

Selecting Songs for an Audition

By Robert Marks

Often the call for a singing audition comes with only days or hours to prepare. At that point, it's usually too late to start trying to learn a new song. Preparation is the only way to assure that performers give their best possible demonstration of skill and talent, while looking posed and self-assured. For over thirty years, I've been helping singers show themselves off to their best possible advantage at these nerve-racking rituals called "singing auditions."

Every performer requires a collection of songs that are ready to be performed at a moment's notice. When selecting songs, age, gender, and look are imperative. Then, suitability to the audition must be taken into account. I consider songs you sing much like the clothing you wear: it must fit correctly, be ready to wear, and appropriate to the occasion.

The song may have to be sung a cappella (without accompaniment), with a tape or CD of accompaniment (karaoke-style), or with a live piano accompanist who is playing the sheet music for the first time. Being prepared for all of these contingencies may make the difference between a successful audition experience and one that you want to forget.

There are countless songs to choose from when deciding what to prepare for musical auditions. Understandably, singers want to be unique, and often feel that choosing an unknown piece will help them to stand out and be remembered. That isn't always the case.

- If the auditioners have never heard your song before, they may concentrate on the song rather than the singer. They should be concentrating on you and your dazzling performance, not trying to figure out where the song is from. If you do decide to sing something unusual, it might be good idea to introduce the song before you begin.
- If the pianist is familiar with the song, he or she will often do a better job accompanying you, and following your specific phrasing.

Vocal coach and author David Craig used to say that "You don't have to be different to be good; being good is different enough." That doesn't mean that every young performer must sing from *Annie* or *Oliver!* There are a multitude of song choices, many of them less overdone but still part of the musical theatre repertory.

Points to consider when building your audition repertoire:

1 Do some homework at the library or on the Internet. Note which Broadway shows or musical films had children in the cast and what songs they sang.

2 Carefully study the lyrics of any song you are considering for auditions. Do the words require experience beyond the performer's age? In other words, should any child sing "Memory" from *Cats*?

3 Attend classes, workshops, and seminars where you can hear songs that others are singing. Keep notes, and ask a coach or teacher about working on songs you like.

4 Watch talent competitions, showcases, and pageants. You don't necessarily want to copy

someone else's performance, but you can learn a lot by watching both the successful and unsuccessful performances. Try to objectively analyze what makes a performance "work."

5 Have at least one "up tempo" (bright) and one "ballad" (slow) in your collection of songs. Make sure that the sheet music is in your optimal key, and clearly marked for the pianist. If the printed music is not in your optimal key, have it written out by a qualified professional so that an accompanist will be able to do the best job possible.

6 If you sing in both "head" voice (high) and "belt" voice (low), have songs that show each range. One song probably won't show both voices equally.

7 Have practice tapes or CDs made both with and without the melody line. The melody line will help you learn the song, but when you're at an audition you have to be prepared to sing with only the accompaniment. If this sounds confusing, ask your coach or teacher to demonstrate the difference.

Ultimately, the best song to sing at an audition is one that fits you, and that you're totally comfortable with. Even if you're a "quick study," a song recently memorized will not look or sound as natural as a piece that has been honed over a long period of time. An experienced coach or teacher is an important asset, but don't wait until the last minute to get ready. Remember, "Failing to prepare is preparing to fail!"

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