

# WRITEGIRL PLANET

Issue No. 11 - Special Edition!  
Songwriting Workshop 2021 Recap



# 2021 WriteGirl Songwriting Workshop Snapshot!

What's Inside?

Writing Activities!

Your Ultimate  
Pandemic Playlist!

WriteGirl Guest  
Songwriters!

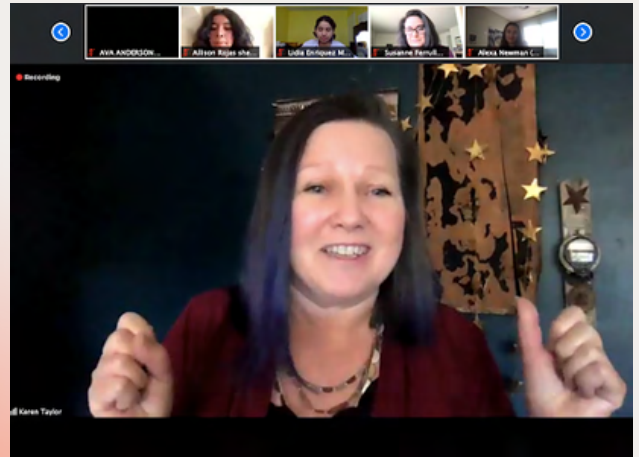
SPECIAL EDITION  
A LOOK BACK AT THE  
20TH ANNUAL  
WRITEGIRL SONGWRITING WORKSHOP!  
SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2021



## Welcome Remarks – WriteGirl Executive Director, Keren Taylor

We've all had that moment when music has saved us in some way. It lifted us up, it helped us cry it out, it calmed us down... the power of songs is felt, but not always understood. And we hope that today, we will pull back the curtain and help all of you learn how to create a song.

You don't need to be a singer.  
You don't need to know how to play an instrument. You are the songwriter today.



So what could you write a song about? Well, you really can write a song about ANYTHING, from clouds to skyscrapers to a Boogie Wonderland, but here is my big tip...

### **Songs happen when words alone are not enough.**

Julie Andrews did not walk in the meadow and SAY, "The hills are alive..." Nope, she needed a song to express what she was feeling.

So, what is it that you are passionate about?! What do you love so much, miss so much, desire so much that you need a SONG to help express the gigantic emotion you feel?

And get ready to rhyme, line after line, because music gets stronger when you rhyme butter with flutter or Los Angeles with...oh no, what could possibly rhyme with Los Angeles!! And that brings me to my last tip...

Get cozy with open vowel words! It's tough to sing *picket* or *widget*, but much easier to sing - *day, say, play, free, so, hey, go, love*...so have fun today, write from your deepest self, don't skate on the surface.

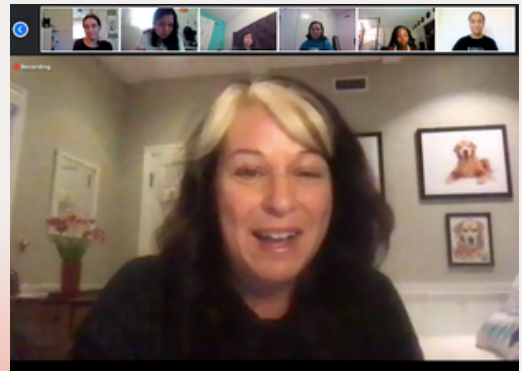
Write about something you absolutely MUST tell the world, because the feeling cannot just be a letter, an essay or a poem...it simply MUST be a song!!!



# Let the 20th Annual Songwriting Workshop Begin!

Singer/songwriter Michelle Lewis joined us for her 20th WriteGirl Songwriting Workshop! To start off the day, Michelle shared a piece of advice:

“Don’t be intimidated if this is your first time writing a song! We’re going to start with finding your way into a song... there’s hundreds of ways you can do it. I tend to write a lot walking my dog.”



## WRITING ACTIVITY!

Take a few moments to free-write about one or more of these questions. Who knows, it could become the basis for a song!

