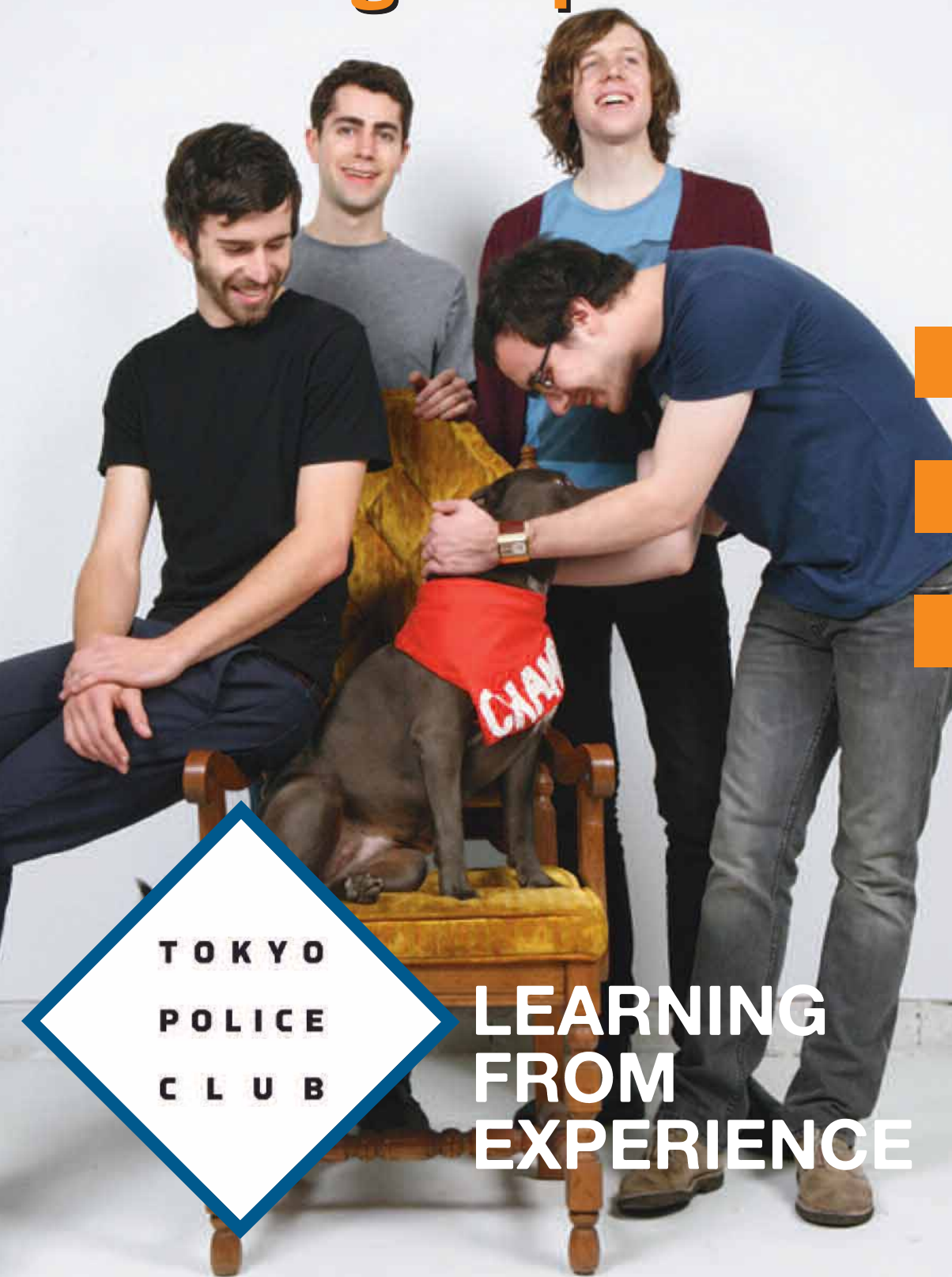


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T O K Y O  
P O L I C E  
C L U B

# LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

- What Can A Producer Do For You?
- Rik Emmett: My Top Ten Tips
- The Johnstnes: Do It Yourself Success
- The True Song





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## C R E D I T S

### CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Ken Whiteley, Ken Kucharic, Rik Emmett, Randy Stevens and Eddie Schwartz.

### DESIGN AND LAYOUT

Cristine Giampaolo, Summers Graphics Inc.

