

Creating a Persona (Finding Your Identity), Putting Structure to The Madness, and Your Business Brain

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Creating a Music Persona

You may think of a persona as changing your personality but that's not necessarily the idea. There are extreme stage personas such as Marilyn Manson (real name Brian Warner), Alice Cooper (Vincent Damon Furnier), Ziggy Stardust (David Bowie real name David Jones) and more subtle ones such as Elvis Costello (Declan Patrick Aloysius McManus), or Queen Latifah (Dana Owens,,whoda thunk?).

The name change is an easy way to develop a "character" that will be the version of you that performs, but it's not necessary. When you get on stage you are performing, so how are you going to look, act, be perceived, etc. Here are some things to think about:

Clothing - what do you wear while performing?

- a. Custom made costumes that match your band members
- b. Jeans and a flannel
- c. Three piece suit
- d. Your normal clothes

Do these clothes match the sound of your band? Do they pay homage to a traditional look/genere? Do you want to be perceived as professional then why are you wearing a stained poncho on top of a once a week showered body?

Banter - What is said on stage

- a. How do you do it? Funny, serious, are you a story teller, study other songwriters, what works? What does not work? What do *you* like?
- b. What will you say? Does this song have a specific story to it, if it's interesting tell it.
- c. Why? So many people over talk in between songs, while tuning, etc. Think about the function of your talking, if you have nothing to say don't say anything at all, it's ok to sometimes let the music speak. If you can't think of anything clever say things that will help you get to that next place (promote website, tell people about merch, etc).
- d. Where? Is your talking relevant to the audience at this particular venue? Coffee house or house concert vibes often love long stories sometimes between every song. Noisy bars with young college kids don't always love that kinda thing. Always be yourself but understand that it might take adapting your set/talking to each different audience even if just a little.

How you act off stage

- a. **To Fans** - be appreciative, be enthusiastic, they will come back if they like you as a person.

- b. **To Venue** - Relationships are important. Be nice. To. Everyone. Bartenders, bookers, owners, etc. Don't be a dick. In fact, pick up your empty bottles around the stage and bring them to the bar. Talk to the staff, ask them questions, make friends. If the staff likes you, they will tell the booker/owner. Reputation in music business is huge. Think about this: You are the music venue owner, trying to make your club great and a musician just stepped off stage that was great but had a terrible attitude. Are you more likely to book this guy again, or the guy that played last night that may not have been as talented but was super nice and was clearly a hard worker, and tipped all your bartenders, and cleaned up his stage when he was done. The answer should be easy.
- c. **On Social Media** - Do you post videos of your fav songwriters on Facebook? Do you have a band page and talk trash about other bands and venues from that page? As a performer you might want to think about these things. For instance I had a gig at a church for a while, rarely did I ever post anything about religion though sometimes I really wanted to. Why? I did not want to say anything disrespectful and I thought better safe than sorry. I did not want to get fired, in the end I had to pay my bills so I made a conscious decision to just keep that kind of thing private.

With all this stuff, consistency is really key. Try to develop these things each time you play. If you are a storyteller, develop that and be consistent. If it doesn't work you can always change it but try it out for a while and allow it to grow. Do you dress up as a band sometimes but not others, this can be confusing for your fans as well as (in business talk) your "brand". If you saw Devo play without those red "whip it" hats or some other weird costume would you even know who that band was? Well, they're famous and I know them by their songs..well, what about before they were famous and no one gave a crap about their songs?? Pick something, go with it.

Structure To The Madness

Let's face it, we're artists and sometimes that means we're really creative, have lots of ideas, but can't organize them. Here are some things that have helped me out.

Ways to Create Structure

Laptop - This definitely helps if you can afford it. The best thing it does for me is allows me to work out of my house.

