



Bennett, J. (2011) 'What's in a name?'. *Total Guitar*, 222, pp. 34. ISSN 1355-5049

ResearchSPAce

<http://researchspace.bathspa.ac.uk/>

This version is made available in accordance with publisher policies.
Please cite only the published version using the reference above.

Your access and use of this document is based on your acceptance of the
ResearchSPAce Metadata and Data Policies, as well as applicable law:-

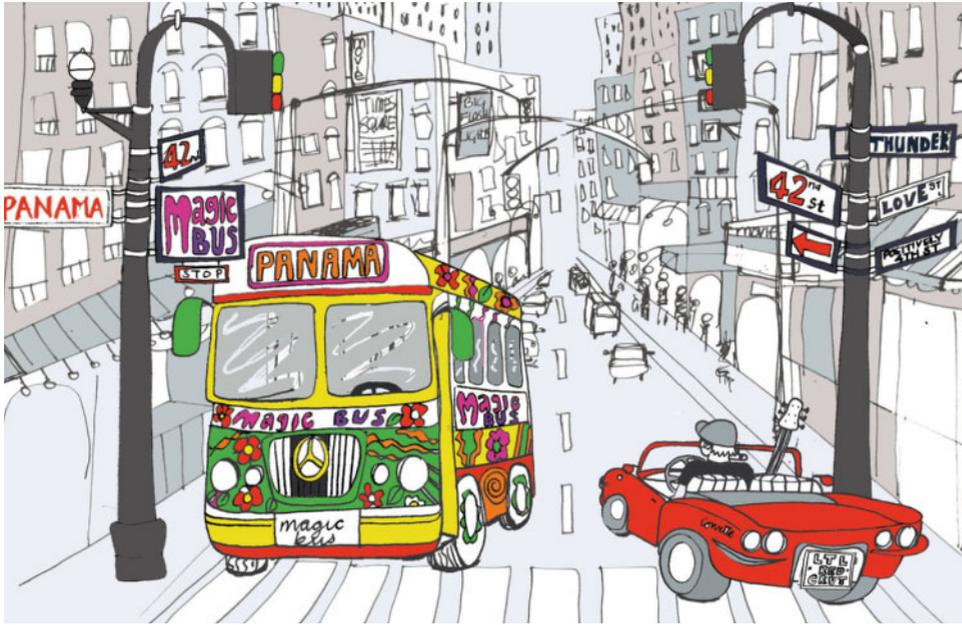
<https://researchspace.bathspa.ac.uk/policies.html>

Unless you accept the terms of these Policies in full, you do not have
permission to download this document.

This cover sheet may not be removed from the document.

Please scroll down to view the document.

Songwriting



could start by asking yourself some questions suggested by it. Who is the 'fool' character? What's he doing on the hill? Who says he's a fool? How does he react to the people who say it? How do they react to him? Paul McCartney's lyric answers all of these questions pretty clearly, telling a story of a man who is on his own, but at peace with himself. He starts the first verse with a simple description, "The man with the foolish grin is keeping perfectly still", and develops the lyric until, by the end, it describes the 'haters' from the fool's point of view: "he never listens to them / He knows that they're the fools..."

Aberfeldy's *Love Is An Arrow* uses a great big metaphor for its title, and this is part of its success – the metaphor helps us to say a simple thing in an interesting way. From this title, let's ask ourselves some questions from which we might be able to create some lyric fragments. Arrows can point something out, but they can also be weapons, so which meaning shall we use? Who is the arrow pointing at? Is someone being shot by this arrow? In the actual lyric, songwriter Riley Briggs implies both meanings of the word. He uses a simple list technique, describing all the things that "love is..." in each verse, and adding a bucket load of extra metaphors to the title, including fire, disease and geometry.

Come Dancing is a modest title, but even in two words it provides a lot of information. We know that one character's saying these words to another, and we know what he wants. From there, the songwriter can fill in the rest. Ray Davies chooses to tell us a nostalgic story of the weekly dance near his childhood home in post-war North London, and adds historical and personal detail about family relationships, thus conveying a powerful tale of youthful hope, love, social class and regret. The title phrase appears in each chorus as reported speech and helps to frame the information in the verses.

So if titles can help us to develop lyric themes and ideas, how do we create them in the first place? One quick technique is to collide adjectives and nouns – *Little Red Corvette*, *Purple Haze*, *Dancing Queen*, *Magic Bus*. Well-known phrases can become titles very easily – *Let It Be*; *Do It Again*; *Oh Well*. You can't go wrong with names – *Moves Like Jagger*, *Dirty Diana*, *Layla*. Or places – *42nd Street*, *Panama*, *Highway to Hell*. And it can be fun to get a bit surreal: *Rock Lobster*, *Monster Mash*, *Karma Police*, *21st Century Schizoid Man*.

The source material for song titles is all around us, not just in songs, but in every form of language: novels, conversation, visual experiences (say what you see), soap operas, road signs, menus, movies, magazines, and even eavesdropping. We encounter short verbal phrases *Every Day*. You can find titles *Here*, *There and Everywhere*.

Hey Joe. Stop. Go Now. ●

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

"Titles can be a very powerful way of getting listeners to engage with a song"

WRITING a complete lyric is a big job.

You've got to think about your characters, the imagery you're using, and the timeframe and location of the song's 'action' – and that's before you even start on the technical stuff such as syllable count and rhyming. But writing a title on its own is easy – it's only a few words, after all. And for some people it's the perfect way in to the songwriting process.

Think for a moment about any song you like, and focus on its title. Is it interesting on its own? If it's quirky and unusual, does it draw you into the world of meaning provided by the lyric? If it's a cliché, does it still sound authentic when sung? Does it help to summarise the overall meaning of the lyric? Titles can be a very powerful way of getting listeners to engage with a song, but they can also help us to write songs by providing that essential early spark of an idea on which we can build a complete lyric.

To illustrate, let's look at three randomly selected examples: The Beatles' *The Fool On The Hill*, Aberfeldy's *Love Is An Arrow* and The Kinks' *Come Dancing*. It doesn't really matter whether you already know these songs – in fact, it might be better to pretend you don't for the moment.

If you were writing a new song working from that first title only, *The Fool On The Hill*, you

JOE BENNETT

JOE BENNETT is the director of the UK Songwriting Festival and teaches on the Masters degree in Songwriting at Bath Spa University. Joe was Total Guitar's Music Editor when the magazine was launched in 1994.