## info@long-mcquade.com

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### CORPORATE HEAD OFFICE:

Long & McQuade Musical Instruments  
722 Rosebank Road, Pickering ON L1W 4B2

### PUBLISHING OFFICE & ADVERTISER INQUIRIES:

Long & McQuade Musical Instruments  
Attention: info@long-mcquade Magazine,  
722 Rosebank Road Pickering ON L1W 4B2  
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PRODUCTION

# What Can A Producer Do For You?

## KEN WHITELEY

With the proliferation of reasonably priced, high quality recording gear, anyone can make a great CD, right? Sometimes your best investment could be the people you work with. Simply put, the right producer should help you make the best recording you possibly can.

That process should start well before recording begins. Of course different producers, like different artists, bring unique skill sets to a project, so not every producer will function in exactly the same way. That said, the first step should be to try to understand why the recording is being made in the first place. There are usually a number of reasons at work. Focusing on the goals, intentions and expectations can be very helpful for everyone concerned. When working with a band, it is great to have a person not in the group who can sift through diverse opinions and bring everyone to a common vision. Even with a solo singer/songwriter, a producer should help him or her to be clear about what is achievable and realistic, while stoking the fires of creativity and the world of potentialities.

Once everyone is on the same page, so to speak, the next phase begins. Back in the day when producers were usually on the staff of a large record company, their job was called "A&R," which stood for "Artists & Repertoire." Similarly today, one of the first things you and your producer will likely do is go over the material that you want to record. This can cover song selection, arrangements, instrumentation, musicians and touchier questions like song variety, structure and quality. The common vision of the whole project is further refined in what hopefully is an atmosphere of mutual trust, respect and honesty.

The producer is generally involved in helping to create a budget. It has to be realistic and comprehensive from all points of view. This can also include assistance applying for additional funding from arts councils or FACTOR. It's always good to keep in mind that none of these organizations will fund all of a project and you will be up against a lot of excellent competition for scarce resources, so it's best not to count on receiving extra money ahead of time.

As in all aspects of working together, it is very important to be clear about money arrangements. For example, many producers get an amount of money for producing and also negotiate a royalty based on a percentage of sales. Sometimes there can be some flexibility about when a royalty might become payable because circumstances can vary so much. Generally this is the kind of thing that should be worked out before recording starts.

Finally, the special day comes when recording begins and you have a producer there to help make sure that magic happens! It can happen in so many different ways. Whether you are a band that has road tested your songs together in a myriad of clubs or

are sitting in a room with some incredible musicians that you are meeting for the first time, the situation calls for what I call relaxed intensity. You may be doing nothing more than singing "scratch" vocals (temporary guide parts) or the plan may be to capture everything "live off the floor," but you will be creating the "bed" that the whole recording will lie in. Even a recording that starts from "beats and loops" needs to have the right "feel" and groove.

Your producer is the one that will help guide the whole recording process. There are so many roles involved in recording: songwriter, singer, musician, recording engineer, musical arranger, mixer, computer technician, psychologist, logistician, chief cook and



bottle washer, etc. Even the most experienced artists benefit from letting go of all the details they don't have to be concerned with and focusing on their art. For new artists, in most cases a producer is invaluable. It's pretty hard to sing your heart out when you are worried about whether there is too much or not enough compression on the vocal. Even for hard core "do-it-yourself-ers" who like to spend time twiddling knobs, stacking guitar parts or mastering the art of digital editing, at the end of the day (or the early morning light) nothing beats a trusted set of objective ears.

Making a recording to release to the world is a big deal. Don't be afraid to ask questions or to approach people whose work you admire. Of course you'll check out web sites, but talk to people too. Having a producer should be about a relationship that can open doors you didn't even know were there. Your producer/guide will also help prevent some wrong turns you might not see coming. Whatever happens, together you should enjoy the ride and let them help you be the best you can.

Ken Whiteley has produced over 125 recordings, which have earned him 2 Juno Awards, 2 Grammy nominations, 22 Juno nominations, 4 American Gold Records, 10 Canadian Gold & Platinum records, and combined sales of over 8 million copies. Visit his website at [www.kenwhiteley.com](http://www.kenwhiteley.com).



# LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

TOKYO  
POLICE  
CLUB

It's not that far from Newmarket, Ontario to the David Letterman Show... really. Just ask Dave Monks, bassist and vocalist for the seemingly unstoppable and cosmically blessed musical force that is Tokyo Police Club.

In just five short years they have made the trip three times, the first of which was off their inaugural meteoric EP *A Lesson in Crime*, no less.

