

# Off Message or On Song?

*The whys & wherefores of using songs/song lyrics in EFL*



*"Music is the most eloquent language." Phillip Glass*

**Chris Walklett. ELTAM Macedonia 2016**

[walklettchris@hotmail.com](mailto:walklettchris@hotmail.com) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u31FO\\_4d9TY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u31FO_4d9TY)

**Music, songs and song lyrics are a hugely popular resource with a long history of use in the EFL classroom. They are though sometimes dismissed as little more than a novelty or a distraction from more serious language teaching.**

**The aims of this presentation are two-fold;**

**Firstly, to show that there is more to this resource than meets the eye. It is more than just a fun, motivational “novelty act” and is therefore worthy of more than just hurried “off the hoof” gap-fill type activities. It will be argued that there is sound pedagogical purpose to the use of this resource in the English teaching classroom.**

**Secondly, in the workshop part of the presentation, the variety of uses this resource can be put to will be examined. As the majority of the ideas will come from participants themselves.**

# Outline

**1) Why are songs & song lyrics so important, usable, desirable in EFL?**

**\***

**2) What can be done with them and how can song lyrics be employed in more creative ways?**

**\***

**3) A a selection of songs will be supplied and then in groups, discuss possible uses/activities of these songs**

**\***

**4) What ideas have you had? Feedback to the room**

# Clarity or obscurity?

It is advantageous to have clear/unambiguous lyrics?

...but perhaps not that realistic – is the language you hear like this?

\*

Sometimes indecipherable but this can be interesting too...

\*

Or obscure e.g. Eagles - *Hotel California*

\*

Often the lyrics of some of the best songs are open to interpretation

Some have double meaning; e.g. Stranglers – *Golden Brown*

or triple meanings - Beatles – *Happiness is a Warm Gun.*

# Why do songs/song lyrics work in the EFL classroom?

**Fun” (Jolly 1975 & Lewis 2014)**

**“Motivating” (various inc. Green 1993, Engh 2013)**

**Songs can bridge gaps between a formal and informal learning environment. (Candlin 1992 )**

**“Help with stimulating and facilitating learning” (Keskin, 2011)**

**“Can help learner’s attention & assist them with ‘on task’ behaviour”(Moore, 2002)**

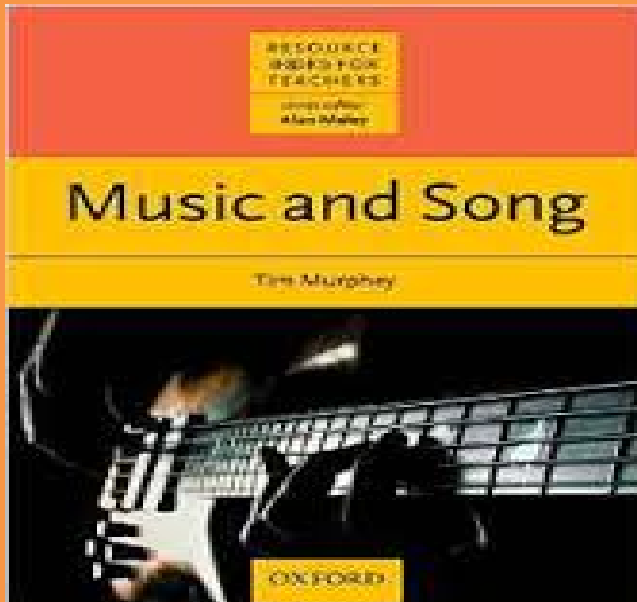
**Source of authentic language inc. ‘everyday’/colloquial vocabulary**

**Benny Lewis calls the picking up of words/phrases “language hacking”**

# Meaningful, powerful & useable text type

**Tim Murphey said;**

**“anything you can do with a text you  
can do with a song”**



# Why do songs/song lyrics work in the EFL classroom?

Contain a variety of accents both 'native' and otherwise  
- listening to 'locals' and even practicing like a 'local'  
might help you sound more like one.

Can be enlightening & stimulate interest & act as a 'way in' to the culture.

Can be used to introduce grammar naturally - *in situ*

"Certain characteristics of song lyrics ...make them easy to work with".  
Wassink (2011) e.g. length, rhyme, repetition.

- "Language teachers may be missing a great deal by not exploiting songs and other rhythmic language compositions as classroom teaching aids. The close relationship between language and music is an easily recognizable one" (Jolly 1972)

# What can you do with a song?

## ...More a case of what can't you do ?

### Analyse the title

Prediction activities / guessing based on title.

