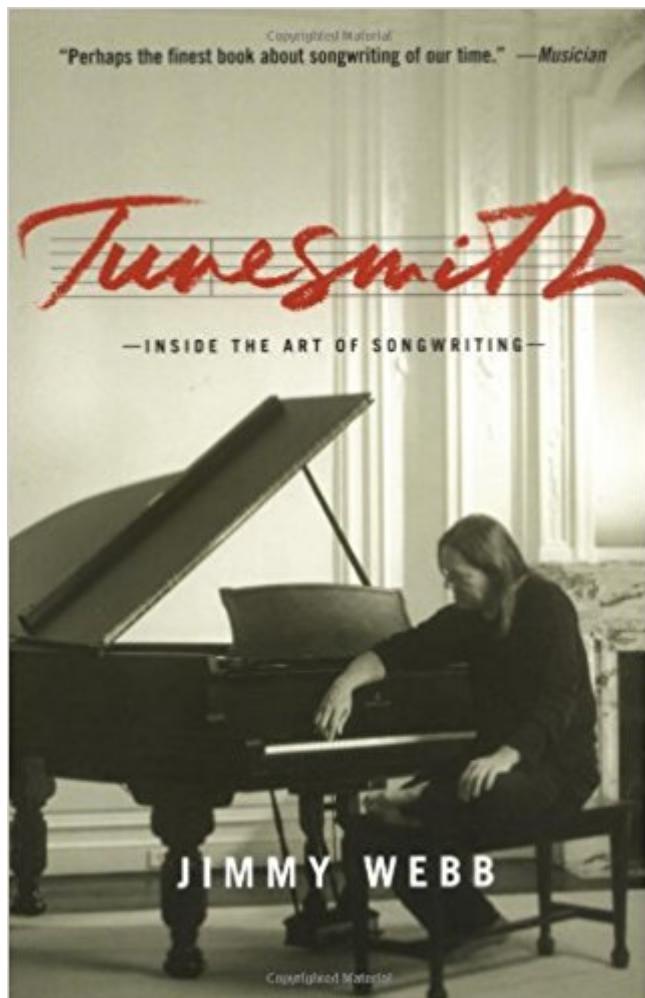


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# Tunesmith: Inside The Art Of Songwriting



## Synopsis

Webb brings his insider's knowledge, experience, and star power to the ultimate guide for aspiring songwriters. With a combination of anecdotes, meditation, and advice, he breaks down the creative process from beginning to end--from coping with writer's block, to song construction, chords, and even self-promotion. Webb also gives readers a glimpse into the professional music world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Warning: People who want to learn basic songwriting should go elsewhere.\*\*\*\*\*From 1965 to 1970 or so Jimmy Webb was inescapable. You watched the Carole Burnett show, and there were the 5th Dimension singing "Up, Up and Away." Turn on the radio, and Richard Harris' cake melted in the rain. Glen Campbell rode the Witchia line, drove through Phoenix, and ruminated about Galveston. Those incandescent melodies entered my childhood and have stayed with me. Hard rock drove this more upbeat music from the airwaves, but Jimmy Webb's legacy remains in the catalog of fine songs he wrote at a precocious age. Now his book gives us some insight into the mind who might arguably be called the last great songwriter of the 20th century. Many people coming to this book will eagerly open it, hoping to extract the secret that made Jimmy Webb into a wealthy man, and they will come away disappointed and frustrated. This is not a book about how to write a song, so much as it is a repository of the mind of Jimmy Webb. True, Jimmy writes about how he composes a lyric, and how he creates a chord progression. His discussion of prosody is excellent, too. But there is more here

that simple technical discussion of song writing. This book a cultural history of the American song up to the end of the 1960's. Jimmy Webb gives us stories, his own history, his background, and discussions of songs from the beginning of the modern era to the present. For some like me, who has a deep interest in American Cultural history, this book is a gem.

It's an event when Jimmy Webb, the songwriter who epitomized both the romance and the innovation that characterized the songcrafting of the sixties and seventies ("By the Time I Get to Phoenix," "Wichita Lineman," "MacArthur Park," "Up, Up, and Away," etc.) turns his attention to writing a book about the songmaking process. Not only a great songwriter, Webb in his heyday was also admired as the possessor of a bright youthful intellect and a zany, happy sense of humor. The bulk of his hit-laden song catalog was completed by age twenty-five or so, at which time Webb mostly disappeared. For those insiders and fans who have been paying close attention, Webb has added to that catalog in more recent years, contributing such underpublicized gems as "If These Walls Could Speak" (Amy Grant, et al, early eighties) and "California Coast" (Linda Ronstadt, about 1990), a song that also helped celebrate the comeback of Brian Wilson, who created delicious and plaintive Beach-Boys-style background vocals for the cut. In TUNESMITH, we're allowed to be there as Jimmy Webb explains which writers and which songs he has admired, and we watch in fascination as Webb dissects a few of these personal favorites to lay bare the structure and the art within. Jimmy Webb is said to have spent four full years creating TUNESMITH, and his love for the craft is obvious as you turn the pages and absorb the insights being shared. A tip for researchers: Paul Zollo did an excellent retrospective interview with Webb after the songwriter had been silent for at least a decade.

I'm not a fan of Jimmy Webb and came to know him through Paul Zollo's book *Songwriters on Songwriting*. As a beginning songwriter (but longtime musician) I found a lot of great things in this book. This means I have no reverence for Jimmy Webb & am reading this as a simple student of songwriting. I'm about halfway through with it right now. Jimmy Webb's dedication to his craft is obvious, and it comes through the pages. The incredible amounts of work that go into writing a song are tracked moment by moment in this book. Just about every step to songwriting, all of the options are in these pages. From various "tricks" of chord substitution to which rhyming dictionaries he likes and why - it's all here. His approach to songwriting is that of a master craftsman, and he doesn't hold back in his lessons. One odd thing. As a musician I was able to follow through as he introduced different elements - inverted chords, 7th chords, etc. The novice, however might have

difficulty. He introduces each piece individually, but then makes logical leaps that I still don't quite get. Specific examples escape me, but he'll take great pains to describe something simple and a paragraph later give you an example that incorporates something he hasn't yet introduced to you. He'll go on about how to construct a triad, and then jump PAST 7th chords. I was able to follow it, but I've been playing music for 10 years. I also disagree (but this is personal preference) with his chord substitution ideas: just find any chord with one note in common. Maybe he brings it all together in a later chapter, but he should let the reader know that he's wandered into the land of Chordal Compositions (compositions with no particular key) and away from the diatonic world that dominates Western music.

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