"Playing Letterman was pretty much a year after the record came out," Monks explains. "It was wild. We've played Letterman three times now. The first time we were so nervous. The last time we played was cool because we could just relax... and it kind of felt like we were actually playing a song. It was much less stressful."

A healthy musical fortune, undeniable mass appeal - and a ridiculous tour schedule - has placed them on some of the biggest festival stages in the world and in some of the hottest clubs tour after tour. This rapid growth in popularity - and subsequent audience size - has necessitated some personal work on the band's part.

"With the intimacy of a club show, it's really easy to connect with people," Monks explains. "At a festival, you can't assume anything. You can't assume that anyone knows any songs...they might just be looking for the beer tent and be standing in front of your stage by accident. So, you have to project so much personality. You have to amplify whatever feeling you are putting out there. So it's something that, as we have got more confidence touring, we have worked really hard on. We have played a lot of festivals. We played Coachella early on and more recently, and I feel like it's nice to play them these days and have a little more under your belt before you go on a big festival stage."

Another amazing opportunity came their way when they were asked to take part in the celebration surrounding the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver. However, honoured though they were, the band was initially a bit hesitant about accepting the invitation. They were deep into recording and Monks in particular was hesitant to interrupt the always fragile creative process.

"We were right in the middle of recording the last record, which is really a consuming process. It's really hard to just snap out of it. You can't just go chill for a weekend. It actually came right when we were done... literally, Thursday we were done tracking and we flew out Friday. It worked really well like that. It was a kind of a nice bookend for the record."

The record Monks is referring to is the follow up to the very successful *Elephant Shell* entitled *Champ*. At the prompting of their label, the band decided to step out a bit and work with an outside producer - a process which Monks described as "daunting".

"All you get is a phone call," elaborates Monks. "How can you know what someone is like when it comes down to bass lines and snare sounds over the phone? You can't really get a sense of that."

They finally decided on producer Rob Schnapf. Schnapf's eclectic catalogue really appealed to the band.

"It gave you the sense that he adapts to any situation he's in," Monks explains.

So the band took a pass on yet another cold Toronto winter and flew down to LA for three months. As a result, "*Champ* has a summery feel to us. It was December and January, but for Torontonians going down..."

Apart from the "summery" feel, there is no questioning the role experience played in helping Schnapf and the band realise their vision for *Champ*. According to Monks, the process was, for one thing, made easier by Schnapf's technical experience, and also by his ability to work within the band's democratic ethic, providing a "nonpartisan... black or white, good or bad approach to speed things up and get things moving in a definitive direction, instead of just splitting the difference on certain things."

For the band, their growing experience not only allowed them to express themselves more clearly in the studio; it also empowered them to exact more control over their own direction.

"*A Lesson in Crime* and *Smith* came out of no experience," Monks begins. "To me, they just kind of encapsulate this really fresh, pretty naive year and a bit in our lives. The reason that they are really fun records is that we really didn't have any ambitions for them. We kind of just made them for the sake of it. *Elephant Shell* came out of a new world of having this whole big machine going on around you and then trying to figure out how to block it out and get into yourself. We really struggled with getting time and mental space. For *Champ*, I think we had learned that. We went to the manager, the agent, and the label and said we need this much time and unless we are opening for U2 or something don't call us. That's what we did and it was great. We really got to just relax and make music. That was fun. Which I think is the new and valuable place that *Champ* comes from."

While capitalising on previous experience influenced the recording of *Champ*, a completely new experience helped stimulate the writing process. Monks becomes very animated when discussing a new writing approach that he and keyboardist Graham Wright employed that they referred to as "Wednesday Songs".

"You had to wake up and write a song that morning. You could record it just kind of with acoustic and vocals if you wanted or you could go all out. But you had to send it that day and you couldn't have any preconceived parts or melodies or anything. It had to be all fresh. That was a really cool exercise to do because it meant that you had to wake up and work with what you had in your head that morning, which is cool. And it meant that you could make totally awful music if you wanted, which is pretty freeing."

Though admittedly not the normal or perhaps most fruitful approach taken by the band (the process only yielded one song - "Gone" - on *Champ*) it is one that Monks says they will definitely repeat.

The rise of Tokyo Police Club has been rather dramatic. In Monks' own words, "We have done some pretty incredible things."

The release of *Champ* last June is sure to do nothing to slow their momentum. With this in mind, one might excuse Monks for letting it go to his head... even a bit. Instead, he offers up a humble and slightly irreverent view of things that seems far beyond his 23 years.