**What’s some good advice you received?**

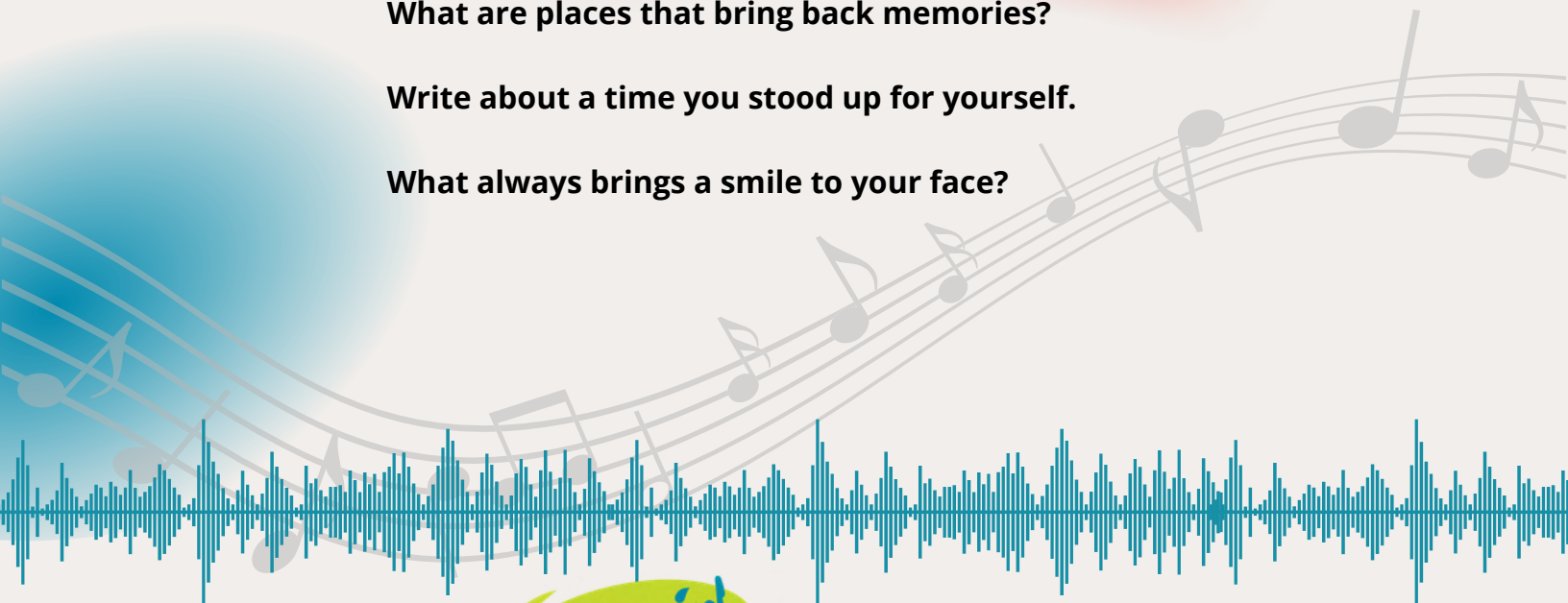
**What do you wish you could say to someone special?**

**What do you dream about?**

**What are places that bring back memories?**

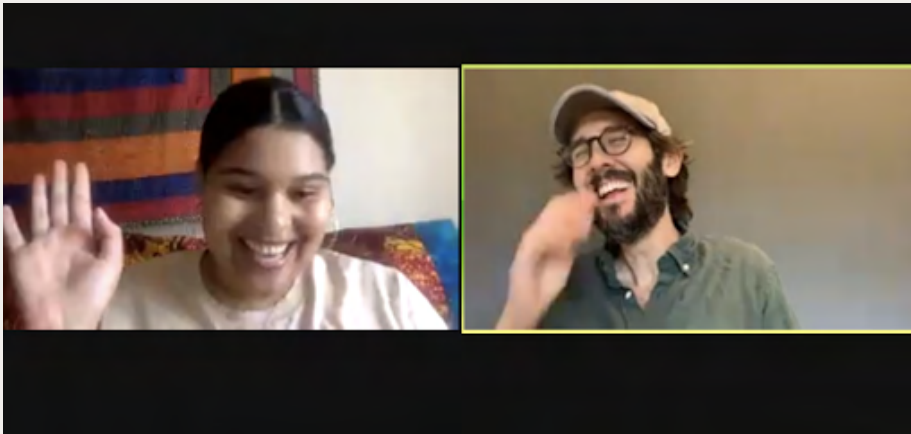
**Write about a time you stood up for yourself.**

**What always brings a smile to your face?**





# Q&A WITH JOSH GROBAN



WriteGirl Alum **Amaya McGinnis** interviewed Josh Groban who made a surprise appearance!

**Josh Groban** is a GRAMMY-winning singer/songwriter whose foundation, **Find Your Light Foundation**, helps young people get an education in the arts. The Find Your Light Foundation is a supporter of WriteGirl! Groban said of his passion for arts education:

*"I was that shy, introverted kid, I had a hard time making friends...it really was those teachers, those mentors, that called me out, that shy kid in the back of the choir. Those teachers in those programs saved my life. And I also realized [in] supporting the arts, supporting great young writers, a little bit can go a long way."*

Josh Groban shared some of his go-to songwriting tips. He believes ideas can and will come to you at inopportune times – like right before you're about to fall asleep. Don't wait!

