

Everything you wanted to know about acting...
...but were afraid to ask

If we accept a simple definition of acting as the portrayal on stage of some part of human experience that is shared with an audience then in a sense every singer is also an actor. - Oscar Kosarin, The Singing Actor

Choosing a character

Choosing a character will help you find an emotional context for your songs. Character colors the meaning of the lyrics and gives believability and passion to the song. The character is chosen *before the vocal work begins* because the choice of a character with whom everyone can identify will affect unity, dynamics, forward motion, inflexion, interpretation, your visual plan/choreography -- in other words, Music, Sound, Expression and Showmanship.

Character is the development of a real person, living truthfully, in imaginary circumstances. - Sanford Meisner, On Acting

Be sure the character is someone for whom the words of both songs are motivated, truthful and fit the *style* of the character. For example, one character choice for the songs "How Many Hearts Have You Broken?" and "My Foolish Heart" is Erica Barry from the movie *Something's Gotta Give*. A story about the rejuvenating power of love, the up-tune expresses the simultaneous fear and excitement Erica feels as she falls for Harry. It is well suited to Erica's bantering wit -- and her ambivalence. "My Foolish Heart" in which she compares the uncertainty of love with the constancy of the moon is also a truthful expression of Erica's conflict and style.

Using the same character and circumstances for both the up-tune and ballad creates a musical scene. The break in-between the songs can be used as another device to enhance the emotional and visual expression of the package.

TASKS in preparation for finding character in songs:

- A. Identify the character
- B. Find the circumstances
- C. Find the emotion through action in the up-tune
- D. Find the emotion through action in the ballad

All of the character work is done in the first person, as Erica:

A. IDENTIFY THE CHARACTER

Who Am I?

My name is Erica Barry. I am in my fifties, a successful writer, divorced, with a daughter, Marin who is in her late twenties. To all appearances I am in control of my life, but I am vulnerable, feeling that I have been “put out to pasture” by a culture that has no regard for women my age. I am smart, cautious and determined.

B. FIND THE CIRCUMSTANCES

Marin has been dating Harry Sanborn a middle-aged “peter pan” trying desperately to keep up the pace of a younger man. They show up at my beach house thinking I am out of town. Harry suffers a heart attack and has to stay at my house until he is well enough to go back to New York.

Where am I?

The scene for the up-tune: Harry and I have just run in from the beach and we begin to dance.

The scene for the ballad: Harry has just confessed that he can not change his ways, and leaves me.

Each scene is an almost perfect fit for the up-tune and ballad.

What do I want?

Do I want to give in to Harry? To Resist Harry? To reinvent myself? To fall in love? To prove something to Harry? To myself? Be Specific.

Identifying with the emotional life of a character (and not your own) allows you access to the emotional high stakes in the lyrics.

**C. FIND THE EMOTION THROUGH ACTION:
THE UP-TUNE**

Feelings are intangible. It is through action that we find emotion. What are the actions that bring Erica to the moment when the up-tune begins? Be specific.

**D. FIND THE EMOTION THROUGH ACTION:
THE BALLAD**

What are the actions that bring Erica to the moment when she begins to sing “The scene is set for romance....”? Be specific.