

Introduction

Creativity is an amazing thing and, some claim, we humans are the only species capable of it. The potential to imagine that which does not already exist is part of what makes us us. There's something called the infinite monkey theorem that suggests that, if you put a bunch of monkeys in a room with typewriters, they would eventually end up writing the works of Shakespeare. That's great and all but would they really grasp the profundity of what those random letters on a page signified? To them, Juliet might as well be a banana. That's not true creativity, now is it? Or is it? Maybe it could work somehow. It is the tree and Juliet is the banana? Maybe not.

Creativity is responsible for all of the innovation and art that we use and experience every day, from a stunning architectural structure to your favourite song on your playlist to the design of the smartphone that gives you access to that playlist. Pretty much anything new that is brought into the world involves at least some act of creativity. But even for the most artistically inclined, there are times when the inspiration is easier to access than others. And when you're trying to make your living with your creativity, those dry spells can be a problem, causing unnecessary drama and stress.

I am a composer/songwriter, writer, musician, voice artist, and an all-round creative cat. I am also what I have come to call an idea factory. What is that exactly, you may ask? Well, let me tell you!

I have ideas for all sorts of things coming at me all the time, day or night. In the middle of working on one project, I can be inspired for another. Last week I was trying to have a nap but, apparently, I was actually supposed to be writing a song so I got up off the couch and obliged the Muses. Yes, it can get complicated and a little distracting but I love it. It's one of the reasons I haven't officially narrowed down my focus yet. I try to – honestly! I will tell myself that I'm going to stick to composing children's music for the time being, and I mean to. But what am I supposed to do when, a week later, after having written five or so kids songs, I have an idea for a YA novel? Just ignore it? I don't think so!

I am aware that I am truly blessed in this respect. There are many people with much more talent than I who desperately want to create something meaningful and beautiful but, for some reason, find themselves unable to come up with a storyline for their script or theme for their collection of paintings or they don't know how to finish that third chapter of their book. The concept of writer's block permeates all art forms and sometimes there are legit deadlines looming that make the situation all the more frustrating.

If this sounds like you, if you are someone who even occasionally experiences these barriers to your creative output, I sincerely hope this book will help you. My intention is to give you tips to help get those juices flowing, to get you thinking out of the box so that the muses have a chance to find you.

I have often wondered how I can support other artists in their search for expression because I believe we are a community and should be working together to bring out the best in each other. During my ten years as a music teacher, I derived great joy from watching my students grow as musicians and as people. And besides, it's not a competition. Even if two people come up with the same concept, it will be realized very differently.

Now, I can't tell you how to be successful – I haven't sold more than a handful of anything I have ever done - yet. I can't tell you how to market your work – there was a time when I basically stopped posting on Twitter because my tweets were averaging one like a post. But, to date, I have written and/or composed countless pop, jazz, classical and country songs and instrumentals, an opera, a moosical (triple oops intended), three song collections for vocalists, an inspirational book of poetry, children's stories, novels – all projects that just happened because they decided they had to happen,

See, that's the thing. When the Muses come knocking, I open the door, welcome them with open arms and say, "Yes!" I am a master at that and I can help you become a master at it, too.

So, I humbly present to you this book with twenty tantalizing tips to turbocharge your creativity. I couldn't resist the alliteration! Some techniques are more concrete and practical, others more spiritual and "woo-woo", some you may already be familiar with, but you are sure to find some concepts that work for you and you keep coming back to.

How to Use This Book

As to how to use this book, there are different ways to approach it. You can read it through to the end to get some sense of where you can go with it and then return to specific sections as needed later on when you are working on something. Or you can just go to any page and trust that you find what you need at that moment. Either way, it is a resource to keep with you along your journey.

You might be drawn to use a particular technique when you are working on a specific project. Again, trust that instinct. When you are presented with a series of possible questions, like in the “What If” chapter, you don’t need to answer all of them. They are meant to get you out of a rut, so take one question that interests you and see what comes up. And you can keep going back, answering a different question each time, or, once you get the hang of it, make up your own questions if you are so inspired!

So, if you’re stuck, if you find the ideas aren’t flowing as easily as you would like them to, consider this your creative drano or, dare I say, laxative? Although someone did point out to me that, well, you know what results from a laxative and you don’t want your creative output to be that. At any rate, grab a pen and paper and, when you’re ready, turn the page and let’s get working on that plumbing!

