

**Faculty: Steve Seskin, Scott Cook, Mary Bragg, Vance Gilbert & Bill Nash**

Kerrville Folk Festival has offered Songwriters School for over 35 years. Held in the Kennedy Outdoor Theater with plenty of room for break-out sessions, the intimate setting of Quiet Valley Ranch on weekdays, paired with the quality of the faculty and the synergy of creative collaboration, have given KFF Songwriters School a solid reputation for helping writers move up to the next level. Registrants vary from experienced songwriter performers to lawyers who really want to be songsmiths. Songwriters School is limited to 60 to maximize the opportunities for each student to get feedback and receive coaching on their work.

Your registration fee includes a KFF tote bag, admission to the festival and campground (including Sundown Concerts and tent camping), four days of songwriting classes and lunches on class days.

## **2023 KFF SONGWRITERS SCHOOL SCHEDULE**

### **MONDAY**

**9 am Welcome to Song School Steve Seskin and Thomas Chapmond**

**9:15 am till 10:30 opening Master class**

**Steve Seskin will open with a talk on Lyric Writing**

What elements make up the most potent and engaging lyrics? In this workshop we take a look at lyrics that have that magical combination of imagery and emotion and how those two factors contribute greatly to drawing in the listener. I always say “show me, don’t tell me.” We need to paint pictures with our lyrics. We’ll talk about some of the tools every songwriter needs to be a better lyric writer.

**10:30 till 10:45 - Break**

**10:45 till noon Master class with Mary Bragg**

**Challenging Yourself as an Artist**

Falling into habits, good and bad, as writers and performers is something we all do. In this class, we’ll cover ways to improve your songs and performances using constructive feedback from both yourself and others. We’ll try hard, new things that will not come easily at first; we’ll cover creative song prompts, innovative performance tricks, and we’ll set individually crafted standards for your artistic goals.

**Noon till 1:00 - Lunch**

**1:00 till 2:00 pm**

Meet the full-time faculty Steve Seskin, Mary Bragg, Vance Gilbert, Scott Cook and Bill Nash

Each instructor will talk a little about themselves, their classes and maybe even play a song

2:00pm to 3:30 - Afternoon Electives

**Bill Nash** will offer a class on **alternate tunings**. He will teach you what they are and how to use them to open a whole new world of possibilities for the musical/guitar side of your songwriting.

**Mary Bragg** will offer **Harnessing Your Vocal Chops**

Everyone's singing voices are incredibly individual. Whether you're a songwriter who hardly sings or a classically trained singer who hardly writes, we'll identify what makes your voice special in all its physiological intricacies, and help you deepen your understanding and use of that instrument to better deliver your songs.

**Scott Cook** will offer politics in songs, "Bridge-building vs. burning: How not to write political songs that suck"? How to preach to more than just the choir!

**Vance Gilbert** will offer **Vocal Miscellany - Scatting, Humming, Yodeling, Talking, Stories, and Silence** -

You don't have to have a lightning-fast, smoking guitar solo in that break between the bridge and the last verse. Heck, do you even need all those words in the bridge? - as you've said what you needed to say. Or do you just want your mouth to dance with joy in your solo break? Bring your good songs, a ready mouth and an open mind and let's have some vocal fun!

3:30 till 3:45 - Break

3:45 till 5:00 - Afternoon Electives continue

**Steve Seskin** will offer the 1st of many **critique sessions** for students. During this session we will look at 4 or 5 songs. Please bring lyric sheets. There will be a lot to learn observing this process so feel free to attend even if you don't feel ready to look at one of your songs yet. Please bring at least two copies of your lyric.

**Bill Nash Multiple capos!** Bill is one of the masters of using two or three or even four capos to create amazing possibilities of sound with his guitar. he will de mystify this process and show you how to use multiple capos to make you sound like an even better guitar player than you are.

**Vance Gilbert** will offer **I Still Got It, Staying Relevant After A Certain Age Session V** -

This popular workshop will have it's 5th airing. After years of practice and hard work, all the goodness of what you do has really come together - and now you have stylish bifocals and some grey hair. More than ever, after-50 singer songwriters have earned the right to take some extra care to keep their thing together. Lower the key, pace your set, show your maturity in your vocal approach to the music. We'll talk about your age, station, health, direction, and expectations. Let's talk about subject material too - writing about love and relationships has a different slant now, doesn't it? You know more now - here's your chance to parlay that experience and knowledge into successful songwriting and performance. While there'll be plenty of discussion, be prepared to play and sing.

**Scott Cook will offer a look at** different fingerpicking patterns, exploring what kind of song works well with this accompaniment and how to use it for part of a song but not all of it.

5:00 pm till whenever - **SONG CIRCLE** on the main stage. We will sit in a circle and swap songs. No critiques, just enjoying each others songs and hopefully getting to know a little bit more about each participant in the process.

