The Proverbs 27:17 Song Critique

From the book: *How to Be a Worship Songwriter* by Steve Cass https://songs4god.net/how-to-be-a-worship-songwriter/

Worship Song Analysis Form Substance – Structure – Melody – Prosody – Viability

As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another

■ Proverbs 27:17

Use this form to self-evaluate Use this form to evaluate for others Use this form to craft your song

If you're giving answers for another writer's song, remember the more specific you are, the greater help you'll be to the writer for the revision process.

Substance

Intended Use

What is the intended use/audience (congregational singing, large or small group gathering, recording, coffee house, club, personal praise and worship, etc.)?

If corporate worship, how and when could it be used during a worship gathering (Call To Worship, Communion Song, etc.)?

The Power of One Idea

What is the song about? Does it revolve around a central idea or event? Is it implied or stated?

Is the subject unclear or obscure? Do the lyrics serve this central theme or are they scattered?

No Story, No Song (not every song is a story song, but every song is about a story)

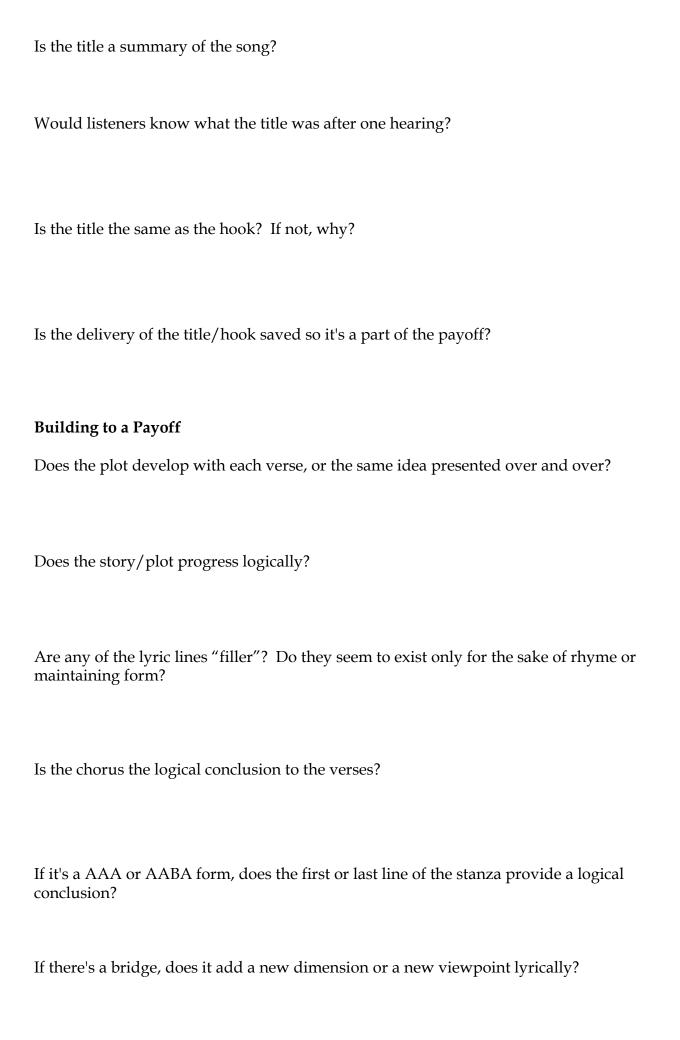
Do the lyrics tell a story?
Is the lyric and hook one central idea?
Does each line pass the, "so what?" test (does each line point to the hook or the main idea)?
Do you get the feeling that the writer is telling you a story, or is the song just making statements?
Does the song portray accurate scriptural truth?
What is the one central emotion, or central set of emotions?
Structure
Song Form
What is the form or structure of the piece: verse/chorus/verse, AAA or AABA?
Does it have a bridge, a pre-chorus, etc.?
Does the form suit the piece?
In a verse/chorus format, is the chorus the logical conclusion to the verses?
Does the bridge (if existing) add a new dimension to the story?

