

Songsmith – Austin
December 15, 2025 Critique Session

The Songsmith – Austin Critique Session was held via Zoom from 7:11 to 9:18 pm on Monday, December 15, 2025, moderated by Joe Strouse. We had eleven attendees and heard ten excellent songs in various stages of creation. Joe also talked about using AI music apps as a tool, followed by a spirited discussion. Finally, we recognized that this session was the Eighteenth-Ever-Annual-Holiday-Pot-Luck-And-Critique-Session (EEAHPLSAC), founded by songwriter Jacquelyn Fraley all those years ago.

Phil Fielder sent his AI music-generated song “The Little Christmas Tree”, a beautiful country tune about fulfilling a child’s Christmas wish. The group liked this one very much and suggestions included a slight modification to the title, as well as some minor lyrical changes for form. Thanks, Phil!

Stewart Moser sent “Lame Duck”, a ballad about people in power losing their traditional stronghold over others. This song was well done and comments included a few very minor lyrical suggestions to help with the flow. Some cool rhymes, too, as one would expect from Stewart. Nice work!

Kevin Mallory submitted “No Child Left”, a rocker with ample sarcasm about how society has let our children down in providing adequate care, guidance and attention. With great prosody, listeners really enjoyed this song and only a few minor changes were offered. Another classic from Mr. Mallory!

Scott Joffe sent a draft of his song “I’m Here (or) My Love Never Died”, a very heartfelt ballad about loss. While Scott’s lyrics were extremely thoughtful, the song was open to interpretation and the listener could make it a very personal experience. Comments included some possible lyric changes. Outstanding, Scott!

Long-absent John Stearle didn’t miss a beat with his humorous country song “Does This Dress Make Me Look Fat?”, which included many images to support the singer’s uncomfortable position. Suggestions included culling a few lines in verse 2, as well as starting the song with the chorus. Welcome back, John!

GrAmy sent in “Close My Eyes” - a ballad for their play about the two main characters being apart and missing each other. Beautiful performed, Amy and Greg provided wonderful harmony and emotion. There were a few minor possible changes the group provided, but overall, very good work! Thanks!

Mitch Lobrovich submitted “You Are Christmas To Me”, a piano vocal ballad about what the singer deems most important about the upcoming holiday. This sparse draft was very effective in providing the perfect emotion. Suggestions included some minor lyric changes to the chorus and verses. Great start, Mitch!

Bill Basinski sent “My Finger Got Lost”, a ditty about the singer becoming somewhat disoriented and losing track of the doleful digit. Great images and rhymes in this A-A-A style song and vivid, as we’ve come to expect from Bill. There were a few minor lyrical possibilities offered - thanks, Bill!

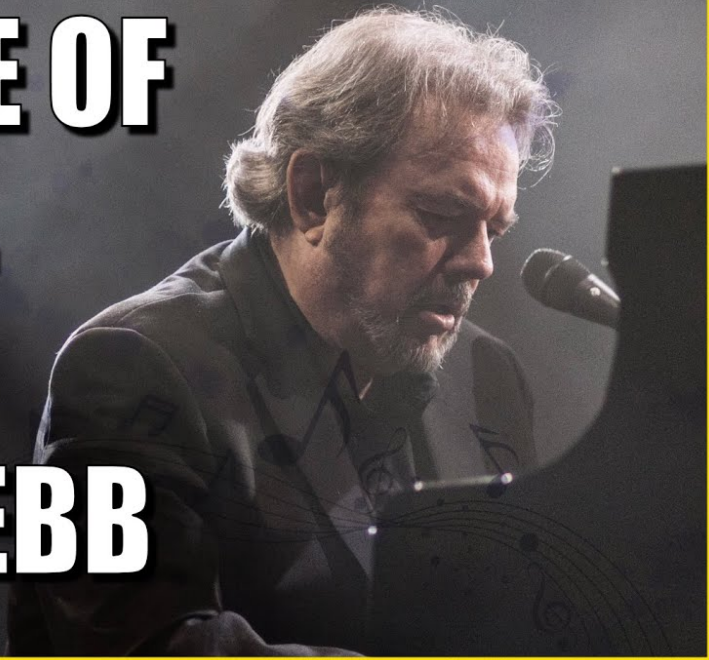
Mary Dawson sent in “Greater Than That”, a Christmas song that was included in a 2024 ASCAP songwriter’s compilation (congratulations to Mary and Beverly Houston!). Beautifully performed, this song was very poignant, with a great ending. There was one minor lyrical suggestion. Thanks, y’all!

Joe Strouse sent in “Black Friday Shopping”, a Steely Dan-style ditty about shopping challenges on that day of days. Suggestions included a few lyrical possibilities to make it more cohesive.

Joe then reopened Pandora’s box by playing an AI version of his “Black Friday Shopping” using the Suno app to show what the same song would sound like as a catchy pop song sung by a female. The purpose was to acknowledge AI as a songwriting tool. While there is generally notable resistance for using songwriting AI, it is here, whether we agree or not. Thus, Joe challenged everyone to try an AI app for generating music ideas for next month’s optionally optional songwriting challenge.

Mary mentioned an interview with Jimmy Webb and his statement about how the burden of songwriting ultimately relies not he songwriter - the interview can be seen here:

A LIFETIME OF MUSICAL GENIUS JIMMY WEBB



Songsmith meets three out of the four Monday nights each month. As always, Songsmith has a Salado meeting (2nd Monday of each month), the 3rd Monday for the Austin meeting, and a DFW meeting (4th Monday of each month) where your songs can be heard and you can get feedback - always free – no dues, spam, or other obligations.

As always, we're looking for Zoom-knowledgeable person to run the audio and visual portions for the DFW and Salado meetings. If you're interested, please contact Mary Dawson at Mary@MaryDawson.com.

We hope to see you next year on Monday, January 19, 2026 or sooner!