

REASONS FOR THE RHYMES

A SONGWRITING GUIDE BY JOHN KELLY

Commissioned by Graeae
for the 'Reasons to be Cheerful' engagement programme



**A PROTEST SONG CAN UNITE PEOPLE, GIVE PEOPLE
STRENGTH AND CAN BE PART OF MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN.**

ABOUT JOHN KELLY ("JK")

John has been singing for a lifetime and as a professional for the last ten years. His Irish roots and love of music have strongly influenced the energy, passion and fun that John brings to his work. He is an active campaigner with his music and continues to attract interest from national and international media.

Over the last seven years he has completed 5 UK tours as well as many international performances. John is Artistic Director of DaisyFest, National Associate Artist for Drake Music, musician with circus company Extraordinary Bodies and is Policy & Strategy Manager at Merton Centre for Independent Living.

John is cast in *Reasons to be Cheerful* and sang *Spasticus Autisticus* live at the opening ceremony of the Paralympic Games in London. He has played with the Blockheads and his own band Rockinpaddy whenever he gets time off. John has developed a ground-breaking new guitar The Kellycaster, supported by Drake Music.



REASONS FOR THE RHYMES



3 (AND A BIT) STEPS TO YOUR OWN #PROTESTSONG

BY JOHN KELLY

STEP 1: WHAT DO I WRITE ABOUT?

This can be the easiest and hardest bit to do and it's probably the most important bit too.

This first step is to focus on the idea and **get it out**. The more ideas you generate, the more you have to play with.

Like anything the first attempt might need refining and revisiting, but **go with the flow**. Keep track of what you create. This is so important so you don't forget things.

Don't get hung up on getting it all nice and tidy at this stage, feel free just to get it out.

Collaborate with others as you might be the writer, a rapper, a signer and another friend might be the singer or guitar player. You might be in a band or you might get together with others and create a new band just for this. With different skills and talents or as a solo make your song shine with your energy and passion.

Use everything around you to fill your song, to tell the full story of your passion.

Music, poetry, and all forms of creative expression are a human right and an important way we express feelings, make connections and come together. Imagine others performing your song of change. I've been lucky enough to experience this in a small way and it makes the hairs on the back of your neck stand up. It's an amazing, humbling feeling, so go for it. There is a Protest Song in us all. And when we say song, we include your spoken word poetry, signed song, or your music from your own band.

So to start, ask yourself these questions:

1. What is your song going to be about?

What is the thing you feel most passionately about?

Is there something you would like to see improved, better understood or changed for the better?

Is it about injustice, like discrimination, being treated differently or a lack of access for example?

Is it about good things, like having freedom, coming together, celebrating differences or a shared experience? This might hold the clue to the name of your song title too.

2. What is your message?

What do you feel and sense around you? What's on the telly, radio, newspapers?

What are other people saying about this issue, or is no one talking about it?

Are there things only you know or feel that might make other people think in a different way?



3. What do I already know about?

Make a list of all your thoughts around the idea. You don't have to write them on paper - you could record them, cut words and phrases out of magazines or papers, whatever works for you.

4. What do I need to know about the subject?

Do you need to do some research? Find out some things about the subject. Have conversations with others to get different views. Could the song be a conversation between different perspectives?

5. What is the positive change I want to see?

Be bold and brave with this.

What does the change look and feel like?

How could things be better with the change you want?

What is your role in the change? What do you want others to do?

The beauty of our #ProtestSong campaign is that it's not a competition. It is an opportunity for you to be creative and make a 'song' about something you feel passionate about.

STEP 2: FIND A RHYTHM, FIND A STRUCTURE & MAKE IT YOURS

You might find you want to experiment with melodies, chords and rhythms. If you are a sign language user your signs and translation can create the rhythm, but try and play with pace, hand shapes and space.

Take your time. The song might just find itself and flow into a traditional pattern a bit like this:

- an intro
- verse
- chorus
- second verse
- chorus
- middle section (mid 8, often slightly different from the verse & chorus pattern)
- third verse
- chorus (maybe repeated)
- outro or ending.



You might use a pattern like the one above to **structure your song**, or perhaps apply a rule that certain lines rhyme, like in a limerick.

To find a melody or tune, my friend Gary Day suggests you might get a catchy 3 or 4 note 'tune' or melody in your head first. You could sing/sign/record into your phone as a record of something to revisit when you're ready for putting lyrics to it, and vice versa. I've seen this work really well in writing a song.

