Songwriters Circle

Group Participation Guidelines

Welcome!

The TMS Songwriters Circle is open to all songwriters regardless of age, experience in the genre or familiarity with the feedback process. We want everyone attending to come into the experience with clear expectations for participation, to feel welcome, and for the group to be helpful to songwriters.

This is a positive, self-directed and supportive environment. It is not a class. We respect the care and effort songwriters give their creations and celebrate each individual's pursuit of improving their songwriting. We learn from and support each other through clear feedback, and we are motivated by a genuine interest in supporting fellow songwriters.

The Songwriters Circle meets for 90 minutes at 6pm the second Sunday of the month in The Commons at The Center for the Arts. The group is facilitated by local musician, songwriter and educator Susan Jones. Up to 5 people will be selected to share work each session. Depending on the number of people sharing, each songwriter will have 10-15 minutes to present work and to receive feedback from the group. The facilitator will keep track of time. Everyone who attends must participate actively and kindly, whether by sharing work or listening and responding to songs presented.

The Circle is donation based. While we need to cover the costs of offering this group, we want to make sure this opportunity remains open to anyone who wants to participate. Cash, Venmo and online donations are accepted.

For Presenters

1. Bring a work in progress or a completed song to share with the group. No need to bring pages to hand out unless you'd like.

2. Keep it short and sweet - give only the context necessary for the work you will present before sharing it, and give your time to sharing your work rather than talking about it. Be clear about the kind of feedback you are looking for - about the lyrics? the music? a transition in the song? general impressions? Reserve at least half of your allotted time block for peer feedback, questions and suggestions.

3. Consider the feedback you receive with an open heart and mind - we encourage thoughtful suggestions or feedback from the responders.

4. Share only material you want workshopped. If you already think that your song is performance-ready, we encourage you to find a venue and perform it. This feedback group is about improving songwriting on the way to production or performance. It is not a dress rehearsal or performance itself. TMS and the facilitator will keep you informed of performance opportunities at the school and in the community.

5. Make room for others - if you shared at the last session, let others volunteer to share their work first before you take another turn.

For Responders

1. Consider each piece with care. Your job is to listen. Listen closely. What you hear matters to the person sharing it.

2. Put yourself in the presenter's shoes. Think about what you expect from the group with respect to your own work. When examining another's song, consider how you might benefit from the feedback you give.

3. Honor the courage it takes to offer work for feedback. Be direct, honest, specific and, above all, helpful to the presenter. The piece may not resonate with you, may not be what you consider well written, or may even be offensive to you in some way. You can even voice that as your perspective, but first, ask yourself how your feedback and suggestions will help the songwriter to make the songwriting the best they can.

4. Stay focused on the person's work and avoid personal tangents (about music, artists, etc.) or giving feedback that begins "If this were my song..." - consider writing that song yourself.

5. Be nice. Make friends. Have fun!

Primary Facilitator: Susan Jones

Questions?

Contact Susan Jones, 307-690-8859 or sjprince@aol.com

Songwriters Circle: Sample 90-Minute Feedback Session

1. Introduction & Ground Rules (10 minutes)

- Welcome and brief introductions from participants.
- Facilitator outlines session goals: constructive feedback, respectful dialogue, and fostering a supportive environment.
- Set guidelines for feedback:
    - Focus on what works and what can be improved.
    - Avoid overly harsh critiques; offer specific, actionable suggestions.
- If few attendees, time for a warmup creative writing exercise

2. Song Submission Process (5 minutes)

- Songwriters interested in sharing work for feedback will submit their names at the beginning of the session.
- Limit to 4-5 songs per session, chosen at random to ensure fairness. If time allows, a waitlist song may be added.
- Each songwriter must share the context of their work: stage of development, specific areas where feedback is sought (lyrics, melody, structure, etc.).

3. Song Presentation & Feedback (70 minutes)

- Each songwriter gets up to **5 minutes** to perform or present their song, followed by **10 minutes** of structured feedback.
- **Feedback structure:**
    - **Facilitator feedback (2-3 minutes):** A brief response from the facilitator to set the tone and model the feedback process.
    - **Participant feedback (7-8 minutes):** Attendees take turns offering their insights.
    - Songwriter may respond briefly at the end of each session to clarify or ask questions.
- After 15 minutes per song, the next songwriter presents.

4. Wrap-up & Next Steps (5 minutes)

- Facilitator recaps key points and encourages attendees to apply feedback to their work.
- Invite songwriters to reflect on how the feedback was useful and share any immediate plans for revisions.

Additional Notes:

- Songwriters are encouraged to bring printed lyrics or chord charts for the group to review during the critique.
- Songwriters should bring their own instruments (though a small keyboard will be provided).
- Attendees not sharing songs are welcome to participate in the feedback process or simply observe.

Room setup @ 240 S. Glenwood

- Music Stand (provided)
- Keyboard (provided)
- Tables & Chairs (provided)
- BYO Instrument