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10 TIPS FOR WRITING GREAT SONG MELODIES

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Of all song elements, a great melody is probably the most important one for creating a song that people remember.

When you've written a great song, more often than not that means that you've given the listener something they can hum all day. Since it's very difficult to hum a chord progression, and since it's hard to remember lyrics without also remembering the melody that they're attached to, the quality of your song's melody becomes crucial to the success of your song. You'd think that since there are many different musical genres, there must also be many different ways to construct a melody. But in fact most melodies show a similar construction, whether jazz, rock, country, classical or folk. As with all song characteristics, the moment you describe the qualities of good melodies is usually the moment you can list the songs that don't follow those guidelines. Nonetheless, there are common characteristics that seem to keep appearing in successful melodies, regardless of when they were written, or for what genre.

Here's a list of 10 tips derived by studying the best song melodies across most musical genres. If your melodies aren't quite making it for you, check the list, and see what you might do to improve them:

1. **Use mainly stepwise motion.** Stepwise motion means moving from one note to an adjacent one without skipping a note. Stepwise motion ensures that the melody is more easily singable.
2. **Use occasional leaps.** A melody that is all stepwise with no leaps can lack vitality. A leap, particularly an upward one on especially emotive words, will inject energy and feeling into your melody.
3. **Keep a melody within an octave-and-a-half.** Melodies that are too expansive are more difficult to sing. A listener will connect to your song if they can sing along with it.
4. **Incorporate a climactic moment in your song's melody.** Somewhere, usually in the chorus, there should be a spot where the melody hits a high note, and then descends from it. That high note becomes the climactic moment, the spot everyone waits for.
5. **Allow chorus melodies to be generally higher in pitch than verse melodies.** The higher chorus melody allows for greater song energy, which should happen in a chorus.

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6. **The tonic (key) note should appear more often in the chorus melody than in verse melody.** Musical phrases in the chorus should move toward the tonic note, especially near the end of the chorus.
7. **Allow the rhythm of your melody to match the natural rhythm of the words.** Forcing lyrics into unnatural spots in your melody sounds awkward.
8. **The notes of a verse should usually be shorter and more rhythmically active than the notes of a chorus.** The longer chorus notes allow for a greater emotional build.
9. **Repeated melodic phrases helps memorability.** Melodies that don't use repetition are harder to remember. Repetition is an important feature of most successful songs. Once you've written the first phrase of your melody, the best thing is often to simply repeat it.
10. **Use repeated notes, especially with a lyric that expresses determination or strong opinions.** Repeated notes will strengthen a lyric's message.

As I say, for every one of these tips you can list good songs that do practically the opposite. But if you find that your melodies are not making you happy, one of those tips may help you write a tune that creates more of an impact with listeners.