

It's a fine line between self-abnegation and self-preservation —

it's a tightrope act.

But it's the only way to the other side.

# CODA

And the other side is a beautiful place to be.

After I decided to finally take care of my creative self, a few things dawned on me.

I realised how insignificant my talent was (even before reading that it was optional).

I realised how far behind I was compared to all the wonderful songwriters and musicians out there.

I realised how vain the hope was of writing a better song than somebody else — and how futile.

And I realised how little any of that mattered.

What mattered was doing what you love, giving what you have,  
creating because you can...

and revelling in the opportunity you've been given.

You have more to say, do and share than you think — and much  
less time!

So start now, regardless of mistakes you have made or fear you might make.

Make a commitment, write down a goal with a date and ramble on!

Jeff Goins, who inspired this manifesto, would tell you the number one thing to do is to show up.

Every day!



You get good at the things you do every day.

Repetition is the mother of all learning.

Repetition (and variation) is also the mother of music.

So choose the motifs you want to include in the symphony of your life and work on them every day.

There's little else we can do but echo the lives that surround us on all sides at all times.

Originality is a myth, personality — a hoax, perfection — a pretence.

Brian Eno even questions genius.

Great artists, he suggests, might just be the tip of the iceberg of a great community around them.

By all means, start in your bedroom.

But don't stay there for too long.

Get up, get out, get going.

Find your scene, find your team, find your purpose.

Embrace it, study it, share it!

Every journey starts with the next step.

What's yours?

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## Thank you!

Feel free to share, shred or shirk this manifesto as you see fit. And don't be a stranger! You can reach me by [email](#) or visit [the website](#) for a challenge.

Love!