*"It won't be in there in the morning. Take that extra second, get up, get it down and you will have the most incredible pleasant surprise when you wake up."*

As for getting stuck while writing, Groban said:

*"It's very easy to overthink writing – to try to be extra clever. The best thing I had to learn was to not have a delete button. Flow. Let it out. Just write and write. There is no wrong answer."*

## Q&A WITH JOSH GROBAN, continued

Still feeling writer's block? Embrace the gibberish!

*"I've decided at times to embrace the gibberish. There's something beautiful and powerful about just emoting gibberish. It's like a strange holy experience, just letting this noise come out of you. And oftentimes, the right vowels will find themselves, and the right sentiment. Even if it doesn't mean anything in the lyric, it will give you chills. Something's there. And a lot of times words will pop out when you least expect it."*

Groban is often most inspired by songs that borrow from classical music, like The Beatles's "Blackbird" which borrows from Bach.

*"I'll sit down and think of some chords that feel big and special to me,"* he shared while sitting at his piano and playing a few big and special chords. Then he sang some words from his song "February," to so many comments from our group. Mentees and mentors wrote in the chat:

*"So blessed to be here"*

*"His VOICE!"*

*"Goosebumps"*

Groban's final advice? Just play.

*"Sit at your instrument, whether it's your voice or your journal or your piano, and just play."*

### **The Find Your Light Foundation, on Instagram:**

"Josh had an incredible time at WriteGirl's 2021 Songwriting Workshop! Thank you to all the other featured guests and all the attendees for supporting arts education."

# JANICE ROBINSON JOINS JOSH GROBAN

When Janice Robinson joined in, an impromptu musical brainstorm session ensued featuring Josh and Janice (who toured with Tina Turner!!). They shared beautiful off-the-cuff renditions of the mentees' lyrics from the chat!

Alexa Newman, mentee, shared lyrics she wrote:

*"Trapped in the comfort of her fantasy,  
not fully present in reality."*

Sophia, mentee, shared:

*"Something in my mind keeps turning,  
something in my mind keeps burning  
this is real, this is real"*

Milissa, mentee, contributed:

*"A heart keeps breaking....  
with every turn you keep making"*

Songwriter Janice Robinson shared some advice:

*"I want to say to the girls, to the young ladies, it's spirit. When you pick up your pen to write, you need to be in tune with your spirit, and remember that you're going to be part of the soundtrack to someone's life. That's an honor and a responsibility. So every time you feel something, never be afraid. Because it's the spirit that always guides you through every melody, every word."*

## WRITING ACTIVITY!

Get yourself in a rhyming mood. Create a second line for each of these, using the same rhythm/beat, as well as rhyming with the last word:

*I wonder how long it will take.*

---

*Don't tell me you never knew,*

---

*There's a feeling in the air,*

---



# LISTEN TO SONGS IN A NEW WAY

Songwriter **Michelle Lewis** played a few songs and asked us to listen in a new way.

*"You don't have to be a singer or musician to be able to write a great song. But maybe be a listener. Maybe be able to listen for the rhythm in conversations, the rhymes and words that come out of people's mouths, how vowel sounds are kind of singable, but consonants are more rhythmic. Pay attention to the patterns. Pay attention to when you hear things repeated."*

Then she asked Special Guest Songwriter **Tiffany Red** to describe how the "Replay" hook came about.



*"We just knew that we wanted the energy of the song to match the energy of the track."*

Michelle also prompted the group to think about song's themes on tracks like "Drivers License," a song that bucks typical pop song structure.

## WRITING ACTIVITY!

*We asked everyone to pop into a padlet link to share some rhyming words to help inspire the songwriting process. Add your own rhymes to this collaborative rhyming dictionary! Let's keep it going!*

*Access the Padlet here!*



# WHEN RHYME MEETS FORM

Songwriter **Shelly Peiken** introduced different rhyming structures, noting,

*“There’s no right or wrong... just as long as something does rhyme. The brain is used to hearing songs that rhyme and the rhyme makes the meaning sort of click in. It’s like a little magic dust on the words.”*

## RESOURCE FOR SONGWRITERS!

Tired of the same old rhyming patterns? We have [a website for you](#) that offers **twelve different rhyming schemes!** Challenge yourself to write a song in a new pattern!