## **TUESDAY**

In addition to the master classes this morning, there will be private mentoring sessions with, Mary Bragg, Vance Gilbert and Bill Nash.

Five 30-minute slots from 10 am till 12:30 pm. Signups for these slots will be at 8:30 am on the main stage. Please sign up for only one per day until everyone has had a chance to take a slot. If there are open slots after that, you may sign up for a 2nd slot on the same day.

9 am till 9:15 Questions?

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### **9:15 till 10:30 Master Class**

**Steve Seskin on Melody writing.**

In focusing on melody writing, I teach from a place of writing melodies for lyrics. Prosody is the marriage of music and lyric. We will explore ways to determine if the overall vibe of the music feels right and look at specific parts of songs in terms of choosing an appropriate melody that milks the emotion that the writer would like the listener to feel from the lyric. I will also talk about phrasing and accents. There is an important word in every sentence. We look at choosing accent places that stress the right syllables and help drive home your point. Music can actually change the meaning of a lyric when used to its fullest potential. We also discuss rhythm and range and how to use them effectively in songs.

10:30 till 10:45 - Break

10:45 till 12:30 - **Master Class with Scott Cook "Reverse Engineering - Song Structure as a Key to Creativity:** In this class, we'll take a look at how form can be a source of inspiration rather than limitation. We'll talk about five formal lenses (rhyme scheme, chords by number, song form, rhythmic feel, and motif), analyze a few well-known songs through those lenses, and see how we can reverse-engineer old forms into new creations."

12:30 till 1:30 - Lunch

1:30 till 3:00 - Afternoon Electives

**Steve Seskin and Mary Bragg** will offer the 2nd critique session for students. During this session we will take a look at 4 or 5 songs. Please bring lyric sheets. There will be a lot to learn observing this process so feel free to attend even if you don't feel ready to look at one of your songs yet.

**Vance Gilbert** will offer **Songwriting through the Eyes of Performance** -

A great song does not by itself get heard. It needs to be performed so that a producer, publisher, record exec, and most importantly your fans can be part of its full impact. It's a "collision course" Vance offers where performance and songwriting are inextricably intertwined entities. Here's your chance to pick up and hone some skills that will make your song and its presentation shine. Everything from keeping time, arrangement of the song, what key, "getting the guitar out of the way", the cliché police, posture, vocal stuff, even how to approach the stage and plug in the guitar will be examined on the mike in a safe and supportive "open mike-ish" atmosphere.

**Scott Cook - will offer politics in songs, "Bridge-building vs. burning: How not to write political songs that suck"? How to preach to more than just the choir!**

3 pm till 3:15 - Break

3:15 till 5 pm - Afternoon Electives

**Bill Nash** will offer "partial capo 101" Ever get tired of the same old G, C, D chords? Sometimes the sound of a new chord voicing is just the ticket to jump start our creativity and off to the races with a new song. Learn hands on how to use a partial capo in as many as 8 different positions. Most in standard tuning with simple fingerings. The partial capo has a similar sound as rich open tunings

**Steve Seskin**

### **How to Write a Story Song**

Everyone loves a great story song. Songwriters are well served by having a few of these in their arsenal. But upon inspection, these songs are not at all easy to write, they can go wrong in so many ways, losing the listener, creating confusion, or even worse indifference.

This class will teach you the ins and outs of writing story songs, using imagery, metaphor, dialogue, and microscopic detail to move a story forward and keep the listener interested and emotionally invested.

We will discuss the fundamentals of the form:

-The more you wish to describe a universal truth, the more minutely and honestly you must describe a particular.

-Creating scenes. Where is your narrator located, what does this place look like? USE PICTURES, think of it as a little movie.

-Building meaning, moving through time, generating empathy and resonance.

**Vance Gilbert will offer Vance 202 -**

Are you a working musician? Have you had a few sessions with Vance's "bootcamp" over the last few years? Well, here's a chance to dig in a little deeper. We'll look at the shape of a "set", the set list itself, patter, and prepping for a performance. Also the song will be scrutinized (bring one that is somewhat "tattered" and just not working for you for whatever reason). Think of the previously mentioned Vance classes with a substantially more intensive examination of what you write and how you present it on the stage. There'll be a little clawing and bleeding - antiseptic will be provided (just kidding - don't be such a chicken!)

## **Mary Bragg will offer From Song Seed to the Studio**

Explore routes to take your song seeds from germination to full bloom with music production tools that don't have to be dizzying. Understand how to get started in a DAW (digital audio workstation), and how to stay on top of current sonic industry trends, if you want to. We'll discuss how to bridge the gap between songwriting and production tools, how to record basic but solid demos of your songs, and how to work with a producer.