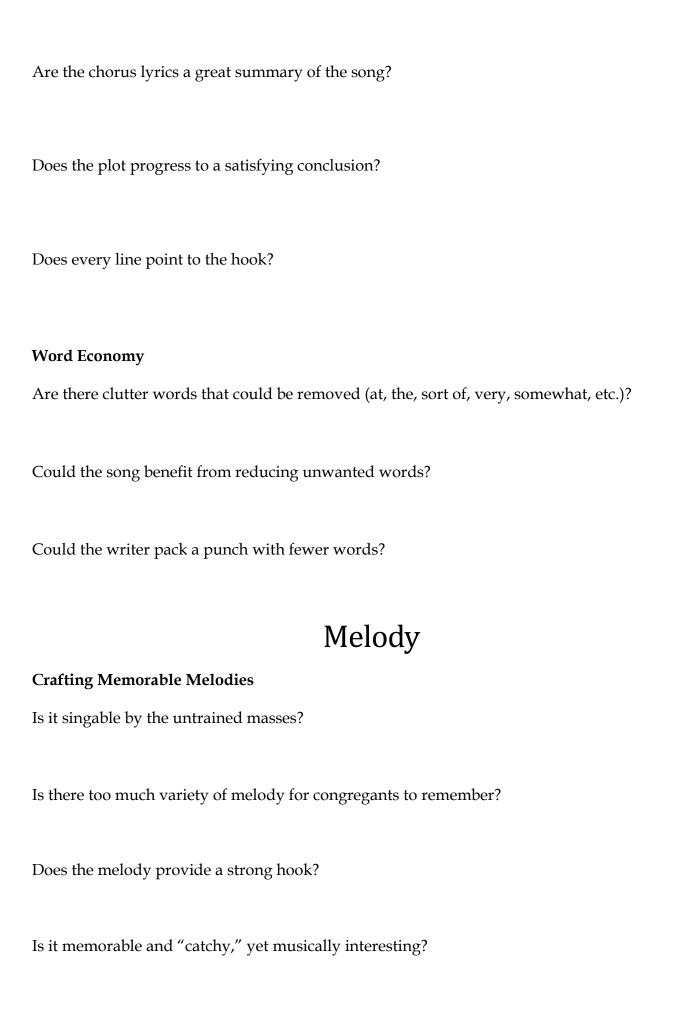
<u>A</u>	Stron	<u>ng Start</u>	

Are key questions answered so that people know what's going on (the schema: who, what, when, where, why)?
Is there a clear schema unfolding, or are there points of confusion?
Is there a strong or interesting first line?
Would a later part of the song (perhaps the second verse) make for a better opening?
Rhyme
Is the rhyme scheme consistent?
Are there tricky or unnatural rhymes?
Do the rhymes serve and enhance the story, or has the story been sacrificed for the sake of rhyme?
Do any of the rhymes distract you from the message?
Are there any "Your father he is" sentences constructed for the sake of rhyme?
Poetic Devices
Do you use vivid, concrete images?

Do the metaphors and similes serve the theme?
Are there scriptural allusions, quotes, or paraphrases?
Does the writer make use of sound repetition to good effect, or are they distracting? (a) Assonance (repetition of vowel sounds)? (b) Consonance (repetition of consonant sounds)? (c) Alliteration (repetition of the initial consonant sound)? (d) Are key words or phrases repeated?
Are strong and direct nouns and verbs allowed to carry the lyrics (does the subject of each line strongly relate to the story or the hook)?
Are there clichés or trite statements or comparisons? It might be ok if the writer is playing off of them to make a fresh statement from an old one. (The two are very similar. Trite: lacking freshness because of overuse. Cliché: trite and stereotypical statement that's lost its impact due to overuse.)
Are there trendy, but ultimately dated, slang expressions?
Syntax
Is the diction consistent? Are verb tenses consistent? Pronouns correct? Any word choices that distract you from the message?
Is it clear who's speaking (is the writer speaking to God or to someone else)?
Is it always clear who's expressing the thought or action?

A Memorable Title





Give comment on the following aspects of the melody:

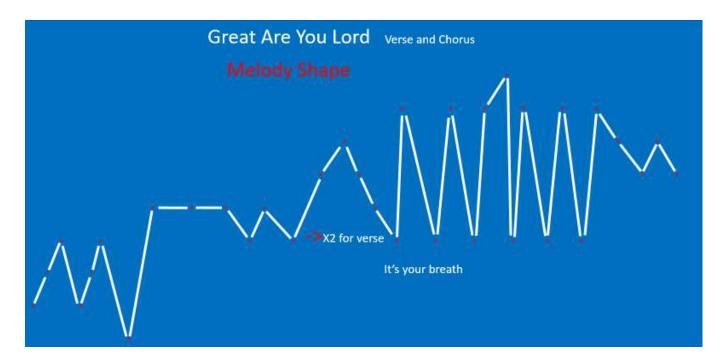
- The range the note range and "singability."
- The repetition how certain elements repeat
- The rhythm the prosody with the spoken cadence of the lyric. Also, does the underlying beat of the music complement or compete?
- The shape the visual structure

Draw a dot for each note of the melody. Don't worry about being super accurate. The idea is to create a basic shape after you connect the dots with a line. Below are some blanks for you to use, plus an example. Check out the *Student of Melodies* section of *How to Be a Worship Songwriter* on page 44 to see some ideas.