### Pre-listening

This could include vocabulary work, grammar work etc.

### Listen & listen again

Listen to it. Listen for a second time, this time with lyrics. Watch the video etc. etc.

### Focus on a particular linguistic aspect;

Grammatical Lexical Phonetic etc.

### Focus on the topic

Have a discussion about the issues /themes raised in the song

### Other activities

All sorts e.g. Dictogloss – reconstructing a short text by listening, noting down words for reconstruction. e.g. Kate Bush's majestic but mysterious *Wuthering Heights*



# *What can be done....*

## Order the events of a narrative story e.g Squeeze's – *Up The Junction*

Gets a job

1) Meets a girl

He starts drinking heavily

2) Falls in love

Move in together

3) Move in together

She gives birth to a daughter

4) Gets a job

Meets a girl

5) She gets pregnant

She gets pregnant

6) She gives birth to a daughter

He is left alone literally 'up the junction'

7) He starts drinking heavily

Falls in love

8) She leaves him and sets up home with another man

She leaves him and sets up home with another man

9) He is left alone literally 'up the junction'

# Follow on activities...the list is endless...

- Summarise briefly e.g. 20 words.
  - Write another verse.
- If you haven't seen a video of the song already you could discuss what video you'd make for the song.
  - If the song is from a personal perspective you could;
    - Write a diary entry from the viewpoint of the writer.
    - Reply to it/play the part of an Agony Aunt (or Uncle).
- advice *mix it up* - let the song dictate the activity/activities don't get too formulaic –we don't want to bore/scare them off

# Pronunciation & vocabulary work

Listening practice & phonemic work can also be achieved through the medium of songs and song lyrics.

Work with rhymes

Give out lyrics with the wrong words...homophones/homonyms

Lip synching to a song to mimic the patterns of speech.

*Lip Sync Battle* a popular TV show in UK.

Dictation

# Mondegreens

Dictation - interesting due to Mondegreens.

e.g. misheard lyrics – Hendrix’s *Purple Haze* ;

“scuse me while I kiss the sky” Vs “scuse me while I kiss this guy”

Lots of Mondegreen stuff on youtube e.g. British comedian Peter Kay

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YBTYvwTftvs> (1<sup>st</sup> 3 only)

Mondegreens come about because of issues of connected speech –

Such as;

elision,

liaison,

reduction,

assimilation,

Juncture.

# Word spotting

Wordle.com can be utilised to make these word pictures from song lyrics



# Thematic work, discussions etc

Freer activity - songs are sometimes social commentary and contain specific cultural themes. They allow some kind of way in to the culture of a country which is often quite elusive to the learner. Songs that have narratives or tell stories can be very usable. e.g. s

Bobby Gentry – *Ode to Billie Jo* - a classic *whodunnit* and *what did they do* mystery.

The Farm – *All Together Now*. A rallying cry for peace set during WW1.

The Verve – *History*. A relationship unveiled - comparisons with Blake's *London*.

Sex Pistols – *God Save the Queen*. A reaction to the Queen's 1977 Silver Jubilee.

Scroobius Pip – *Letter from God to Man*. God's sends *us* a letter explaining that is actually *us* and not *him* that are responsible for the state of the world today.

The The – *Heartland*. An educated indictment of Thatcher's Britain.

Dolly Parton – *9 to 5*. Surviving in a man's world.

Baz Luhrman – *The Sunscreen Song*. The ultimate advice song.

Idina Menzel - *Let it Go* (from *Frozen*) Lots of discussion e.g. interpretation of the title.



# Gap fill –

# the good, the bad and the ugly



Gap fill can work but needs work or may not, know without sufficient context can be problematic...

Course books very unadventurous and unfortunately a tendency to tippex out words fairly randomly

- what a waste of a text type.

## What can we do?

- Pick particular vocabulary / 'chunk'
- Discuss word types/parts of speech missing from the gaps ...to narrow down e.g. would it be a verb, adjective or noun?
- Might be better to blank out phrases rather than just individual words – E.G. Collocations.