Alum Arielle Davis introduced Special Guest Songwriter and Rapper **Dessa** who shared her tip on writing rap songs:

*“Rhyme, rhyme, rhyme. Do it internally, do it externally, get weird!”*

Michelle broke down the different parts of songs, including verses, pre-choruses, bridges and post-hooks. A fan of bridges, Songwriter Keren Taylor chimed in to break it down:

*“You’ve got the verse, setting you up. You’ve got the chorus, which is that hook. And then the bridge is almost like a bird walk. The verse is kind of like your appetizer, the chorus is your main course and then it’s like, ‘Let me go have a little water over here.’ The bridge is a sideways thing that takes you away from the verse and the chorus... and then kind of pulls you back to the chorus.”*



# USE UNIQUE RHYMES

## WRITING ACTIVITY!

### USE UNIQUE RHYMES

But everybody's like:

Crystal

Maybach

Diamonds on your timepiece

Jet planes

Islands

Tigers on a gold leash

- Lorde, *Royals*

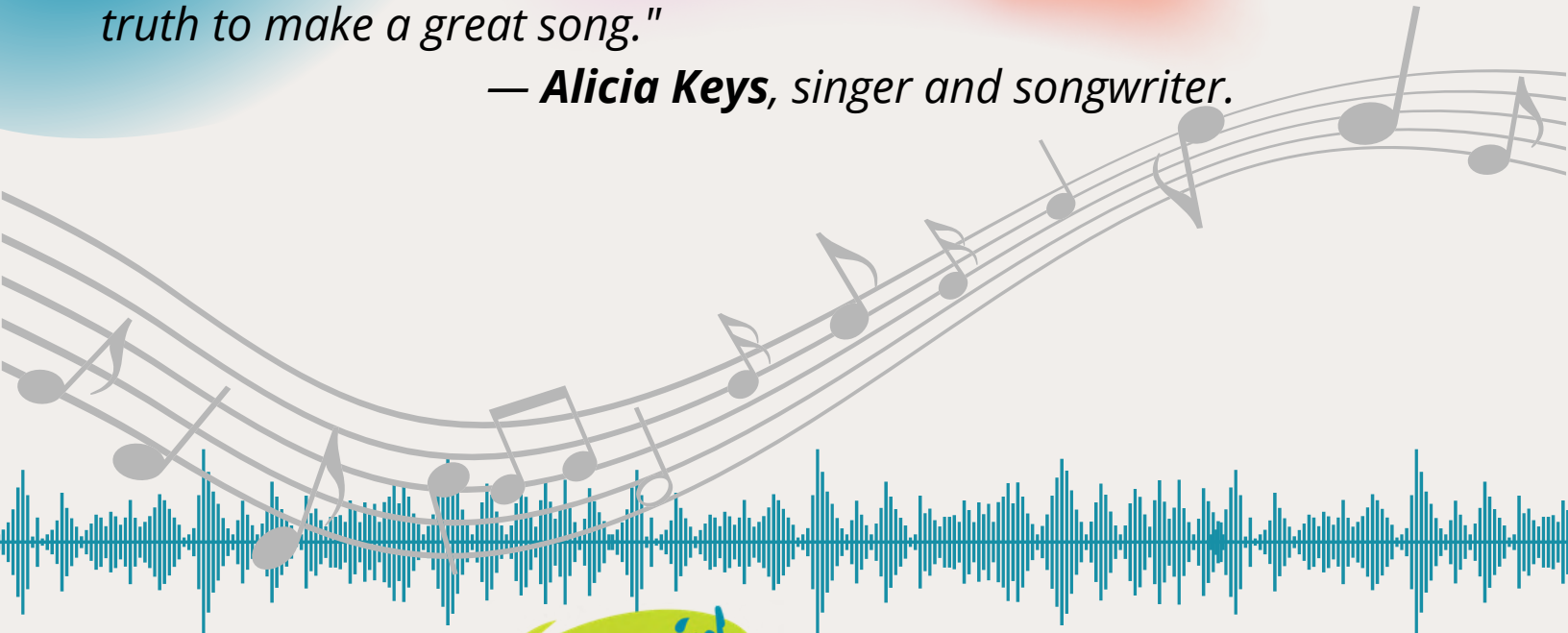
TRY THIS:

Underline all of the words in your free-write that are good rhyming words



*"A friend once told me that all I need is three chords and the truth to make a great song."*

— **Alicia Keys**, singer and songwriter.



# TIME FOR BREAKOUT ROOMS!

Mentees broke out into a total of **26 different breakout rooms** with our 30 guest women songwriters who were on hand to lead our workshop.

“Writing is all about the passion... and then you gotta get to the crafting to get to the song sometimes,” Kirsten said before the breakout. “These songwriters are going to help share their wisdom and their craft.”

