

MEET THE MASTERS SERIES – SONGWRITING INTENSIVE

Title: Crafting the Compelling Song Workshop: Ideas, Structure, Music, and Lyrics

Rodney Alejandro: Dean of Professional Writing and Music Technology at Berklee College of Music

November 29th and 30th

Time: 11am – 4pm

Description:

Transform your songwriting from inspiration to completion in this comprehensive weekend workshop led by Rodney Alejandro, Dean of Professional Writing and Music Technology at Berklee College of Music

This intensive 2-day weekend masterclass is designed for songwriters with no required musical or lyrical knowledge. The emphasis is on discovery and application of songwriting basics through an integrated learning approach. Each module follows a 20-minute format combining Strategic Overview, Technique Deep Dive, and Group Exercise to ensure immediate practical application of concepts learned.

The masterclass is structured with 12 modules per day, 20-minute integrated format, and Hands-on group exercises.

Workshop Learning Outcomes: By the end of this intensive 2-day workshop, participants will have developed a comprehensive foundation in songwriting craft, equipped with practical tools and techniques to continue their creative journey.

- Idea Generation - Capture and develop song seeds from diverse sources, building a sustainable creative practice through organized idea banking and thematic exploration.
- Narrative Structure - Construct compelling story arcs with clear beginnings, climaxes, and resolutions while understanding the specific functions of verses, choruses, and bridges.
- Musical Foundation - Apply melodic contour, harmonic color, and rhythmic patterns to create emotional impact and maintain listener engagement throughout your compositions.

- Lyrical Craft - Write vivid, specific lyrics that show rather than tell, using figurative language, symbolic imagery, and intentional point of view to create memorable songs.

Day 1: Ideas, Narrative, and Basic Structural Blueprint

Day 1 focuses on transforming initial sparks into usable concepts, defining the subject of the song, and understanding why song sections are necessary. We'll explore how to capture inspiration, develop themes, and build narrative arcs that engage listeners.

- Capturing Ideas: Learn to recognize and preserve fleeting "song seeds" through freewriting and idea banking techniques.
- Defining Theme & Subject: Distill brainstorming into clear themes and create focused character profiles with emotional depth.
- Building Narrative: Map story arcs and craft vivid, image-based lyrics that show rather than tell.
- Understanding Structure: Master the function of verses, choruses, and bridges to create engaging song flow.

Morning Session: *From Spark to Story*

A. 11:00 AM - Capturing the Song Spark

Learn to recognize fleeting ideas through freewriting techniques.

Exercise: 5-minute continuous writing to identify 3 potential song seeds.

B. 11:20 AM - Sources & Idea Bank

Build a system to organize inspiration from diverse sources.

Exercise: Scavenger hunt through non-musical art forms to find song ideas.

C. 11:40 AM - Theme Identification

Distill ideas into unifying themes for emotional resonance.

Exercise: Articulate underlying themes and explain their universal appeal.

D. 12:00 PM - Defining the Subject

Create focused character profiles with core conflicts.

Exercise: Develop a subject profile outlining emotional state and motivation.

E. 12:20 PM - Identifying Narrative Arc

Chart story progression from beginning to resolution.

Exercise: Map inciting incident, climax, and resolution for a lyric fragment.

F. 12:40 PM - Lyrical Storytelling Basics

Transform clichés into vivid imagery.

Exercise: Revise common phrases into image-based lines that show the story.

Afternoon Session: Structure and Flow

A. Understanding Song Sections

2:00 PM - Defining Key Sections: Learn how verses tell stories, choruses deliver hooks, and bridges provide departure. Analyze examples to identify section functions.

2:20 PM - Achieving Basic Flow: Create seamless transitions using vocal dynamics and rhythmic techniques to maintain momentum between sections.

2:40 PM - Fundamental Structures: Master Verse-Chorus and AABA forms. Practice outlining lyric fragments using classic song structures.

B. Creating Dynamic Contrast

3:00 PM - Sectional Contrast: Use dynamic shifts in melody and rhythm to prevent monotony. Identify how verses differ from choruses in tempo and density.