# Where to go for ideas?

Websites;

[www.teftunes.com](http://www.teftunes.com)

[www.tuneintoenglish.com](http://www.tuneintoenglish.com)

[www.lyricstraining.com](http://www.lyricstraining.com)

[www.fluentu.com](http://www.fluentu.com) – interactive subtitles on music videos

<http://eltraining.mdl2.com/mod/page/view.php?id=217> (Jo Gakonga)

& Sandra Vida's website <http://lessonswithmusic.com/>

Blogs and other sources;

<http://evasimkesyan.com/2013/08/01/33rd-elt-carnival/>

<http://www.teachthemenglish.com/2013/08/4-great-reasons-to-use-songs-in-languange-teaching/>

<http://www.adfl.org/bulletin/V33N1/331029.htm>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rigdTOZ9THM&feature=c4-overview&list=UUGwUhf0N-4pRmPKAoOaw>

<https://www.era.lib.ed.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/1842/5500/Ludke,%20K.M.%20-%20Teaching%20foreign%20languages%20through%20songs%20%28workbook%29.pdf;jsessionid=0793A08648A2A7A89F2EB299A12E47AA?sequence=1>



# A thought to end on...

Candlin says

*“songs have a place in the classroom for helping create that friendly and cooperative atmosphere so important for language learning, but they can offer so much more. “(Candlin 1992 IX)*

*“They offer insights into the culture and especially the stories and myths of different societies, providing a window into the frames of reference and values of the peoples whose language we are learning” (Candlin 1992 IX)*

# (Selected) Bibliography

- Bartle, G. (1962). Music in the language classroom. *Canadian Modern Language Review, Fall*: 11-14.
- Cunningham, C. (2014). 'Keep talking': Using music during small group discussions in EAP. *ELT Journal, 68(2)*, 179-191.
- Engh, D. (2013). Why use music in English language learning? A survey of the literature. *Language Teaching, 6(2)*, 113-127.
- Failoni, J. (1993). Music as means to enhance cultural awareness and literacy in the foreign language classroom. *Mid-Atlantic Journal of Foreign Language Pedagogy, 1*, 97-108.
- Fomina, A. S. & Merkulova, T. (2000). The use of songs in the EFL classroom. *IATEFL-Ukraine Newsletter, 18*, 26-27.
- Green, J.M. (1993). Student attitudes toward communicative and non-communicative activities: Do enjoyment and effectiveness go together? *The Modern Language Journal, 77*, 1-10.
- Griffie, D. (1992). *Songs in action: Classroom techniques and resources*. New York: PrenticeHall.
- Huy Lê, M. (1999). The role of music in second language learning: A Vietnamese perspective.
- Jolly, Y. S. (1975). The use of songs in teaching foreign languages. *The Modern Language Journal, 59*, 11-14.
- Keskin, F. (2011) *Using Songs as Audio materials*. <http://www.tojet.net/articles/v10i4/10438.pdf>
- Kirsten L (2001) Using Music in the Adult ESL Classroom, ERIC Digest,
- Ludke, K. M., Ferreira, F. & Overy, K. (2014). Singing can facilitate foreign language learning. *Memory & Cognition 42(1)*, 41-52.
- Maley Poetry & Song as effective Language Learning Activities. In Rivers - Interactive Language Teaching
- Moi – C.F. – Rock Poetry Materials in the EFL classroom . Tomlinson Developing Materials for Language teaching
- Maxim, H.H. (2000). Integrating language learning and cultural inquiry in the beginning foreign language classroom. *ADFL Bulletin, 32(1)*, 12-17.
- Medina, S.L. (1990). The effects of music upon second language vocabulary acquisition.
- *National Network for Early Language Learning, 6(3)*, 1-26. Salcedo, C.S. (2010). The effects of songs in the foreign language classroom on text recall, delayed text recall and involuntary mental rehearsal. *Journal of College Teaching & Learning, 7(6)*, 19-30.
- Saricoban, A. & Metin, E. (2000). Songs, verse and games for teaching grammar. *The Internet TESL Journal, VI(10)*. <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Saricoban-Songs.html>.
- Schoepp, K. (2001). Reasons for using songs in the ESL/EFL classroom. *The Internet TESL Journal, VII/*
- Spicher, L., & Sweeney, F. (2007). Folk music in the L2 classroom: Development of native-like pronunciation through prosodic engagement strategies. *Connections, 1*, 35–48.
- Tumanov, A. (1986). Music in L2 pedagogy. *Russian Language Journal, 40(136-137)*, 35-54.
- Wassink, D (2011) What's in a song? Teaching Language through Music. <http://www.alea.edu.au/documents/item/195>

I sweat  
my brain is  
70% song lyrics

Thank you!!! Please feel free to contact me;

[walklettchris@hotmail.com](mailto:walklettchris@hotmail.com)

& check my Facebook group

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/creatingusesforsongs/>