Re	Song Name verse
Do	
Ti	
La	
So	
Fa	
Mi	
Re	
Do	
Ti	

Re	Song Name Chorus
Do	
Ti	
La	
So	
Fa	
Mi	
Re	
Do	
Ti	
Re	Song Name Bridge
Do	

Re	Song Name Bridge
Do	
Ti	
La	
So	
Fa	
Mi	
Re	
Do	
Ti	



Does the melody take the listener on an adventure?

Now, you can *see* the range and the repetition of your song. Describe the variety of the patterns:

With this visual, as well as the vision in your mind's eye, do you have dynamics — peaks and valleys? Do you get the sense that your melody is building to a climax while expressing the main theme?

(in the case of a hymn or an AAA song, this usually occurs on the fifth and sixth lines of an eight-lined verse —ex. "In Christ Alone")

Has the melody changed for the chorus? Does it soar?

The Cry

Does the song have a high point and a "cry"? Describe:

Notice the high point in the example of Great Are You Lord. The chorus melody is elevated, then there's a top note during the chorus. Good congregational songs – all songs – are more memorable with an elevated melody at the chorus or high point.

Prosody

Do the lyrics and melody belong together (ex. Happy lyrics, happy melody)?
Is the lyric conversational? Is the emphasis on the right syllable when singing?
Are there sustained notes on unimportant words? Unpleasant vowel/consonant sounds?
If they are open vowels on sustained notes, are they pleasant to hear and sing? Or are they a distraction?
Do you feel that the words used convey the intended emotion?
Could a singing congregation breathe and phrase correctly (is it "singable")?
Are there any tongue twisters (ex. she sells sea shells by the sea shore)?
How is the harmonization? Do the melody and the harmonies (chords) work well together?
Does the melody soar when the lyric soars emotionally?
Manage this suite of tasks – how the language affects the emotion, how the emotion affects the music, how the music affects the message – throughout the framework of your song.

Viability

Can the chorus stand alone? Does it feel like "home"? Does all of the lyric and music point toward the chorus? Does the song end well, or does it seem abrupt, forced, or too long? Is there a better way to end the piece? Can the song be tightened in any way? Could any parts of the song be developed more? Does the rhythm/melody/chord pattern change from verse to chorus to bridge? Which lines, if any could be cut? Which ideas or images need expansion?

Would you characterize the song as congregational? Please comment:

What alternate chords could be used?

Does the overall song provide memorable musical, melodic, and lyrical hooks? Please comment:

Do the lyrics speak of our higher calling to seek the gospel? And by that, I mean, the gospel story itself AND/OR how biblical truths impact our life today?

Commercial Viability and Overall Impact

Not all songs need to be prepared for commercial radio. And not every congregational song should go to radio. But this list is a proven barometer for how songs are accepted by the untrained masses. Generally, assess the song in front of you in the light of acceptability of people at your church:

Is the length of the song appropriate for commercial radio (3-4 minutes)? Is the song lyrically simple, or are there too many words? Commercial radio will never play a 'wordy' song. You may never find an artist that will be interested in recording your song if there are too many words.

The song must be easy to sing.

- 1) A Short Intro (8-12 seconds is good)
- 2) Total song length for upbeat songs: try not to exceed 3-3.5 minutes. For slow/ballad type songs: try not to exceed 4 minutes
- 3) Strong hook. This should be in every song regardless of the song form.
- 4) Great chorus. The chorus should stand alone. Someone should be able to look at the chorus alone and know exactly what the song is about.
- 5) Short bridge. When going for commercially viable/radio ready, it's good to keep the bridge about half the length of the verse.
- 6) Stay on topic. Stay focused on each line and make sure everything points to the hook.
- 7) Get to the chorus in less than a minute. In fact, try to make it in 40 seconds or so for an upbeat song if possible.