

THOUGHTS AT SEMESTER'S END

As songwriters, we are trying to communicate. Any song, speech, film, story, has the same task; to grab someone's attention, hold it, build up to the main point, hit 'em hard, make sure they've got it, then release them.

"Tell them what you're going to tell them, tell them, then tell them what you told them." (Ralph Murphy)

Don't try to "hide" in a song.

Nothing you feel or have experienced is a "first."

Don't be afraid to be yourself. Sometimes the more personal a song is, the more likely it is to touch others.

Your first songs might be crap. Learn from them and keep getting better. Don't obsess about a song that stumps you. Move on and come back later with a fresh perspective.

Need an idea? Write a song for someone you care about, mom, dad, friend, new or old lover. Write it for only that one person, make it personal, even embarrassingly so, don't think about the market or how a critic might respond. I bet it will touch more people than an attempt at reaching and pleasing everyone.

Find a balance between predictability and surprise, in your lyrics and melodies. People want their expectations fulfilled---but with a twist.

Show it don't say it

Make me laugh, think, cry or dance

Ask yourself "who's saying this and why?" when you're stuck on an idea.

Dare to be dumb, but there is a big difference between hip dumb and just plain stupid

"In some songs there's so much tap-dancing, sky-diving, bungee-jumping and uni-cycling that the writer's greater goal just seems like an afterthought. Sometimes the best way to get from point A to point B is to simply walk." (Anonymous)

If you only define yourself by success, then you will eventually have to define yourself by the lack thereof, which is an inevitable part of any career. Define yourself by the quality of your work.

Find ways to stay inspired. Keep going back to that place where you loved music without expecting anything, when you were a fan, not a professional. Make it fun. If the process feels like work, the finished product will too.

It's a marathon not a sprint.

In any media, the large majority of product will always be fluff, derivative "flavor of the month", crap, trash. It will always feature marginally talented people and it will piss you off. It will be the musical, film, TV and literary equivalent of each week's issue of US magazine; easy to look at, enjoyable as a guilty pleasure, and totally valueless as of the next week.

Some people love to create that stuff and are very good at it. There are many opportunities to make some \$ down that road. If that's the path you choose, you will have to work every bit as hard as you would on a more artistic path.

Many start out wanting to change the world and it ends up changing them. That's ok, but keep trying to raise the bar for your own work. You can bet that the competition is.

In this business there are a million reasons to get discouraged and to be negative. You'll meet people who grumble constantly. Avoid them. Be realistic, assess your talents and the market you're shooting for and keep focused on the places where they intersect.

Make an honest assessment of the things that are most productive and most counter-productive about yourself. If you're unsure, ask 3 friends and 3 close family members to list them and I bet they will be in agreement. Then start enhancing the 1st and minimalizing the 2nd. The longer you forge behavior patterns, the easier good ones are to continue and the harder bad ones are to break.

Change is coming to get you. If you cower in the corner, you'll get the crap kicked out of you. Meet it halfway and dance with it.

Celebrate all your victories, even the small ones, and mourn all defeats.

Then get back to work.

The only thing you can ultimately control is the quality of your work. That will determine the path you take in the music or any other business.

If you do have some success, it likely will be because of your unique perspective, the way you see and interpret the world. You may feel that you have to search for your unique voice and identity but don't overlook what's already there, fully formed inside of you. If you tell your own story specifically and personally enough, it becomes universal.

Common characteristics (that are within your power to control) of successful people I have known in the music biz.

1. A Strong work ethic. Plan on working twice as hard as you would in any other occupation. (Also plan on having 10 times more fun.)
2. Likeability. The working relationships in the biz are similar to friendships. Be the kind of person you would want to hang around with.
3. Ability to tolerate rejection. The beginning and end of your career will be 100% rejection. The middle, successful part will be about 80%.
4. The ability to re-invent yourself as situations demand. Musical tastes and styles will not stand still. Be willing and able to evolve.
5. A positive attitude. See above comments about negativity.

Good luck. Bob Regan