**How To Prepare A Song for Audition**

Ideally almost all of this text work should be completely before you even listen to the song once, before the music has influenced your opinion on the mood, rhythm and delivery of the text. Realistically, of course this is usually fairly unlikely to be the case. Most of us pick an audition song having heard it at least once and often many times. However, whilst going through this process, do your best to resist your knowledge of the music as far as possible. You are far more likely to find new and more natural readings of a particular line (or indeed the whole song) if you do.

1. **Write out the song as prose.** In other words, write the text without the ‘unnatural’ breaks and punctuation that the poetry of the song will often supply. Ideally we want to retain the exact punctuation that the lyricist supplied, but this depends a bit on the rigour of the lyricist in question. You may have to add a little punctuation to turn it into realistic prose. For example:

“*And now, the end is near
And so I face the final curtain
My friend, I'll say it clear
I'll state my case, of which I'm certain
I've lived a life that's full
I travelled each and ev'ry highway
And more, much more than this, I did it my way*”

Becomes:

“And now, the end is near, and so I face the final curtain. My friend, I'll say it clear. I'll state my case, of which I'm certain. I've lived a life that's full. I travelled each and ev'ry highway. And more, much more than this, I did it my way”.

Write the entire song out in this format, and then **read it out loud, as if performing an acting monologue**. Resist as much as possible the rhythms of the song and find the natural rhythm of the text. Often you will realise that a sentence has actually been quite unnaturally broken up by musical phrasing. Ignore this and read it as prose. Do this a couple of times (especially with a song you know well where you are more likely to drop into the musical rhythm of the song without realising).

1. **Immediately, write a list of one word descriptions of the song**. Don’t think about this too hard. It should be your **instinctive,** initial impressions of the text. These might well be contradictory – for example, My Way might give you: ‘confident’, and ‘arrogant’, but also ‘insecure’ and ‘lonely’.
2. **Write a detailed backstory for the character who is singing.** The level of detail is up to you, but it will help enormously for you to have a strong feel of who the character is (their name, how old, they are, their background etc) as well as the immediate backstory just before you start to sing. This might seem a little ‘drama school’, but this level of specificity is even more important when you are performing a song out of context of the piece it is from. Speaking of context, don’t feel you need to match your context and backstory to the show. It may often be the simplest (and best) option, but don’t be afraid to create your own character and context if you want to. In the end, all of this detail is to help YOU find specific choices in the song, and to avoid simply playing an ‘emotion’ for 3 minutes.
3. **Write the text out again, but this time split it into individual ‘thoughts’** and leave a couple of lines of space between each one. It is down to you to decide at what point there is a new impetus to the character’s thoughts, but the general rule is that it should never be longer than one sentence, and will often be shorter. It may be that, in an extreme case, a single ‘thought’ might be just one word. In songs they may well fall with the obvious punctuation that music provides, but, like the rhythm of the text, be awake to the possibility that it doesn’t.

Now, in the space you’ve left between each thought, write something that helps you make that thought *specific* rather than general. Different people will find different things that work for them, but here are some pointers:

1. Actioning – for each thought pick an active verb to play alongside the thought. It can be as abstract as you like, but it must be active not passive – ie something you can DO to someone. Eg an angry thought might come alive if you think the action ‘I stab you’ as you sing it. Be creative with the verbs and don’t be afraid to choose the opposite from what is obvious. Play that same angry thought with ‘I embrace you’. Does that add a new colour that you hadn’t considered?
2. Whilst some people swear by ‘active’ verbs, others prefer just a more general, literal note. Eg ‘trying to hold back anger’, ‘lonely’, tired. This can be fine too, but try to make sure you don’t become too predictable in your choices.
3. Some general ‘backstory’ for that particular thought. If the thought is ‘I’ve lived a life that’s full’, perhaps you might write a couple of sentences describing what you’ve done. What experiences *in particular*. Remember, be specific, not general. In this example, create one specific, amazing experience that the character had and hold it in your mind as you sing the line.
4. It might be a note about the staging and physical context at that point in the song. Eg if the song mentions a certain person and they are on stage with you, where are they? What do they look like? Do they react?
5. You might also find it a useful place to sketch some very basic stage directions.

There are many more options and there is no need to become too pedantic about it. The important thing is that you are forced to consider *each individual thought*, rather than simply considering the generic ‘emotion’ of the song. Be courageous! In the end, an actor is only as good as the choices she or he makes and often the more interesting the choices are the better. Don’t be afraid to try out the complete opposite of what seems obvious. There are no right or wrong options. Play around and find the ones that work for you, and that you think bring the song alive.

1. **Now sing the song** Learn the notes and get the song sung into your voice and then try performing it. Don’t obsess over all the things you wrote in steps **2)**, **3)** and **4)**. The important thing is that you did the work, not that you remember it! By all means refer back to what you wrote if you want to fine tune a particular moment, but when you sing it, and PARTICULARLY when you perform it in public, let all of that go, and trust that the work you have done will shine through. In this sense, acting technique is very similar to singing technique. We do all the hard work in private so that, when it comes to the performance, we don’t NEED to think about it, we can just inhabit the moment.