Here are two examples of Breakout Room activities focusing on **Rhythm** and **Titles**:

## WRITING ACTIVITY! GET IN THE RHYTHM!

Words all have their own rhythm – where the emphasis is set, which syllable lands on a chord change or a note.

Clap or tap out (or play) a rhythm. Then, fill in that rhythm with words. Take a moment, then tap it out again with your words. “Da da-DA-da”...

Choose a popular song and “sing” the words in a way that emphasizes the rhythm. Fill in the rhythm with words (replace the real lyrics with claps and taps!) Take a moment, then repeat the song or line with the claps or taps.

## WRITING ACTIVITY! FIND YOUR TITLE!

Titles can come from anywhere, but they need to create interest and curiosity. In your journal, looking over anything you have written so far, underline any of your lyrics that COULD be a title... Here are some tips for finding your title:

What is your song about? What is the core theme? What’s a line that could repeat? That might be a good bet for your title!




# A WriteGirl Songwriting Tradition: DANCE PARTY!

WriteGirl members enjoyed a dance party break to “Rain on Me” by **Lady Gaga** and **Arianna Grande**!

Mentees, Alums and Volunteers danced different moves to the song’s verse, chorus and bridge!

**VERSE**

I didn't ask for a free ride  
I only asked you to show me a real good time  
I never asked for the rainfall  
At least I showed up, you showed me nothing at all



**PRE-CHORUS**

It's coming down on me  
Water like misery  
It's coming down on me  
I'm ready, rain on me

**CHORUS**



I'd rather be dry, but at least  
I'm alive  
Rain on me, rain, rain  
Rain on me, rain, rain  
I'd rather be dry, but at least  
I'm alive  
Rain on me, rain, rain  
Rain on me

**POST-HOOK  
FREESTYLE!**

Rain on me  
Mmm, oh yeah, baby  
Rain on me



## TIPS AND TRICKS FROM TEENS AND MENTORS IN THE CHAT:

Throughout the event, songwriters, mentors and mentees shared tips and inspiration in the chat and got inspired themselves!

"Jump and the net will appear...sing and the audience will hear you." – **Susan Bernardo, Volunteer**

"I started writing songs when I was in 6th grade, and it's been an amazing journey of self-discovery and expression. Enjoy the day, everyone!" – **Rhonda Nicole, Songwriter**

"Honestly... his honesty!" – **Sofia, Alum on Harry Styles**

"Less is more." – **Shelly Peiken, Songwriter**

"Brave confessions empower the work." – **Shelly Peiken, Songwriter**

"Pop songs are typically the easiest to pick out song patterns and learn from and then you can break the rules and explore. They follow a formula most times." – **Andy Allo, Songwriter**

"You wanna tell a great story start to finish in 3 mins :)" – **Janet Robin, Songwriter**

"Actions are stronger than words." – **Laila Abdalla, Volunteer**



# A MOMENT FOR SELF-CARE

WriteGirl Staff member Andrea Ohlsen-Esparza led a body centering exercise. Self-care is important!

*"I like pressing my palms together, then pointing my hands downward and lowering them. It's a great way to stretch those computer fingers."* – Cathy Standiford, Volunteer

*"I love to feel the connection between the palms of my hands or the soles of my feet. Kind of creates a circle in your body."* – Volunteer Gabriella Hadley added

Laila Abdalla and Jodi Womack introduced the group to the box breathing method, to reduce stress and help relax. While Laila noted there's many ways to do it, Jodi suggested: 4 seconds breathe in, 4 seconds hold, 4 seconds breathe out, hold 4 seconds. Andrea also showed us how you can do the breath as you move your head in a square, or follow your eyes along a square object like a door or window – a breath in or out for each leg of the square. [Here is more about box breathing.](#)

## HONORING BLACK HISTORY MONTH

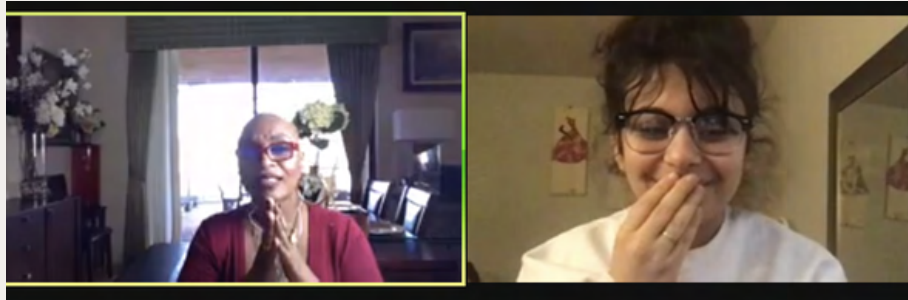
When WriteGirl took a moment to honor Black songwriters, the chat turned into a conversation about how amazing **Nina Simone** and **Ella Fitzgerald** are. "'Young Gifted & Black' is still relevant today!" chatted mentor Marsha Smith. A few mentors even bragged about having gotten to see **Ella Fitzgerald** perform live!