"It's always good to do obnoxious things in music, because at the end of the day, it's just a pop song and if it's something fun then you should definitely indulge in it. I think that's where anything goofy like shouting and clapping and that kind of stuff... it's all good to embrace. We are definitely not trying to be jarring. We want it to be what comes out of our natural sensibility... which I don't think is obnoxious. I could stand for a little more obnoxiousness."



# MY TOP/TEN TIPS

# rik emmett



1. BE YOURSELF.
2. GAIN AND KEEP PERSPECTIVE. BE A STUDENT FOR LIFE.
3. BE PREPARED - GIVE IT EVERYTHING YOU'VE GOT.
4. BE COMPREHENSIVE. DIVERSIFY.
5. .367 IS ONE OF THE SECRETS OF LIFE.
6. BALANCE EGO WITH HUMILITY, AMBITION WITH RESPECT. MANAGE YOUR EXPECTATIONS.
7. YOU CAN'T MAKE TIME: SO MANAGE IT.
8. MUSIC IS SPIRITUAL. THE MUSIC BUSINESS IS NOT. (VAN MORRISON)
9. FORM STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS. BE A GOOD TEAM PLAYER.
10. YOU GO BACK, JACK, AND DO IT AGAIN.

**1.** American Idol judges advise, "make the song your own." Ricky Nelson wrote, "You can't please everyone, so you got to please yourself." You may never become the greatest star on earth, or even make music full-time. But if you really know yourself, and make music with honesty and truth, you'll always enjoy the process. Music offers us the opportunity to be happy doing what we're doing. For me, it's often a life of chasing an infinite dream, for music itself is so ephemeral. My favourite song is always the next one that I'd like to try and write - the next concert - the next album. Most artists I've known are usually restless for new challenges, hungry for the horizon, enjoying journeys, not destinations.

Yet rules have exceptions, and any "rule" about music is bound to contain a paradox or three. In this game you have to please people in positions of power and influence, then capture the imagination and support of an audience, and try to hold on to it to build a career (and that's why there are 10 points on the list!) Even though every success story is its own unique self-help story, with no hard and fast rule books or magic secrets, most successful individuals are people who remain humble researchers and students, who are excellent team-builders, and who form great business alliances and strategic partnerships.

**2.** Where are you now? Where are you headed? What are you really good at, and what do you want/need to get better at? What values and qualities do your role models and heroes possess that you would like to emulate, in order to capture the imaginations of their constituencies, and then - what values and qualities can you project that make you unique?

Be a student for life. Always do Market Research, and also search your own heart and soul for the changes happening in there. Education offers perspective and information - helps you to become a better you, realizing your potential - not to copy, or imitate, but to learn how to articulate your own spirit and ego. A modern comprehensive artist needs to develop as much awareness as possible, and have it inform his/her work.

**3.** Can practice make perfect? Perfection might be an unfair expectation for us to place upon ourselves. But great preparation - technically, physically, mentally - increases the odds for great performance. Get yourself into the zone: give 110%. Music should always be a labour of love, including practice, and even the business of Taking Care of Business, every day, in every way. This means:

**4.** Be comprehensive - diversify. Learn how to read music, arrange and produce. Learn how to build a website and construct a marketing plan. Be a valuable asset to others - deliver essential services. I found work because I was a guitarist who could sing; got some gigs because I could write; others because I could play rock or pop, and dress (and play) appropriately for the wedding band circuit or the glam band. I got work because I could be articulate (like writing magazine columns and teaching); I also have repertoire for solo acoustic, duo, electric rock band and smooth jazz gigs, and recently had an acoustic instrumental "world" album nominated for a Juno three decades after being up there as a rocker. I'm a Jack of Many Trades, reinventing my wheels, and I only know one way to play: I'm always willing to give it my best shot.

**5.** Ty Cobb has the best career batting average of all time. .367. The most successful hitter in the history of major league baseball failed more than six times out of ten. Learn to live with failure, and hearing "no." Don't be afraid to make mistakes - learn from them. Evolve. Adapt. You don't need to be perfect. Getting a hit three and a half times out of ten gets you into the Hall of Fame.

**6.** Your dignity and integrity are woven into your choices. Your musical product expresses your own discriminating taste. Others will have opinions, and will exert influences on your journey. But the choices remain yours - and your choices should give you a feeling of staying in balance. If chasing music is like facing the infinite - shouldn't that be enough to keep you humble?