5:15 pm till whenever - SONG CIRCLE on the main stage

### WEDNESDAY

9am till 10 am **Steve Seskin and Mary Bragg talk about co-writing**, the do's and don'ts, the ins and outs. How to find the collaborator of your dreams. They have written many songs together and they're still great friends!!

In addition to the master classes, there will be individual mentoring offered by **Mary Bragg, Bill Nash, Scott Cook and Steve Seskin** 10am till 12:00 four 30-minute slots.

10:00 till Noon **Master class with Vance Gilbert Songwriting through the Eyes of Performance** -

A great song does not by itself get heard. It needs to be performed so that a producer, publisher, record exec, and most importantly your fans can be part of it's full impact. It's a "collision course" Vance offers where performance and songwriting are inextricably intertwined entities. Here's your chance to pick up and hone some skills that will make your song and it's presentation shine. Everything from keeping time, arrangement of the song, what key, "getting the guitar out of the way", the cliché police, posture, vocal stuff, even how to approach the stage and plug in the guitar will be examined on the mike in a safe and supportive "open mike-ish" atmosphere.

12:00 till 1:15 Lunch

1:15 till 3 pm -

**Steve Seskin and Scott Cook** will offer a **critique session** for students. During this session we will take a look at 4 or 5 songs. Please bring lyric sheets. There will be a lot to learn observing this process so feel free to attend even if you don't feel ready to look at one of your songs yet.

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**Bill Nash will offer** a class on alternate tunings. He will teach you what they are and how to use them to open a whole new world of possibilities for the musical/guitar side of your songwriting.

3:00 till 3:15 break

**3:15 till 5 pm - Afternoon Electives**

**Vance Gilbert will offer**

**This Song Is For Me -**

Often there is so much focus on honing our originals so they can stand side-by-side with songs we admire on the radio, Spotify,

Apple Music. But what about the songs you wrote in the midst of 15 months of serious sequestering and introspection? Do they have to sound like hits? Or can we honor and validate those songs written from that very personal space, even if they don't line up like "verse verse chorus verse bridge chorus" tickets to fame. What about those songs that are the ticket to your personal well being? Let's play some of them, chat about them, and see where these songs live in the pantheon of \*you\*.

**Scott Cook will offer** a look at different fingerpicking patterns, exploring what kind of song works well with this accompaniment and how to use it for part of a song but not all of it.

**5:00 pm till whenever - SONG CIRCLE on the main stage.**

THURSDAY

9:30 am till noon Mentoring will be offered by Scott Cook, Vance Gilbert and Bill Nash. Five 30-minute slots will be available for each of them.

10:00 am till noon **Steve Seskin and Mary Bragg** will talk about rewriting. Writing can more easily come from that dreamy/stream of consciousness place. Rewriting involves considering what you've already written and in many ways is a lot more tedious. In this seminar we examine all types of rewriting. Are you rewriting because the content is not serving the moment in the song, or is the problem the tone of how you put forth your idea? We'll also look at how to know when a song is done and the wisdom of sticking to the task versus putting a song away for a while and giving it a rest. Many times, I write more than I need just to give myself choices. We will choose several songs we've heard during the week and talk about what the writer might consider re-writing and why!

12:00 pm to 1:00 - Lunch

1:00 pm till 2:30

**Steve Seskin, Mary Bragg, Scott Cook and Vance Gilbert** on writing songs for social causes and being of service. We all write songs for cathartic reasons to help heal ourselves. This is a fundamental need that drives our creativity. But why stop there? Let's use our gift and our awareness of what's going on in the world to heal it. We will discuss various songs/projects we've been a part of where that is our intention...

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you how to use multiple capos to make you sound like an even better guitar player than you are.

2:30 till 2:45 Break -

2:45 till 4pm Last small group classes

**Bill Nash will offer a class on alternate tunings.** He will teach you what they are and how to use them to open up a whole new world of possibilities for the musical side of your writing.

**Mary Bragg will offer Harnessing Your Vocal Chops**

**Everyone's singing voices are incredibly individual. Whether you're a songwriter who hardly sings or a classically trained singer who hardly writes, we'll identify what makes your voice special in all its physiological intricacies, and help you deepen your understanding and use of that instrument to better deliver your songs.**

**Vance Gilbert will offer Standards, Covers, & Songs That Ain't Yours -**

**How To Adapt Them To Your Set -**

**Come join the fun as Vance shows you tools and gives permission to put everything in your set from Jimi Hendrix to John Denver. You'll explore the neck of the guitar a little, develop confidence in singing your favorite covers *\*your\** way, and talk about where and when these classics are placed in your set. Even a 2-song set!!**

4:00 till 5 pm -- **Closing session.** Q and A comments and a general catch all session with most of the instructors. 5 pm big hugs and goodbyes