Black history is OUR history, and we've loved seeing some of the heroes of our history being celebrated. Here are three women you should know!

- **Alice Allison Dunnigan** was the first African-American female White House correspondent
- **Biddy Mason** petitioned the court for her own freedom, and helped build the town we call Los Angeles
- **Audre Lorde** was an activist and writer who advocated against gender discrimination, racial injustice and homophobia during the 20th century

# CLOSING SHOWCASE!

The WriteGirl Songwriting Workshop culminated in performances by songwriters who instantly set some lyrics to music...lyrics that were just written by teen members! The songwriters spontaneously brought the teens lyrics to life. Sometimes with a guitar, sometimes a cappella, and always empowering!



**Janice Robinson** kicked things off with lyrics from Maria Galstyan: “When She Steps Up.”



**Lisa Loeb** jumped on to sing “Sunny Days” with lyrics from Annalisa D’Emelia.

**Heidi Rojas** sang a cappella with a song called “The Dark Only Lasts So Long” with lyrics by Maya McGowan. Here is an excerpt:

“You’re the moonlight I’m chasing  
because my headlights keep breaking  
but the dark only lasts so long”



## CLOSING SHOWCASE, CONTINUED!

**Samantha Nelson** used an app called Voisey that helped her find inspiration for the music she put to Piper Miller's words — the lyrics "kinder on Mars" really struck a nerve with mentees in the chat!



**Louise Goffin** played guitar and sang "When We Were Young" with lyrics by Silvia Pinto.



**Tiffany Red** jumped in with a recording that helped us get a look into her process for "Midnight Fair" with lyrics by Victoria Rosales. Mentor Rieko Mendez chatted in response, "Midnight fair gives an intriguing mood and so much anticipated joy!"

"Step onto the roller coaster, even though we were terrified...Midnight fair."

**Priscilla Renee** played a recorded track and sang along live. Lyrics by Sidny Ramirez included:

"Once upon a summer,  
watching from home,  
uncertainty cloaking the world  
never good at faking smiles constantly  
breaking,  
I'm a girl, a lonely girl, a lost girl  
do we really move on? Do we really let  
go?  
Do we ever say goodbye? I'm not ready  
to move on"



**Andy Allo** strummed her guitar and sang "My heart" – lyrics by Sophia Sparks. At hearing her song come to life, Sophia chatted, "I'm SHOCKED!"



# What is the Title of your Pandemic Song?

Teens and volunteers shared their current pandemic jams in the chat:



Heartbreak Anniversary - Giveon  
"Lemons" by LoveLeo  
RIDIN SOLO by Jason Derulo.  
Levitating - Dua Lipa  
Hamilton (Wait For It)  
WANNABE by itzy!  
All Your Love - Sir Sly  
10k Hours by Jhene Aiko  
Anything Broadway  
Dancing in the moonlight ☐  
Blind by ROLE MODEL  
Song in my Head by Madison  
Anything Miley Cyrus Plastic Hearts!  
all Britney all the time  
"Drops of Jupiter" by Train  
Celebrity by IU  
Burn It by Golden Child!!!!  
Cabinet man- lemon demon  
Anything by Adele  
Kyoto by Phoebe Bridgers!  
"Nights" by Frank Ocean  
The spins by Mac miller  
pools by glass animals  
Fly to my room  
invisible string by taylor swift  
Out there-hunchback of notre dame  
telepatía  
Headphones by walk the moon!  
I have soooo many but one is "rise up"  
by andra day  
Are You Bored Yet?  
Billy Joel's whole discography  
Hey There Delilah - Plain White T's

Taylor Swift "this is me trying"  
Anything Beatles  
No Es Justo J Balvin  
J Cole - Crooked Smile  
Big Black Car- Gregory Alan Isakov  
Kingston - Faye webster  
"Fine Line" by Harry Styles. ☐  
Mars - yungblud  
anything by desi oakley and Sara bareilles  
Flowers In Your Hair - The Lumineers  
Girls like you by maroon 5  
Secret Tunnel Avatar The Last Airbender  
Anything by Paramore!  
blister in the sun - violent femmes  
This December by Ricky Montgomery  
Anything by Sara Bareilles – particularly Brave!  
Better Summer  
Boys Will Be Bugs by Cavetown  
Any Eels or Elliott Smith song, really  
all things Lorde and all things Chloe x Halle  
I bet on losing dogs by Mitski  
all of weyes blood  
Do It All the Time- Idkhtfm  
Fiona Apple's latest album  
someone to you by banners  
revisiting The Cardigans the 1990s  
skin by Sabrina carpenter too and drivers license  
to be so lonely — harry styles  
Driver License by Olivia Rodrigo  
any musical theatre songs also  
Waving Through a Window Dear Evan Hansen  
Ella Fitzgerald I've got a crush on you  
Clouds by Zach Sobiech !