Chrome book - \$300

Used Macbook Pro (2014 prices)

\$524 (quick Google search)

Garageband - comes on a Mac computer. This helps me organize my musical thoughts. I label the songs and then I want to work on them later. I work on a verse and maybe even chorus, and then put it away. I will come back to it later and it seems fresh again. Sometimes it all comes out in one but most of the time it's me chipping away bit by bit. I have tons of songs that I am trying to do this and for my ADD brain it helps me feel like I'm always working on something new. The

good stuff eventually comes to the top. I still try to finish everything because you never know...maybe that bridge you finally write brings it all together and a song you hated now makes total sense.

Logic Pro X - \$200

<https://www.apple.com/logic-pro/>

Smart Phone - there are cheap multi track apps, also free recording apps which is what I use all the time to get ideas down. Driving in the car I have a melody, so I will sing into it, beat box, talk to myself whatever idea I have get it in there. It helps if you can go back through them and label them each something.

Text Edit/Notes - I use this because it's really simple, frills free, and helps me organize my songs. Also I can edit quickly and don't have to hurt my hand writing. Make sure you back up by either uploading documents to Google Drive (free) or backing up on a hard drive every once in a while. Printing the lyrics out may help you, or handwriting them into a book that has all your songs, I like to date my songs so I can see progress. Bringing the handwritten/printed lyrics to open mics or even gigs (yes, sometimes I read straight from the book) is a technique I stole off of my bro Andy.

Keeping Self Accountable - By creating documents that have actual titles this makes me want to work on these songs again. It also creates accountability, kinda like naming a child, then you have to take care of it.

There are millions of ways to keep yourself accountable in music. For me since I don't have a full time job, I have to create work, make up tasks, and put deadlines on them. Otherwise, who is going to do this? The cool thing is that, all of this stuff is about getting more art out there, being MORE creative, and truly designing your life to be awesome. That being said, some of it sucks.

Ways I keep myself accountable:

Put deadlines on my Google Calendar - "get back to Jon today about booking Joes Pub, emailed him on 8/2/14"

Set up meetings with people - Meetings? I thought music was about smoking drugs and getting ladies. Well, not if ya wanna get paid. Meetings make you accountable but also put other people in the game that are counting on YOU. If you don't make the meeting/don't do your homework/etc you're not only disappointing yourself and stunting your own career, you're also pissing others off. If you can't handle things all yourself, don't. That's why we have meetings with other people so they can help. Hey, I need help updating my calendar on ReverbNation. Set up a meeting, "hey Jon, can you once a month update my Reverb calendar? I'll give you \$20 a month, or I'll give you a guitar lesson once a month"

Play Shows - Even if it's open mics, go play your songs, if you never do, you won't get better. This IS a form of practice. Mainly it's practice performing, but also just going over new material. You can do it in your room til your blue but if you never play the song out, you won't figure out how it's going to sound out in the real world. Book a gig, then you have something to aspire to. Sometimes we think art should drive commerce but we need to allow commerce to drive our art at times.

Record - Set up studio time, put money down, all things that will get your ass in gear to get some songs finished. Don't have money? Save it up...can't? Record on your phone, or buy a tape recorder at the thrift store. Getting your songs out of your head and onto some audio format (tape, cd, mp3, dvd, I don't care) helps to improve your songs because you can hear them back. Recording on your own also helps you practice for when you go into a "real" studio. There's nothing worse than paying money to record at a studio and then freezing up because you are nervous. Your songs come out not sounding like you. You've now wasted time and money and you come out with a really nice sounding recording that does not represent you.

Play to a Click Track - Practice with a metronome. Sounds fun yeah? You'll thank me when you get into that studio. It also helps your time in general, you may have *really* bad time and just not know it. I've played with some *great* songwriters and guitar players that had awful time, and had no clue. It was *really* hard to be their drummer. If you want to get to that next level and hire next level players (ones that have good time) don't expect them to stay around if you can't count to four without speeding up.