SHOW BIZ IMAGE should be consistent with one's true nature, balanced with self-image. Your spirit should be evident in your product. Get knowledgeable and comfortable with the marriage and balance of all elements of hype - packaging, publicity, marketing and promotion - this is BRANDING.

Manage your own expectations. Be practical: be realistic. Advance in stages. Dreams are important: gotta have 'em. Just remember - Step by step, you make dreams come true. Only bite off what your teeth can chew.

**7.** Time is the most precious of all commodities. The single greatest challenge that a modern musician constantly faces is time management. Prioritizing is a crucial skill: building practical and realistic game plans and strategies, and timelines with achievable goal-setting, is fundamental to evolution, adaptation and a progression of successes.

**8.** I've mentioned heart and soul, spirit, ego, love and truth, in other points. But there's also practical, realistic, and making calculated plans, so Van's quote deserves its own number.

Always remember that business is just business: that a business plan needs to make a profit if it wants to survive. You can't eat and pay the rent if your integrity gets no gigs. Even the most determined spirit needs to find a paying audience. That ain't selling out - it's just business, so render unto Caesar. Music itself is not just technique, or math, or intellect, because (when it's very good) it's also spiritual and connects with folks emotionally. Learn to make THAT kind of music and you'll always find work - feed your heart and soul, and share that with audiences, capturing their imaginations by offering them the kind of stuff that money can't buy. That particular "value added" is the most compelling quality of all.

This inevitably leads back to the balancing act of # 6. Oh - and also forward to # 9.

**9.** Music is a collaborative endeavor. You need other musicians, engineers and producers who can do cool stuff that you can't. Managers and agents who can find and make deals that you can't. You need champions who are business executives and corporate patrons. So you have to be able to get along with these folks; you need them to believe in you, and it helps if they like you. Also - James Taylor's Bus Factor: does a sideman have a sense of humor? Is he pleasant to be around? Does he make life more enjoyable?

**10.** Our little blue planet spins on its axis, orbiting the sun as the clock hands chase round their circle in the cycle of the seasons. Sometimes the smartest thing we can do is get back to basics, our roots, put things into the context of our own history, and hit refresh. Remind yourself why you got into it in the first place. How far away from your original ideals have you strayed? Take a good look at what you've learned: if you could go back and do it all again, what would you change? Go back through this list and recreate, for your product is always you. Fill your work with your character and personality, so you will always differentiate organically.

*Rik is in 3 Halls of Fame, and has a fair share of gold and platinum wall-hangings after surviving three decades plus in the music biz. He was voted a Best Rock Guitarist back in the '80s of the last century, a Best Smooth Jazz Guitarist in this decade, and just finished 7th overall in a Gibson.com Reader's Poll of The Greatest Guitarists Ever. A former VP of the Songwriter's Association of Canada, and the Artistic Director of the SongStudio Songwriting Workshop, Rik helped to develop the Music Business and Songwriting courses in the Humber Music program, sharing in a College Innovation of the Year Award in 2009.*

# Do it Yourself Success



In an age of depleting record sales and where big budget rock n' roll contracts are becoming a thing of the past, today's bands are restructuring the rules of the music industry.

From basement recordings to guerrilla marketing, artists have been approaching music with the kind of DIY attitude not seen since the early days of punk rock.

No one is at the forefront of this movement more than Canada's own The Johnstones. Since bursting onto the scene in 2006 with their first release, *Word is Bond*, The Johnstones have independently sold out tours, charted at MuchMusic, sold thousands of albums, supported arena tours and garnered one of the most devoted and loyal fan bases in the country.

The Johnstones have created the "Johnstonian Nation," where the fans themselves become the most important partner in the organization. Thanks to this huge movement, the Johnstones were the first band in Canada to host a live Internet comedy show broadcast to almost 5000 consistent viewers. With guests like the Arkells, Gob and Flashlight Brown, they managed to turn a simple idea into a unique and entertaining forum. They followed these broadcasts by extending the idea across mediums to produce

three seasons worth of Internet podcasts. These bi-weekly, downloadable podcasts contained sketches, stories and music, giving fans an inside look at the band. They also gave fans the chance to hear their own questions being answered by posting them on their Facebook page.

A major label release can often take months or years to see the light of day. The Johnstones never wait more than a few hours to release something to their "Johnstonian Nation." These are the people who drive them, so naturally they're given first access to exclusive news, music, tickets and more.