Tip #1:

Silence the Censor!

This may be a simple way to start and you've probably heard this one before but it bears repeating. Stop censoring your ideas! Don't do it!

Especially when you are focused on a certain type of project, you can be tempted to overlook, or even be resentful of, unrelated or inappropriate ideas that come to you.

But the last thing you want to do when you are struggling to create is discard inspiration. It is important to make yourself open to any and all ideas regardless of whether or not they have to do with the particular project you are working on or want to be working on. It doesn't matter how cheesy the lyric is, how impossible the plot point is, if the dance gesture doesn't reflect the theme of the piece, or if the subject matter sounds too dark - try it anyway. When you are in a bind, dismissing any idea is like telling the Muses they are not invited to the party because they brought kale salad when you asked them to bring nuts and bolts.

The whole point is to get the Muses to come to the party! You never know how they are going to ultimately contribute or how what will lead to what. That kale salad could be just what somebody else was craving (I know, craving may be a strong word) and wanted to bring but didn't have the time to prepare. One Muse could pull an epic prank that your guests will be talking about for years, making your party legendary forevermore. Maybe it's not about the kale or the nuts and bolts at all.

You could rhyme that cheesy lyric with a phrase that totally blows your mind and changes the whole focus of the song. That impossible plot point could be the thing that makes another aspect of the story finally makes sense. You could turn that dark subject matter into something uplifting and filled with light.

You know the story about the boy who cried wolf – the kids who ran through the village screaming that there was a wolf when there wasn't so many times that, when there actually was a wolf lurking around, nobody believed him? Well it's kind of like that but not. If the Muses visit you, blessing you with inspiration, and you ignore them enough times, they will say, "Alright, guess she's not interested" and move on to somebody else. I hate to brag but I think that's why the Muses like me so much. I'm always, "Sure! Why not? I'll give it a go!"

Keep a notebook or your cellphone handy at all times so if an idea does come to you, you can make note of it. It doesn't mean that you have to follow through with everything necessarily or tend to it right away. You may not be in a position to launch a theatrical performance at that point in time but at least consider the idea and see if there is anything in there that interests you. It may sound like it's not in your wheelhouse but there's usually a reason why you were chosen.

And get the idea down right away, wherever you are. Don't sit on it or you might forget, as much as you are absolutely positive that you won't at the time. There's nothing worse than, hours later, trying to recall a great idea and coming up with crickets. Then you're on your knees, rending your garments, cursing the gods, crying, "That could have been my Oscar! That could have been my Tony!" Don't be that guy.

Even if some great revelation doesn't happen, even if that unwanted idea doesn't become a grand opus, sometimes you have to get past the bad stuff to get to the good stuff. So, don't stress out worrying that your genius has finally dried up and your career is over because you've had a less than stellar idea. Just get it down, see where it leads you, and be amazed at how the genius will return.

Tip #2:

I Say a Little Prayer for Muse

O kay, is anybody else humming along with that? Maybe it loses something in the translation. Ha! Anyway, how do you begin your creative process? Do you have any kind of rituals? Do you set your supplies out in a certain order, put your cup of coffee or tea in a certain place, or play a certain type of music? Just like they say that it's good to have a nighttime routine to signal to your body that it's time to go to sleep, establishing a routine can help signal to your brain, and the Muses, that it's time to create. It doesn't have to be too elaborate or fancy - and you don't want to bring about a situation when you feel like you can't do anything because you ran out of your favourite brand of lemon ginger tea – but setting the stage is a good thing.

Many consider creation to be a sacred act so, to add to the spirituality and sacredness of what you are about to embark upon, one part of the pre-creation ritual you might want to consider including is a little prayer. It can be to God, the Universe, the Muses – whatever is most meaningful for you in this situation. The point is to ask the powers that be to bless you with inspiration so that you can share it with the world.

It's not an unusual thing to do so you will likely be able to find some prayers online. One potential incantation, if you will, along the line of what I use goes something like, “Muses, I ask you to bless me today with inspiration. Let me receive your wisdom freely and joyfully so that I may create something beautiful and meaningful that will serve the world in a positive way. “

It's that simple. Just close your eyes, state who you are calling upon and ask them to give you awesome ideas that are in the highest good of all. They like it when you think about having a positive impact so make sure you get that in there.