Go to Coffee shop for sole purpose of getting one task done - For me, I have a hard time getting organized in my house. I take my laptop to a coffee shop. For me I find one with free wifi, a comfortable environment, good coffee, and one that's kind of bustling. I like that energy, and it helps me work. I almost always wear headphones as it helps me concentrate on the task at hand. Often times seeing other people working helps me focus on getting *my* stuff done. I'm big into to do lists now and I have a book full of them. Before I sit down I write a to do list and then attempt to get all those things done in the one session. If I don't finish, that's cool, there's *always* more to get done, but at least I'm chipping away. Having a notebook full of lists allows me to flip the page and write a new one, I can flip back and check the boxes maybe I hadn't gotten done last time as well.=

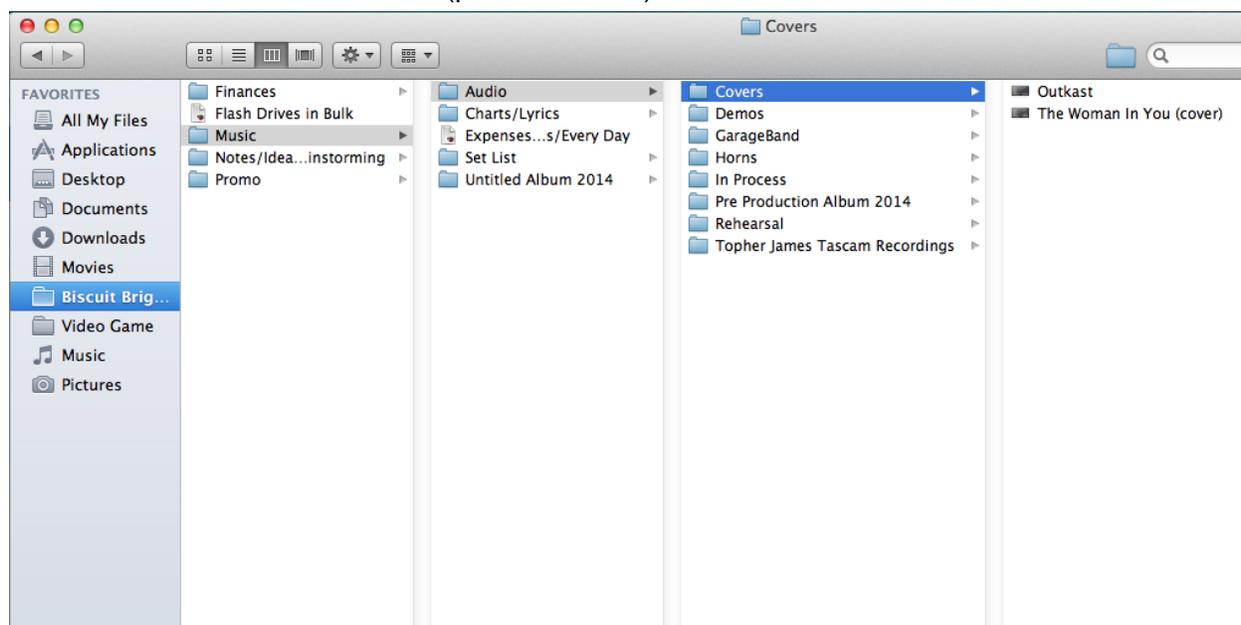
Work in Trade - My back up singers and I trade all the time. They do a recording session, I play in Abby's yoga Kirtan band or record with Talisha on her project, or play a show with her band. The better musicians are in more bands, and we all need people to back us up, great way to trade. I find trading more fulfilling sometimes then money too, though trading don't pay the rent, so just be smart about it.

Labeling- Give your songs a name, a working title if *nothing* else. I label my Garageband files something unique, usually that has something to do with the song, if there are lyrics I pick the overall arch of the song, or something I will remember. If the chorus is "I'm in a Sunday Mood"

then title it “Sunday Mood”. Short, to the point, and easy to remember so you can go back and work on it later. If you name it “Song 12” will you remember what the hell that is later? Will you read it and think “man, that was a great one, can’t wait to finish that chorus”, or will you think “man, I can’t find anything good to work on, all these songs suck, I’ll write a new one” and then start up another song “Song 13” and then continue the cycle. That’s actually the rut I was in for a while, and I started naming songs and it really really helped. I also name the Text Edit file the exact same thing. I open up my Music folder (which we’ll go over soon) and pick the (nicely titled) song I want to work on. Then on my Mac I go to “Spotlight” and type in that same title and find the Text Edit file with the same name. Within that Text Edit doc I have all the lyrics there, a lot of times I will put the chords underneath the lyrics, or write a mini chart up top so I can remember how it goes (in case the Garageband file goes away). Also, if I want to play this song out with other players I can give them the charts to use and follow along.