3:20 PM - Repetition & Variation: Balance familiarity with freshness through subtle melodic and rhythmic changes to repeated phrases.

3:40 PM - Tension & Release: Build dramatic momentum using dynamics and tempo. Map non-harmonic devices to increase tension before resolution.

Day 2 Musical Frameworks and Essential Lyrical Craft

Day 2 introduces foundational concepts of melody, rhythm, and harmony, alongside the essential tools needed to write specific, detailed lyrics that bring songs to life. We'll explore how musical elements shape emotion and how precise language creates vivid storytelling.

Morning Session: Melody, Harmony, and Rhythm

A. Melodic Contour & Shape

11:00 AM - Learn how melodic rise and fall dictates emotional impact. Sketch contours and compose melodies that fit desired emotional shapes.

B. Motif & Unity

11:20 AM - Develop melodic DNA through motif repetition. Transform a 4-note motif for use across different song sections.

C. Basic Harmony & Color

11:40 AM - Explore emotional color through I-IV-V progressions. Practice simple voicings to create smooth harmonic movement.

D. Major vs. Minor Emotion

12:00 PM - Shift between major (happy/stable) and minor (sad/tense) to change emotional weight. Experiment with chord quality transformations.

E. Rhythm & Emotion

12:20 PM - Use tempo and rhythmic patterns to shape emotional impact. Compose rhythmic passages conveying restlessness or calm.

F. Basic Syncopation

12:40 PM - Create groove through off-beat emphasis. Introduce syncopated accents to feel rhythmic surprise and energy.

G. The Power of Musical Elements

<u>Melody</u>	<u>Harmony</u>	<u>Rhythm</u>
Contour shapes emotion	Chords provide color	Tempo drives emotion
Motifs create unity	Major/minor shift mood	Patterns create energy
Phrasing adds flow	Progressions build movement	Syncopation adds surprise

Understanding these foundational musical elements allows songwriters to make intentional choices that enhance emotional impact and create memorable, engaging compositions. Each element works together to support the story and theme of your song.

Afternoon Session: Essential Lyrical Craft

A. Setting the Scene

2:00 PM

Establish narrative foundation through specific "What, When, Where" details. Use sensory descriptions to create atmospheric locations.

B. Character & Motivation

2:20 PM

Define the "Who, Why, How" to drive plot. Write lines that clearly state goals and fears, ensuring actions align with intent.

C. Show, Don't Tell

2:40 PM

Replace abstract statements with vivid action. Transform flat emotional declarations into evocative sensory experiences.

D. Basic Figurative Language

3:00 PM Add depth and memorability through metaphor and simile.

Practice incorporating simple literary devices to elevate ordinary ideas into compelling imagery.

E. Symbolic Imagery

3:20 PM

Ground abstract concepts in concrete objects. Learn to represent ideas like loneliness or freedom through recognizable, tangible images that resonate emotionally.

F. Point of View

3:40 PM

Define the listener's relationship to the narrative through perspective. Explore how shifting between "I," "You," and "He/She" alters intimacy and emotional connection.

BIOGRAPHY

A musician, songwriter, producer, and executive, Rodney Alejandro has been working in the music industry since he signed his first major-label record deal at 19. From then on, he has worked on many award-winning projects in the English, Spanish, and Asian music markets. He has contributed to Grammy- and Latin Grammy-nominated projects in various genres and to the 2004 *Billboard* Latin Pop Album of the Year. He has also contributed to many TV shows, writing the Spanish-language theme for *The Ellen Degeneres Show*, and working as the main

title composer/producer for the Golden Globe–winning drama series *The Shield*. He was a performing member of the Script, an international pop band, as keyboardist and music director. He has also performed with will.i.am, Sofia Carson, Labrinth, Mañá, Stevie Wonder, Roger Daltrey, Eric Clapton, Paulina Rubio, Luis Fonsi, CeeLo Green, and Sebastián Yatra, to name a few. He graduated summa cum laude with a bachelor's degree from Berklee College of Music and was a valedictorian at Full Sail University, where he received a master's degree in entertainment business.