

The Voodoo Muse Online Magazine of Sweet Tea & Conjure

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GENERAL MUSINGS

Completely Unoriginal and Totally Cliché

For years in New Orleans I was a musician and performing other people's songs as well as writing my own. Once, there was a critic who came to one of our shows and wrote up a review the following day. The critique was a good one; but, there was one criticism he made that helped me improve my songwriting. The critic had made the remark that one of my songs contained too many clichés. I never thought about that; before this time I loved using clichés as I thought it would help to connect to my audience. The whole song wasn't a cliché... although I wish i could remember which song it was so I could analyze it and review it 30 years later. In any event, clichés have their place in songwriting and in writing in general, to punctuate or emphasize a point or message. But there is an art to using them and if your tendency is to use clichés in your writing, not using them can be quite the challenge. What it all boils down to is originality and being able to express one's life, experiences and opinions in a manner that reflects you as a unique person.



For example, you may think that writing a song or a blog post without using a cliché would be easy as pie, but it just seems that the more we learn about something, the less we know. In truth, all we need to do is keep it simple, stay true to ourselves – it really is a no brainer. However, the tendency is often to take the easy way out, abandon ship, change our tune, make an about face, and flip flop our position like a politician. To use a cliché or not to use cliché, that is the question. The real acid test is whether we can go back to the drawing board – be it ever so humble – and if the shoe fits, be willing to wear it. Most importantly, don't put off until tomorrow what can be done today. There really is no time like the present to make a change for the better. The ball is in your court – practice makes perfect.

The bottom line is this: if you want to blow people away with originality, stay away from the naysayers, the followers, and the regurgitators. Stand tall and stand proud – nobody's perfect – give yourself a break! Don't box yourself in by trying to live up to someone else's expectations. Build a better mousetrap and the world will beat a path to your door, or so I've been told.

At the end of the day, each challenge is just another bump in the road in the journey of a writer's life. My advice is this: if you've heard it before, don't write it again. If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. Truth be told, when it comes to critics, you're damned if you do and dammed if you don't – take it from me, I've been around the block a few times. I know that dogs bark, but the caravan moves on. God willing, and if the creek don't rise, I'll continue to have my place in the sun, and so will you.

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*This article was originally posted in my Save your Drama for your Mama blog in answer to a prompt from a creative writing site to write a post only using well-worn phrases and clichés.

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