Organize your Computer Files

A good way to do this is to label the folder really generic and then get more specific for example: **Music >Audio>Covers>Outkast** (pictured below)



Check out the organization above - **Music** has folders that can be expanded like **Chart/Lyrics**, **Set List**, etc. all relevant to that main category. I wouldn’t put my show flyers in the music flyer, I’d put them in the **Promo** folder in a **Show Flyers** folder.

Get Detailed With Lyric Sheets

Here is how my lyric sheet (made in Text Edit) is structured - actual files pictured on the next pages:

This World is Broken (Title)

12_11_13 Version (Date of current version, sometimes multiple versions in one doc)

Verse

This is the text for verse

Chorus

This is the text for chorus

Bridge

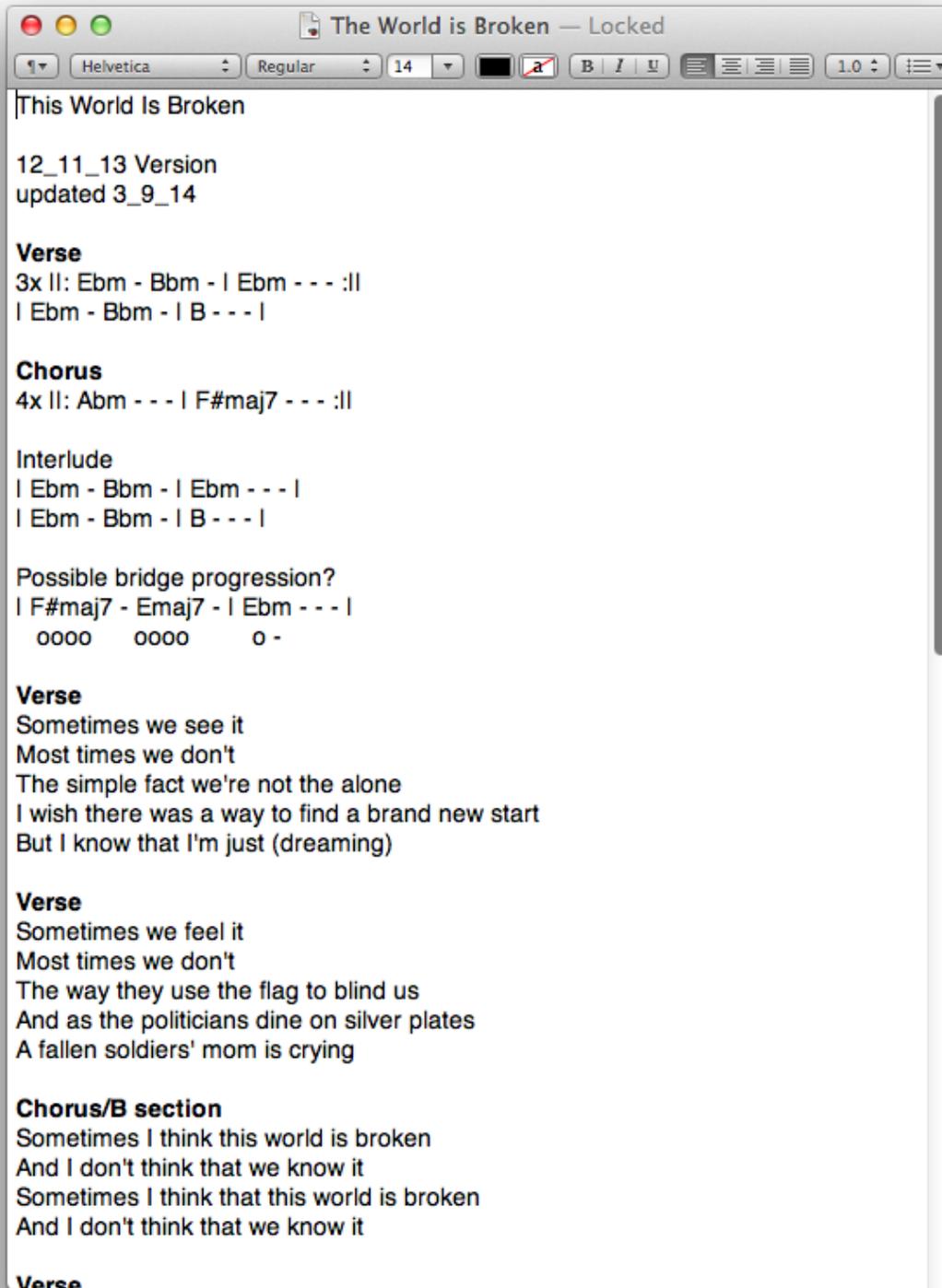
This is the bridge

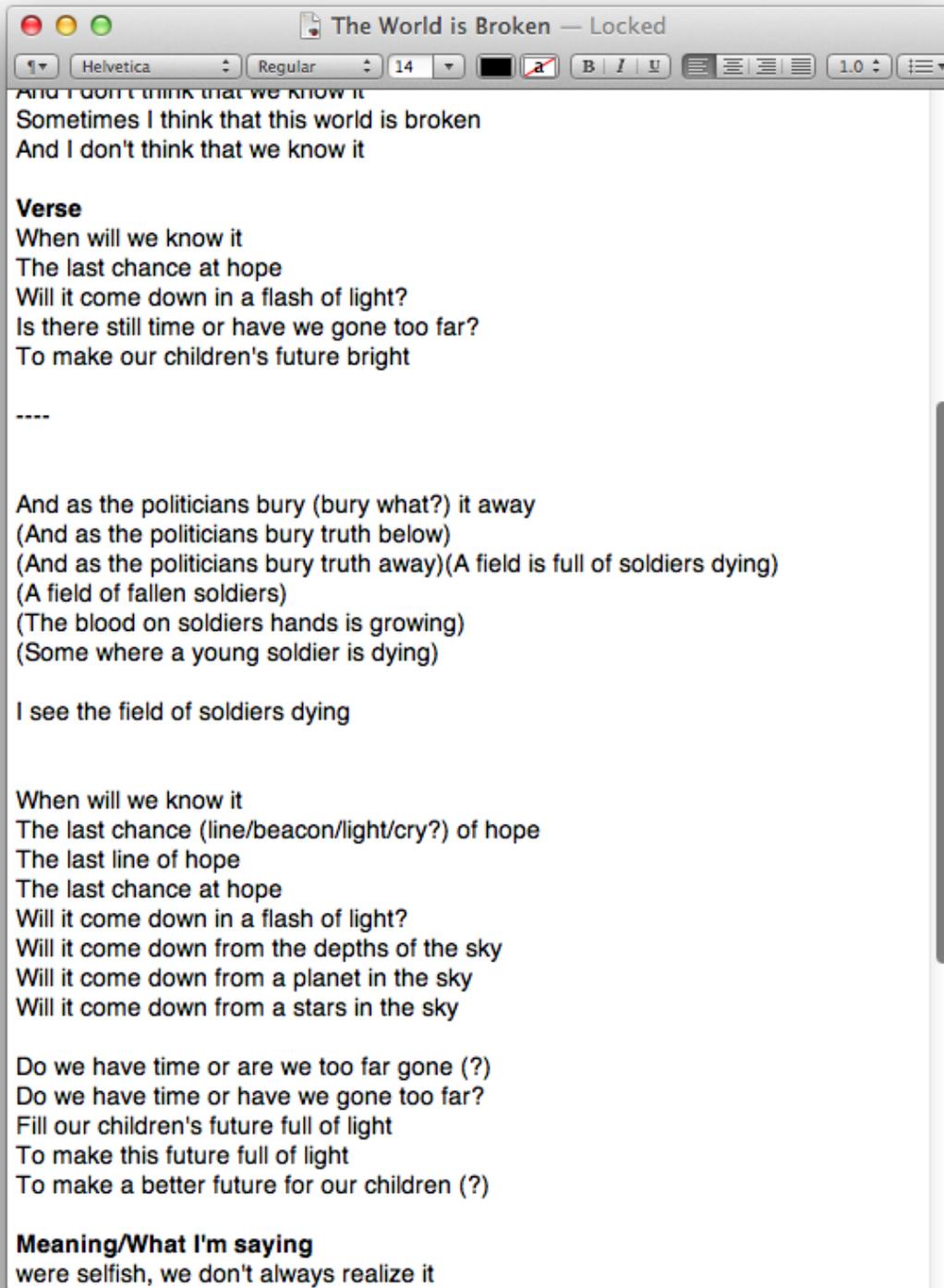
-- ←-- I add a line like this that separates the “finished” lyrics above from the more rough/working ideas below the line.