**We hope all this music inspires you to keep writing!**





# Threads

The 20th Annual WriteGirl Songwriting Workshop wrapped up with a WriteGirl tradition, "THREADS," where members share something they liked, learned or loved about the day! Here are a few selections from the river of threads that poured into the chat at the end of the workshop:

"I loved hearing all of the amazing songs people were able to come up with!" – **Sam K., Mentee**

"I was finally able to get inspiration for jingles and an album!" – **Hannah B., Mentee**

"So inspiring – and so nice to see a song come to life from start to end!" – **Marielle B., Volunteer**

"I loved getting front row seats to the FULL song production process and to see so many of our emerging songwriting teens have their songs come to life!!!!!" – **Janet R., Volunteer**

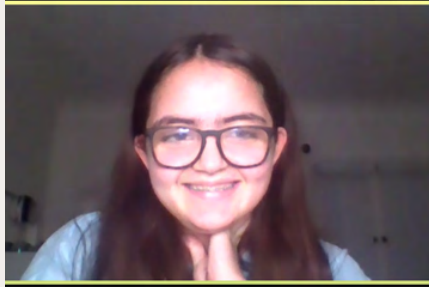
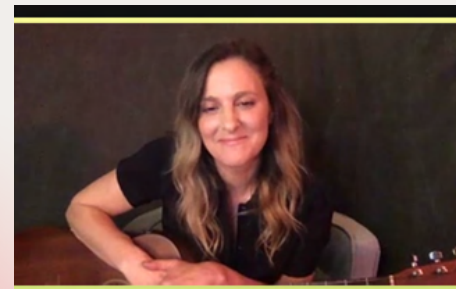
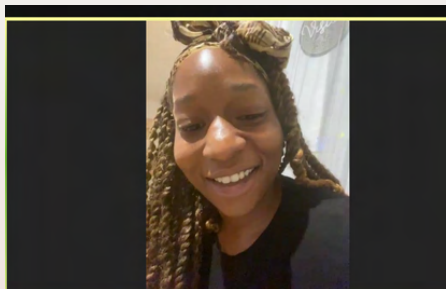


# But it isn't over yet!

We had so many wonderful song lyrics submitted that we created a whole new event on February 26, 2021 we called the...

## The WriteGirl Showcase of Songs!

More than a dozen women singer/songwriters including Blush and Natalie Carol brought the teens' lyrics to life in an online concert, where different indie, pop and soul genres converged.



GRAMMY-winner **Lisa Loeb** and rock vocalist **Nina Diaz** reflected on their experiences in the online space.

"Doing showcases like this help me re-energize. It's healing," **Diaz** said.

"When you see yourself in other people's stories, it makes you feel more human, less alone," **Loeb** said.

## Threads from the Showcase of Songs!

"Everyone's lyrics are so heartfelt and beautiful! This event is a wave of inspiration!" – **Samantha B., Mentee**

"I loved hearing everyone's amazing, touching lyrics and how the songwriters performed them." – **Asha B., Mentee**

"I enjoyed the concert atmosphere. It felt like I was at a live show which I haven't been to in forever!" – **Mia F., Volunteer**