Music notes go from A to G (yep, there are also flats and sharps, the black notes), but pick 4 letters between A and G as a starting point. Then play around on a piano or keyboard. Try putting the 4 notes in different order, playing them faster and slower, longer and shorter...you might find a tune/melody this way.

SOME OTHER IDEAS TO HELP WRITE YOUR SONG...

You will probably come up with your own unique way to create your song. The following ideas have been used by some great songwriters in the past to help them write songs. This is not an exhaustive list of methods, but they might be fun to try.

The shopping list

Ian Dury used a method similar to this.

Write lots of random words associated with the idea/theme like a shopping list. Sometimes they don't even have to be proper words, they just have a nice rhythm or rhyme.

Freestylin'

Don't even write it down at all. Some singers 'scat' out the words just that one time, a one off, free styling whatever comes out of the feeling or conviction. If you do use this exciting method, **make sure to start recording before you begin!** It can be good to do this in a group with a simple beat and then take turns to drop in and out with a phrase or rhyme or whole piece.

I made the news today

Sometimes a protest song flows out of your heart right onto the paper. I wrote *Battle Of Whitehall*, (<https://youtu.be/9pLn3RfY1Hs>) in about 20 minutes. It was all there in everything I had seen and done on that day. I picked up the third verse from things that had been on the news that evening about the protest.

Cut it out

Thom Yorke of Radiohead uses a similar method. As you read or hear a nice phrase, a good word, or pictures, make a note, or start a collection. When you get about 12 to 16 phrases or pictures see what links, rhymes, stands out alone. Group them into 3 groups and you might just have written your three verses or one phrase might stick out as being the tag for your chorus.

The journey

Sometimes a song needs working on and that is fine too. You might have to research the story. I love that journey in songwriting when you end up finding stuff out you never knew.

My reworking of *Which Side Are You On* https://youtu.be/_ACIYwD6rfc took me time. I learned about the original story and then found out that the song had been re-written by different movements. It was first a trade union song, then it was adopted during the civil rights movement and the tune and lyrics changed. Then the song was adopted during an industrial dispute, again changing slightly to reflect a new story. The history of the song's meaning and its changes swam around in my head for ages. Along with the lyrics, I knew the tradition was to change the tune slightly and I spent time experimenting with sounds both acoustic and electric. It felt a big effort to do the song justice for yet another different struggle, but it was a journey I wanted to go on.

Rip outta rap

Rap is great to get a message out. The beauty of opportunity is in the passion and delivery. With one, two, three or many over-laying 'voices' a rap can say it all. Find a pattern and beat, and off you go.

These have been just some ideas to help with your songwriting. You might try one or mix them up and use a bit of each of them.

What matters is that the 'song' is yours and it expresses how you feel about something that matters to you. If it matters to you, chances are it will matter to others too.

This all leads me nicely into step three...

STEP 3: CAPTURE YOUR SONG

You need to choose a format to record your song that suits you best. There are so many ways to do this. The important thing is that it captures the message, energy and meaning of your protest song.

Consider

- Access to your protest song. How does the message/rhythm/feeling comes across in word, sound, sign and feeling?
- How you are going to record your song. If you have experience of songwriting/recording then you'll know how you're going to do this bit already. But if you haven't done any recording before, don't be put off. It can be done fairly easily with a bit of trial and error. Consider recording straight to your phone, as audio or video if that is most accessible for you.
- Spend a little time trying and testing the equipment you decide to use to get the best recording you can.
- Practising the song, practicing the recording. Do a few recordings or takes and choose the one you are happiest with.
- Recording in a place that captures the sound as clearly as possible.

There is lots of software out there that you can use from free stuff like Audacity through to professional paid DAW (Digital Audio Workstation) packages like Logic or Pro Tools for a home studio.

You might know of a friend who would be willing to help, so get them involved.

There might be a local, friendly studio who want to get involved in your song project and want to help, especially if the theme of your song resonates with them. You'll never know unless you ask.

We really appreciate that for many songwriters the quality will matter to you and we really welcome the efforts everyone will have given into capturing and recording their protest song.

This is a chance for your #ProtestSong to be heard and seen by wider audiences on our tour of *Reasons to be Cheerful*. Or it may feature on our Protest Song Stage, our online platform dedicated to your songs of protest and shared through specially created playlists.

Find a format that suits you: signed song; lyric video; audio recording; via your mobile phone or in your home recording studio. It doesn't have to be professionally recorded but it can be!