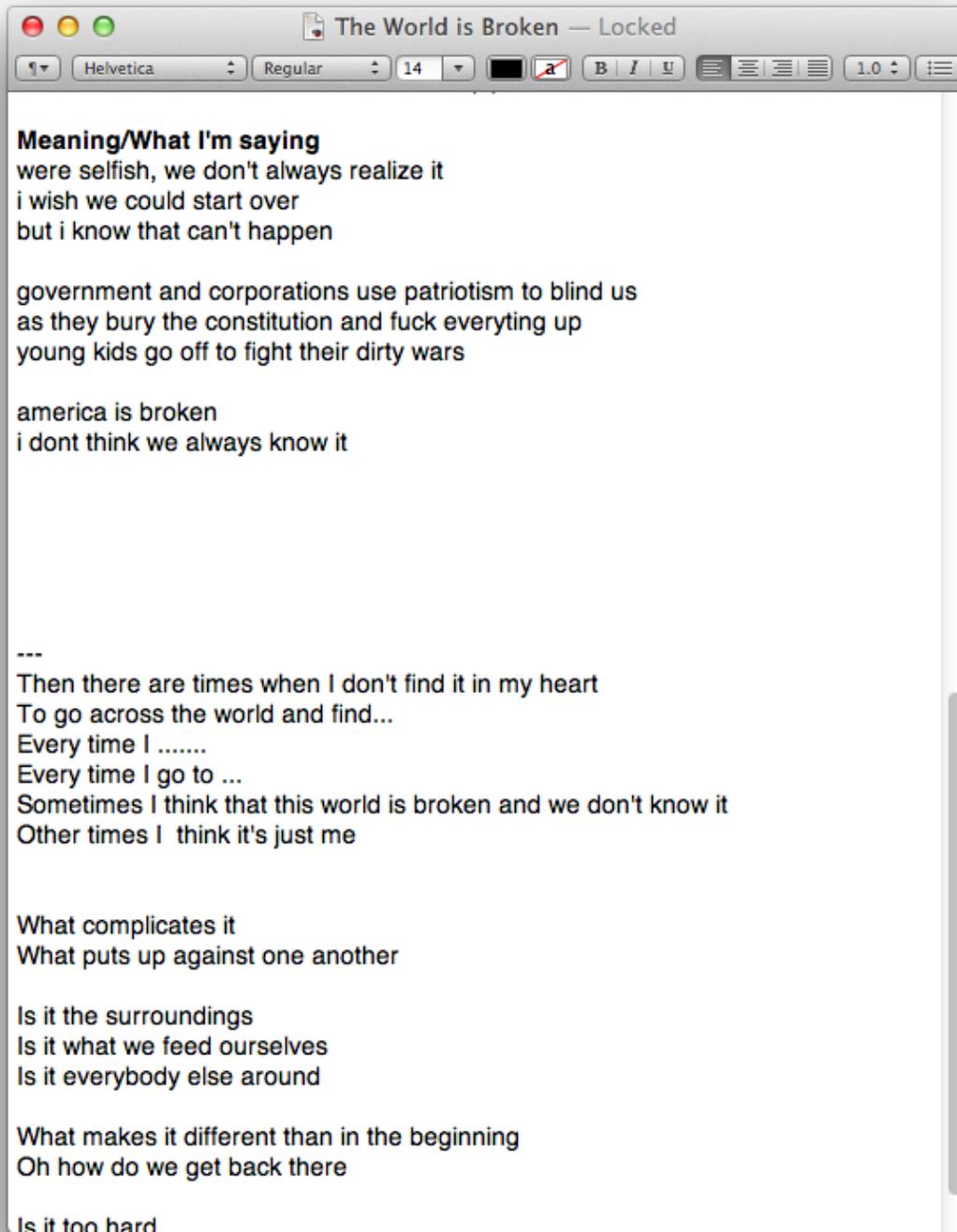
This could be lyrics I like but am not sure if they fit into the song, other thoughts and musings, maybe older versions of the song -- just separated so I can keep myself on task, and when I come back to it I know what’s going on in this document and am not thinking “now where was I?”