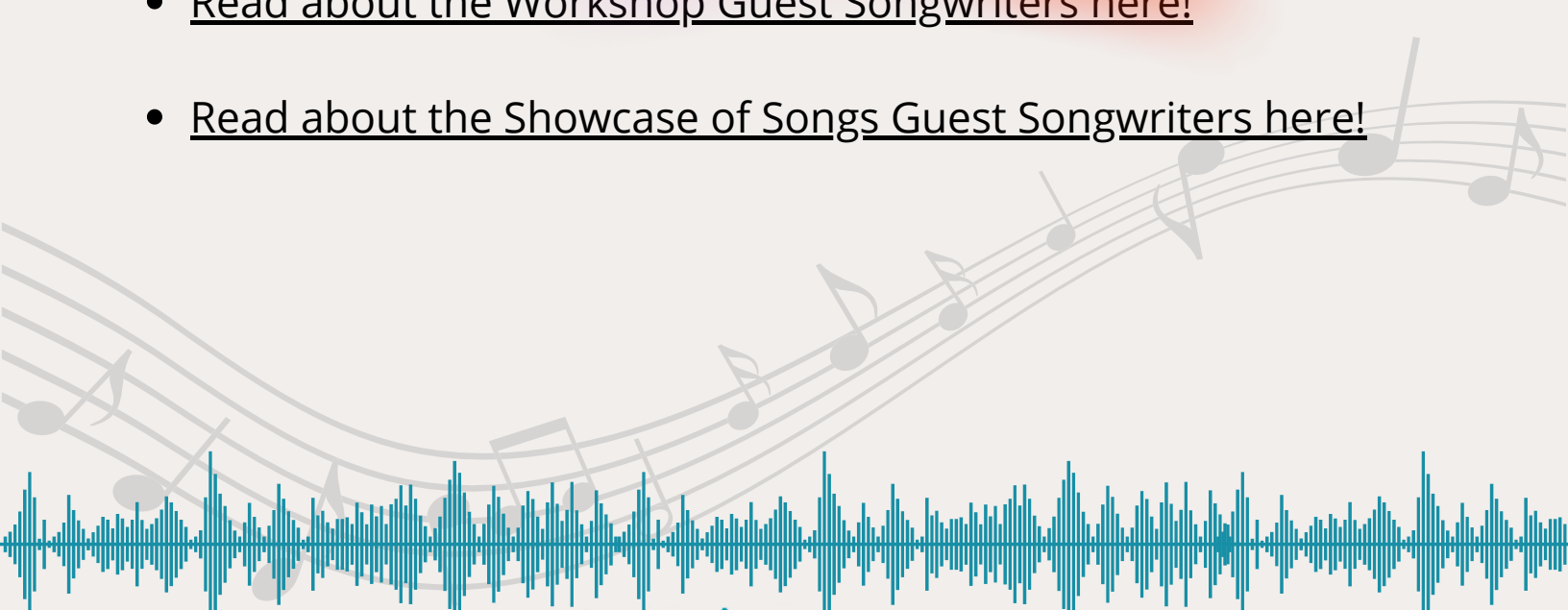
# Links to Inspire You!



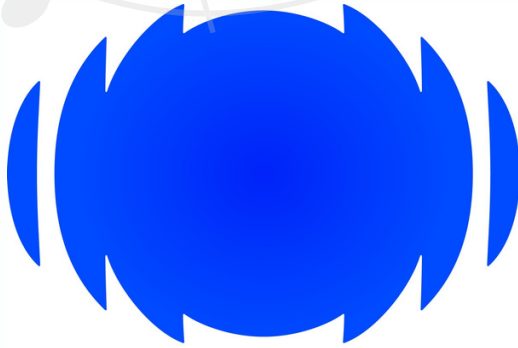
**Remember when we could be together, in-person?**

[Here's a short video of a previous WriteGirl Songwriting Workshop at The Huntington.](#)

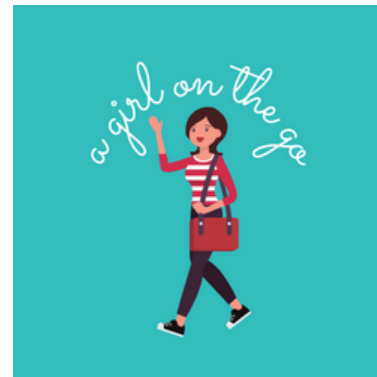
## **FURTHER READING!**

- [Read more about the Songwriting Workshop and Showcase of Songs from the WriteGirl newsletter](#)
  - [Read about the Workshop Guest Songwriters here!](#)
  - [Read about the Showcase of Songs Guest Songwriters here!](#)
- 

# Thank you to our Sponsors:



**SONY MUSIC  
PUBLISHING**





# SUBMIT YOUR WORK!

Share your work with us!

Visit the  
[WriteGirl Clubhouse Page](#)  
to submit your creative work!

# WRITEGIRL STAFF

---

**Executive Director:** Keren Taylor

**Associate Director:** Allison Deegan

**Managing Director:** Katie Geyer

**Curriculum Director:** Kirsten Giles

**Development Associate:** Cindy Collins

**College Program Manager:** Leslie Awender

**Administrative Manager:** Megan Bennett

**Bold Ink Writers Program Coordinator:** Andrea Ohlsen-Esparza

**Social Media Support:** Nicole Dizon

We're here  
for you!

Call 213-253-2655  
or reach us at  
[membership@writegirl.org](mailto:membership@writegirl.org)