"The trick to survival as an independent band is not to follow the typical major label format of an album cycle," says Jarek Hardy (guitar, vocals), "but to invent your own format, something that works for you and doesn't waste money or time. We don't spend huge bucks on press photos and music videos; we spend the bucks on the cameras and software so we can learn how to do it ourselves."

With bands creating their own DIY formulas to fit with the changing times, it is becoming increasingly apparent that there is no right or wrong path to a successful career in rock and roll.

By Randy Stevens



# The True Song

By Eddie Schwartz

Originally published in *Songwriters Magazine* Winter 2009 Issue.

The shortest distance between two points is not always a straight line.

That's not to say that you, as a practitioner of the art and craft of songwriting, can't find a direct route to fame and fortune, if that's what you're after. Even as I write this, there are hundreds of pilgrims on the road to "radio ready," crafting the perfect track for country, or urban, or pop radio, and god bless them.

Some small percentage of all those who travel this "direct" highway will achieve what they define as "success." Their songs will be cut by established artists signed to major labels, or if they perform their own material they will get a deal themselves. They will chart in Billboard, and some might even sell a few million downloads on iTunes.

All well and good, and sure to swell the bank account substantially, not to mention that thrilling walk to the stage to pick up your glistening new SOCAN award, or JUNO, or Grammy.

It's a sweet trip.

Of course, now you have to do it again, and the pressure is on. You have that big advance from your publisher or label to recoup, and what they want is, well, the same thing you did last time. Welcome to the machine. Take your place over there next to all the other cogs.

There is another approach. But be forewarned: you have to wander off the straight and safe and narrow and all too trodden. You must venture into the deep dark forest in search of a rarer, but ultimately much more rewarding creature. Let's call it the true song.

Now it would be nice if I could tell you exactly what you are looking for. Unfortunately I won't and really, I can't. If I could, the journey wouldn't be unique to you and that would defeat the whole purpose. But I can tell you this much: it's something real, something deeply felt, something undeniable.

You may find it inside yourself if you look hard enough, or sitting next to you on the last subway home in the middle of the night. It may pop up in a dream. It may flutter by on the highway as you drive home from your day gig. If you can describe it in a few words, then veer to the side of the road and write them down. If you can express it in a melodic phrase, then get out the handheld and sing it. If the words and the melody fit together, take a moment to thank the personal deity of your choice. You are on the path to the true song.

I "found" "Hit Me With Your Best Shot" just outside a therapist's office after hitting pillows for a while, which was part of that particular therapist's approach. I stepped out on to the front porch after the session and the title hit me (okay, but it's true) like a ton of bricks.

I was despondent about my life at that time. No one in the industry wanted to hear my music and there wasn't a day that went by that I didn't think about giving up. That title gave me hope. Through it I articulated my own defiance in the face of adversity. I affirmed a personal refusal to give up. And the idea that it could be a hit song someday didn't occur to me. It took more



than two years to write it, to take that epiphany and realize it as a developed song.

True songs are "crafty" things. Like most natural finds (an uncut diamond, say), in its artless state it may not seem like much. It almost always has to be honed, and it has to be right. So once the intrepid songwriter has discovered the essential raw material of the true song, he or she has to go to work. Whether it takes an hour or years, he or she will only have succeeded when the lyric, the melody, the groove, and finally the arrangement have become a compelling delivery vehicle for the personal "truth" of the song. And a transformation can now take place. The writer's own take on reality, his or her personal truth can become anyone's, or most everyone's.

The true song doesn't chase fame and fortune, but sometimes, not always, but more often than one would ever imagine, fame and fortune chase the true song.

The true song is not written for the radio, but if and when the true song is broadcast on radio it justifies radio's existence, not the other way around.

And when and if it becomes a "hit," the true song makes a difference to the lives of others, not just to the songwriter's.

And not just for a year or two.

Multiple award-winning Canadian composer, producer and S.A.C. director/president Eddie Schwartz wandered off the straight and narrow to come up with his first chart-topper, "Hit Me With Your Best Shot". He is also the songwriter behind such classic hit songs as "Don't Shed A Tear" by Paul Carrack, "The Doctor" by the Doobie Brothers and "When There's Time For Love" by Lawrence Gowan. He is the President of the Songwriters Association of Canada and also on the Board of Directors of the Canadian Songwriters Hall of Fame.

Songwriters Association of Canada: [www.songwriters.ca](http://www.songwriters.ca)  
Canadian Songwriters Hall of Fame: [www.cansong.ca](http://www.cansong.ca)