Sometimes I date the “version” within the document if I do a significant re-write so if I do want to go back to that version I can do so. Everything that is “iffy” or “maybe” or working I just put under these two little dashes, again to keep on task.

You will also see **Meaning/What I’m Saying** at the bottom which sometimes I include just to keep myself in line as well and not to get too far off track.







Making Money at Music

I play music for my job. That being said, most of the ideas and concepts I try to pursue have making money in mind because I have to. Here are some other things I often think about:

- Find a niche/fill a void in the marketplace - what's your unique selling point? Performing is one thing, what about recording jingles, writing for other songwriters, etc.
- Be consistent. Can't say it enough.
- Stop playing free gigs all together - at least for a while, you'll start making more money even if it's just a little. Next, play only guaranteed money - even if it's \$50, then build upon that.
- Where do they have music regularly? Farmers markets, weekly gigs at restaurants, etc. Can you fit your music into different scenarios?
- Work smarter not harder - One example is performance rights organizations like ASCAP, SESAC, etc. SESAC which I'm affiliated with pays you for playing your original material (I believe the others do too but not sure the rates). Basically this is how it works: Venues pay dues into SESAC, that money goes back to artists like you and me (if you are registered with them). I go to their website and log every performance and submit a set list of my original tunes. Weeks later I get a paycheck from them for playing my original tunes. It's decent money too.
- Private events - who's in charge of that event? Find the website, find the director and email/call them. Once you do a few events you will start to meet other people that are involved with these types of things - event planners usually - and if you are good, consistent, nice, they will refer you. Once you get into a circuit like this start slowly but steadily increasing your guarantee.

Plant Seeds

Not necessarily things I work on every single day, but I chip away at them over time. It's like saving money, before you know it you have something great.

Some seeds I have recently planted:

- A hip hop album. I've collaborated with one artist, we've gotten together about 5 times and recorded one song. It's a small seed, it may go nowhere, it may make both of us tons of money, but we started something.
- A video game. Once every few weeks I get together with a game designer I met through a friend on Facebook. I work on the art and he implants it into the game and puts it to code. It's going to star me and my band mates and be included on the next cd with new music. In the end it may have taken 5 months to create but it'll be something very few people have done, especially locally, plus it's super fun.
- A recording (outside of any of my other projects). My friend Todd and I get together every couple of weeks and work on one song. That's our goal right now. We have lots of other ideas but for now we just want to get this specific song recorded, and sounding really great, and well produced. It might be used to pitch for commercials, it may be for a record label, we're just not sure yet.

There's no secret to making money, in my opinion it's just *hard work*. If you are looking for some easy way to make lots of cash, this ain't it. It's years of consistency, persistence, practicing, making relationships, and for lack of better term *hustling*. If you're willing to do that, then there's money to be made.

Please contact me with any questions, concerns, ideas, I'd love to try and help you get to that next place, hear your new song, or just talk about this crazy business.

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