

Developing Characters in Songwriting

Workshop - with Martin Gilmore

Every song has a character. From narrative stories to deeply introspective songs, every piece of writing carries a specific voice, emotional perspective, and way of seeing the world. Focusing on making that character more vivid and distinct can strengthen a song in many ways. It can lend gravitas to a subject, sharpen emotional communication, deepen storytelling, and help songs feel more believable and emotionally grounded.

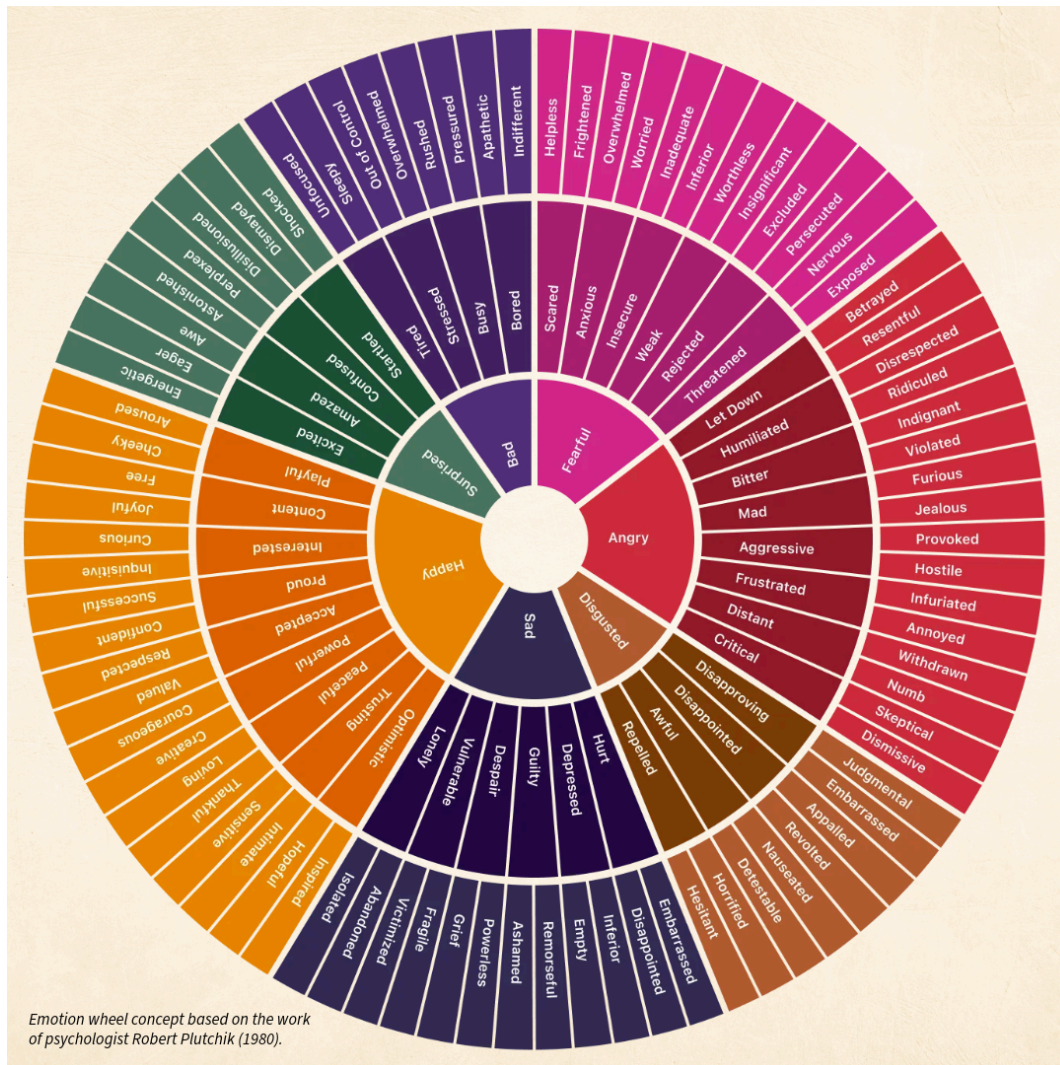
This workshop explores techniques for developing character voice in songwriting through language, emotional perspective, imagery, vernacular, point of view, and storytelling choices. Through discussion, listening examples, writing exercises, and opportunities to workshop material, participants will experiment with ways to make songs feel more human, specific, and emotionally resonant.

The Feelings Wheel

The Feelings Wheel is a tool designed to help people identify emotions with greater specificity. Broad emotional categories like “happy,” “sad,” “angry,” or “afraid” can be useful starting points, but songs often become more vivid and emotionally believable when writers explore more precise emotional states.

Throughout this workshop, we will use this as a creative tool for exploring emotional specificity, character voice, and perspective.

The goal is not to use the wheel as a rigid system, but as a way of expanding emotional vocabulary and discovering more specific emotional textures within your songs and characters.



Questions for your character

- What does this person want?
- What are they avoiding?
- What do they notice?
- What kind of language do they use?
- What emotion are they suppressing?
- What are they trying to protect?
- What do they regret?
- What would embarrass them?
- What details matter to them?

Character through music

- What groove belongs to this person?
- What melodic shape fits them?
- Sparse or dense arrangement?
- Stable harmony or unstable?
- Conversational or dramatic phrasing?

Observational Reminders

Characters are developed through observation. Spend time people-watching, observing environments, listening for rhythms of speech, collecting habits and mannerisms, studying fashion, noticing posture and nonverbal communication, describing objects, and imagining routines. The smallest details often reveal the largest truths about a person.

More information can be found at:
www.martingillmore.com/developingcharacters

