

# Elton John hi-jacked my lyrics



By [Genevieve Vieira](#)

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Is *Nikita*, the third biggest solo song of [Elton John's](#) career a sham? Guy Hobbs, an award-winning freelance photographer from Cape Town made a claim in May this year, stating that Elton's well known track *Nikita* was based on his own lyrics titled *Natasha*.

## The claim

Hobbs asserts that his own lyrics were written in 1982, three years before Elton John's big hit was released, whilst working as a photographer on a Russian cruise ship. At the time of the song's popularity many had noted it as one of the best things to come out of the Cold War. For Hobbs, however, his original lyrics tell his sad story of an impossible love between a Western Man and a Soviet woman.

Hobbs claims that the law suit is not so much about the money as it is about the principle of the matter. Hobbs, who at the time was living in London and trying to break into the world of professional song writing, sent the lyrics to a publisher called Big Pig, trying to find a composer co-writer who could complete his song. He had no idea that [Big Pig](#) was in fact the name of Elton John and his lyricist, Bernie Taupin's company. Like many songwriters, they handled their own publishing.

After two years of trying to get a break in the world of songwriting, Hobbs thought he had failed. The five lyrics he sent to Big Pig, whose address was found in a songwriting magazine, was a last-ditch attempt. He got no response and realised his destiny probably lay in photography, so a month later Hobbs abandoned song writing completely and moved to Africa to work as a nomadic photojournalist for international magazines.

## Substantial evidence

According to Hobbs, *Nikita's* name, theme, hook, chorus and structure are all very similar to *Natasha's* lyrics. Hobbs claims that the hook to the lyric he wrote was 'Natasha the freedom you will never know' whereas the hook on Elton's track was 'Nikita you will never know'. Could this be pure coincidence?

"I basically provided the skeleton to *Nikita* and if it wasn't for me, *Nikita*, quite simply, would never have existed" says Hobbs. "This was my big break and Elton and Bernie stole it from me."

He further states that "A forensic linguistic comparison of the 2 lyrics shows that about 48% of the words of *Nikita* have links to my lyrics. Three acclaimed experts in the USA in forensic linguistics, forensic musicology, and song writing have all said that the two lyrics are, in their opinion, "substantially similar." Is this is not a bit of a coincidence considering that the

song was sent to the writers of *Nikita* four months before they created the song?

Hobbs has worked out a probability analysis that shows that the similarities in *Nikita* happening by coincidence are the same chances that you have of winning a national lottery six times in a row.

It is also suspicious that the accompanying video portrayed Elton as a photographer, uncannily similar to Hobbs own personal story.

*Nikita* won Bernie and Elton the Ivor Novella award for Best Written Song of The Year; however, when Hobbs approached 9 experts who claim to be authorities on Elton John, they all admitted that Elton and Bernie had never talked about the song's roots. Hobbs claims that by any standard of song co-writing norms, he should have been credited as a co-writer of *Nikita*.

## The big delay

The question on everyone's mind is, why would someone wait this long to make such an allegation?

Well, according to Hobbs, when he heard the song on his car radio whilst on assignment in Africa, he certainly noticed a similarity and pondered if Elton had somewhere along the line been inspired by his lyrics. As far as he was concerned, however, he had sent his work to publishers, and if they had given it to Elton, surely they would have been in contact. Hobbs had heard nothing so he presumed everything was above board.

It was only by chance that one day in 2001 that he came across the lyrics of *Nikita* in a guitar songbook. "Reading a lyric is a totally different experience to hearing a song - that's why lyric sites on the web are so huge" says Hobbs. "I was stunned at what I saw and immediately realised that the person who wrote *Nikita* had used *Natasha* as a skeleton."

Hobbs turned internet detective to try and figure out what had happened and work out how Elton had got hold of his lyrics, eventually discovering the link between Big Pig and Elton and Bernie. He immediately contacted Elton's lawyer in the UK and Bernie's in the US, but was brushed off. Hobbs explains "I made enquiries about taking the matter to court in London and was quoted £70 000 just to get the case to the court before the proceedings even started. This was money I just didn't have."

Hobbs wrote over 19 letters to Elton and Bernie, over the years thinking that if he gave them enough evidence they would make things right, but they showed no interest in doing so. "I eventually realised that they would only take me seriously if I initiated legal action" says Hobbs.

In 2012 Hobbs managed to connect with a lawyer in Chicago who was impressed by the case and agreed to help take the matter to court in an affordable way.

## Proof

At the time of sending the lyrics, Hobbs was living in the UK, which had no official way to register copyright. The usual accepted way was to post the lyrics to yourself by registered mail in a tamper proof cardboard letter and then not open it. This established a date of ownership and this is what Hobbs did in 1983.

Hobbs says that he still has the receipt of posting plus the envelopes are stamped over the sealed flap, proving that *Natasha* was written three years before *Nikita*.

## Similar cases

Of course, this is not the first time this has happened in the music industry and no doubt it won't be the last.

The Isley brothers in 1991 laid a copyright infringement case against Michael Bolton. This was simply because one line

"Love is a beautiful thing" was sung the same way in both songs and it awarded them a settlement of about five million dollars.

## Where to from here

Two years ago Elton said "At the end of the day we have to take stock of what we are doing in our lives and be a little nicer to each other." Hobbs chuckles "Talk is cheap. I have always been open to sorting this thing out. In fact I have always believed we could have probably best solved the problem over a cup of tea at his UK Windsor house. Come to think about it, I am still open to it. He knows where to find me."

Whilst waiting for the wheels of the American legal system to turn, an actual court date is still many months down the line. These things are often settled out of court.

Meanwhile Hobbs says he is once again pursuing lyric writing. "I have lost 25 song writing years and I now want to fast track those back. I want to do again what I did 25 years ago - I want to create another international hit. To achieve this I have embarked on a project where I have written 25 kick ass, well crafted, interesting, lyrics and I want to get them to the major singer composers in the world today to see if we can come up with something great as a co-write. Crazy, ambitious, arrogant ... oh yeah... but the point is, 25 years ago I did just that and ended up helping create one of the top hits of the year. The only way to see if I can do it again is to put my stuff out there and see what happens."

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## ABOUT GENEVIEVE VIEIRA

Genevieve Vieira is the former PR and Marketing Specialist at Electromode and the editor of the website, Indie Does It. She has always had a deep passion for music and writes about the music and entertainment scene in South Africa. Follow her on Twitter at @genevievevieira.

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