You will find that you might need to practice a few times. Maybe record a short clip then play it back to make sure its recording ok. Then go for it!

Ok so maybe there's one more step...but it's a really important one, and since you've made it this far...



STEP 3.5: SEND IT TO US TO SHARE

The key is to make and record your song in whatever format suits you. Then send it to us to share with the world. The song will always be yours and by sending it to us you'll be a part of our #ProtestSong revolution. **Download our Submission Guidelines Here** (<http://graeae.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Protest-Song-Submission-Guidelines-1.pdf>)

Keep the song you send to us to a maximum of 3 minutes if you can (obviously your song can be shorter).

The theme, genre, style and format are all up to you. However remember we may not get to share all songs that we receive as part of this project without explanation or justification.

We are encouraging creativity, accessibility, inclusivity and a respect for human rights.

JK'S TOP 10 TIPS

- 1. REMEMBER, there are no rules to writing a song.** There is no right or wrong, if it feels right it probably is
- 2.** Find a pattern/structure that suits you best, find the rhythm in the words and signs
- 3.** Originality and difference is to be celebrated
- 4.** Protest songs resonate with people who feel the same so join with others to sing/sign/chant together
- 5.** One voice/signed lyrics can be just as powerful as many voices, so sing and sign it out bold and proud
- 6. SIMPLICITY IS BEAUTIFUL, life is complicated enough!**
- 7.** Protest songs are about feeling, passion and energy. It will be that passion and energy that makes it yours and is what #ProtestSong is all about
- 8. LISTEN TO YOUR HEART** (what's your gut reaction) and write/record it without fearing it might be wrong. It won't be
- 9.** Find your message, find the rhythm in the words, write a shopping list related to your message, scribble words (even made up non-words), find rhythms in anything you do, see, feel
- 10.** Don't get hung up on making it perfect...after practice (and maybe a bit more practice), it will be



HELPFUL RESOURCES



Here are a few online introduction videos that might help you get started.

Again this list is not exhaustive and we are not endorsing a particular app or way to do this. Different people will find different tools for the job. There is a lot out there with varying levels of accessibility and quality.

All these videos have captioning. Just click the icon to the top left of the screen to toggle the captions on and off (occasionally I've found the captions throws in a wrong word which is disappointing, another song for protest....for online videos to be properly and accurately captioned!)

We will add to the list of resources below, so please share your tools and 'how too' tips so we may add them here too.

Audacity

A basic free download that you can use to record and edit audio
a beginners guide is here: <https://youtu.be/fshLRI3GWqE>

Recording a song on your computer

<https://youtu.be/6vGY00M7Yjo>

Editing a video on your iPhone

https://youtu.be/_ZUvINSCOB4

Using Garageband

How to record a song on garageband: <https://youtu.be/y7DjRJld3o> (short tutorial)

How to record a song on garageband: <https://youtu.be/ZNCAGYENnc8> (in depth)

How to export your song from garage band to an mp3: <https://youtu.be/EJyvSpgL-5E>



Drumjam

A drum rhythm app demo: <https://youtu.be/bFCJ7virgng>

Thumbjam

A single finger app to play a variety of instruments:

<https://youtu.be/kvIv7OF5pYk>

HD loopy:

For looping voices: <https://youtu.be/BtZcYBgRVEs>

A short film on the adventure of using accessible music technology:

<https://youtu.be/V5Asw04DsD8>

Drake Music

For more on Accessible Music Technology: www.drakemusic.org

SofaSessions

For real-time online rehearsal with others (registration, good internet connection and a little audio knowledge is required). <http://www.sofasession.com>

HELPFUL RESOURCES

More excellent and free music software

For use on Mac, PCs, phones and tablets: <https://learningmusic.ableton.com/>
Excellent for getting a quick beat/tempo set up to chant along to and scratch some rough ideas. (Thanks to my mate Gary Day for this link.)

To discover some more examples of protest songs, visit our music platform at
www.graeae.org/protest-song-hub

JK's #ProtestSongs can also be found here:

- Battle of Whitehall <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9pLn3RfY1Hs>
- Which Side Are You On https://youtu.be/_ACIYwD6rfc

Check out JK's website here: **www.rockinpaddy.com**

www.graeae.org

GRAEae

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ENGLAND**



Oi Oi GET WRITING!

Reasons to be Cheerful is a Graeae Theatre Company
production in association with Belgrade Theatre Coventry

