

Learning a New Song

Here are the steps to take when learning a new song. Be exhaustive in your research.

Always begin by studying the lyrics.

Lyric

1. What are your first impressions of the lyric? What does it say to you and does it touch on your life experience somehow?
2. What is the story of the song? What is it about?
3. Write out the lyric in prose form in longhand. Underline rhyming words. Are the rhyming words somehow significant? Look for internal rhyme by speaking the lyric aloud.
4. Observe the punctuation. How will the punctuation affect your phrasing?
5. Are there any words or images in the lyric that you don't understand? Look those up.
6. What are the important images in the lyric? How do they help illustrate and enrich the song?

Music

Read *Excavating the Song: Music Preparation* before you begin. It is assumed that you know the music and can sing the correct pitches and rhythms before you do this section.

1. Observe the musical indications such as tempo markings, style indications, dynamics, crescendo/decrecendo, etc. How do these things support the song and help to communicate the lyric? Look up any words you do not know.
2. How does the music tell the story of your song? Does it work *with* the lyric or somehow against the lyric?
3. What is the musical form? Again, *Excavating the Song* will help. Is there something special that happens in the B section?

Interpretation

Although you may sing a song that many other people sing, you can bring your own interpretation to it. In the 1st year, spring semester, each of you will be singing the same song, one for men and one for women. We will not be doing all the work we do in the first chapter of *Excavating the Song* yet. That will wait until next year. Here are the things we will do this semester. Please be aware that we will take these songs out of context from the shows in which they appear.

1. How does this song reflect your personal experience? Trust that information and the unique subtext that that information gives you.
2. While we want you to personalize these songs, they should not be sung as yourself, but as a character you create. That character may be similar to you in some ways.
3. Who is your character singing to? The first song each of you sings in class can be classified as an “I Want” song, or to use the terminology from last semester, a Song of Disclosure. You may not be singing it to someone who is physically present. In these cases, you must find a way to externalize your partner, even if you’re singing to yourself. Imagine that one part of yourself is singing to another part of yourself. Maybe your timid side is singing to your braver self. Or, perhaps your intellect is singing to your heart.
4. What do you want? What’s at stake?
5. Create a situation in which your character exists and needs to say these words. Where are you? When is it? What are you wearing? These kinds of questions are invaluable. Come up with more that help make your situation more real and visceral to you.
6. What changes happen during the song? Musical Theatre songs are special moments in which a character undergoes some kind of change. As we are taking these songs out of context, you can decide what changes during your song. This is one of the ways that your interpretation will differ from others.

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