The Discipline of Songwriting

Songwriting Workshop

Series 1, Sessions 9-11

By Andy Park

Every songwriter should read this series of quotes from successful writers about the importance of making the choice to write no matter how you feel.

Annie Dillard, Pulitzer Prize winning novelist, talks about the mix of inspiration and hard work in writing:

"At its best, the sensation of writing is that of **unmerited grace**. It is handed to you, but only if you look for it. You search, you break your heart, your back, your brain, and then — and only then — it is handed to you." **Annie Dillard**

"Creativity takes courage."
Henri Matisse

"If you hear a voice within you say, 'You cannot paint,' then by all means paint, and that voice will be silenced" **Vincent Van Gogh**

"You can't wait for inspiration, you have to go after it with a club."
Jack London

Taking the First Step
Anne Lamott, novelist and English professor, talks about the human tendency to get so overwhelmed by the enormity of the journey that we're **too paralyzed to take the first step**.

"Think left and think right and think low and think high. Oh, the thinks you can think up if only you try" – **Dr. Seuss**

Practicing your music puts you in a position to "get lucky"
Jack Nicklaus – someone made a comment about a lucky golf shot he made. He said: "I've noticed that the more I practice, the luckier I get."

Jackson Browne, an American singer, songwriter, and musician who has sold over 18 million albums, was asked. "Generally, when you go to work on a song, do you find that you have the creative energy it takes to see it through?"
Says the "huge voltage switch" of inspiration for songs is "unreliable." "If you wait for inspiration to happen and are not conducting a creative life…you'll have a couple of good ideas and it will be gone before you can respond to it.
Jackson Browne

Carole King is the highest selling female songwriter of the latter half of the 20th century. On the subject of inspiration versus hard work in writing, Carole says:

"Once the inspiration comes, that directs where the perspiration goes, where the work goes. I don't mean to sound like it's some hippie philosophy of [in a high, fairy-like voice] you just sit down and it's all flowing through you. Because there's **a lot of hard work involved in songwriting**.
Carole King

Richard Hugo, an American poet and English professor

"If you write often, perhaps everyday, you will stay in shape and will be better able to receive those good poems [or songs]...and get them down. Lucky accidents seldom happen to writers who don't work...The hard work you do on one poem is put in on all poems. The hard work on the first poem is responsible for the sudden ease of the second. If you just sit around waiting for the easy ones, nothing will come." **Richard Hugo**, The Triggering Town

"Be a **good steward** of your gifts," the poet Jane Kenyon urged