

Songwriting Article #5

Last time, we talked about the 2 most common formats used in our portion of the music industry, the Verse-Chorus-Verse-Chorus-Bridge-Chorus format and the Story-Teller's format. Now, let's talk a little bit about meter.

There is no tried and true format for meter that will automatically make your song a hit. There are, however, some things you can do that will ensure ease of listening. I'm not going to get heavily into strict metric patterns, etc, but I am going to talk about some and show you how they make the melody more "singable", by matching the rhythm of the words with a melodic shape and recognizable cadence.

Take the song "Amazing Grace", for example. The Methodist Hymnal analyzes the meter as CM (86.86). What does that mean? Well, CM stands for Common Meter, (I think) and the 86.86 means that there are 8 beats of the meter, (or words/syllables) followed by 6 beats of the meter.

A-maz-ing grace! How sweet the sound

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

That saved a wretch like me!

1 2 3 4 5 6

I once was lost, but now I'm found;

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Was blind, but now I see.

1 2 3 4 5 6

See how the 8 syllables are followed by 6 syllables, back to the 8 and then back to 6? Now let's look at the beat structure of Amazing Grace and see if we can find a pattern there as well.

A-maz-ing grace! How sweet the sound

3 1-2 3 1-2 3 1-2 3 1-2

That saved a wretch like me!

3 1-2 3 1-2 3 1-2-(3, 1-2)

I once was lost, but now I'm found;

3 1-2 3 1-2 3 1-2 3 1-2

Was blind, but now I see.

3 1-2 3 1-2 3 1-2-(3, 1-2)

You can see an exact match on every line. Each begins with a pickup beat and ends on 2 beats of the 3. If you add the measure and the end of lines 2 and 4 like most people do today, it comes out to be an exact quadruplet of 4 triple beats.

The meter and rhythm of this piece are why it is so singable and so popular throughout Christian history. Do a piece this week and pay particular attention to the meter and the rhythm of it. See if you can do one similar to Amazing Grace. Until next time, Keep On Writing! (Don't forget to send your stuff if you want it analyzed! Send to www.kcchmusic.biz and click on the submissions tab.)