

CABARET SONG RESEARCH, PREPARATION, INTERPRETATION, CRAFTING, AND REHEARSAL

By Emily Leatha Everson Gleichenhaus

Answer these questions to the best of your ability for every song you sing:

Background Research

1. Who wrote the words?
2. Who wrote the music?
3. When was the song written?
4. At what point in the composer's & lyricist's careers was the song written?
5. What is the song from?
6. If from a show, what character sang it?
7. If from a show, from what situation does the song arise? Why does the character sing the song? What function does the song/character play in the story?
8. What other contextual elements of the song are significant?
9. Was the song written for a particular singer? Why?
10. If not from a show, why did the songwriter write the song/why was it written?
11. What do you feel the lyricist is trying to say?
12. Do the song lyrics tell a story or just express feelings or ideas?
13. Look up newspaper reviews or books about the show, songwriter or song
14. Who else has sung/recorded the song? Listen to those recordings and note what you learn from this exercise.
15. Seek out performance videos of this song and listen to every recording of it you can find. But don't listen to any one recording too often, as you don't want to copy someone else's work! Your goal is to craft your own unique version.
16. Look up and understand any unclear words, phrases, or idioms.
17. What songs (or any other media like books, plays, movies, etc) support this song...what songs do particular lyrics make you think of? What songs tell a similar story? What songs support the emotional life of this song?

Acting and Crafting (from the singer's point of view)

18. Why did you decide to sing the song? What about the song drew you to it? Ask "Who is Emily and why does she want to say this?"
19. What is the thought/message you urgently need to convey...with this song, right now?
20. What is your "self revelation." What are you revealing or discovering about yourself?
21. Where (what line) is "truth and revelation" - What's the payoff line?
22. What does the song say that you would like to be able to say in your own words?
23. Who are you?
24. Where are you?
25. When is it?
26. Who are you singing to?
27. What are you doing?
28. What is your objective, what to you hope to achieve by singing/saying these words to this person?
29. What just happened in the moment before you sing? What are you responding to?
30. How do you feel about what just happened?
31. Where is the person you are singing to?
32. Why are you here singing/saying these words?
33. What obstacles must you surmount to achieve these goals?
34. What dangers/risks are you taking in saying these words/working to achieve these objectives?
35. It's as-if...
36. Tie it all together: write a short paragraph on why you picked the song, what it means to you, and what you're trying to say with it.

Deconstruct the Song:

37. Review lyrics to make sure you've got them right or specify reasons for the changes
38. Pick out the "juicy words" write them on one side of paper, on the other side, write images, stories, actions, thoughts (etc) that spring from each juicy word. What does each word mean to you and as defined in the dictionary? What does each word imply? What images do they create in you/convey to others?
39. VOTE (from Robert Cohen's book "Acting One"): Take sheets of paper and fold in half on left half write out an acting beat contained in the lyrics. On the right, write out the VOTE (Victory, Obstacle, Tactic, Expectation) or simply your intention/tactic in that beat. For each beat, what do you expect from the person you're singing to or what do you expect from the audience? Then move onto the next beat until you've worked your way through the whole song.
40. SUBTEXT: Take sheets of paper and fold in half on left half write out an acting beat contained in the lyrics. On the right, write out your subtext. What are you REALLY saying with these lyrics? What are you NOT saying with the lyrics? What is the conversation taking place in your head while you are saying these words or trying to achieve these objectives? What do the lyrics mean to YOU?
41. SYMBOLS AND METAPHORS: Take sheets of paper and fold in half on left half write out any symbol or metaphor found in the lyrics. ON the right, write out your reaction to, experience of, knowledge of, or research about that symbol or metaphor. Make the symbol or metaphor personal. What does it mean to you: an experience, a memory, a reaction, an image. What do you see in your head when you are confronted with that symbol, or metaphor? Then move your way through each symbol or metaphor in the song.
42. IMAGES/THOUGHTS/MEMORIES/STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS: Take sheets of paper and fold in half on left half write out the song lyrics with large spaces between each sentence. On the right, write out whatever comes to mind in response to anything in the song (even single words). What does it mean to you: an experience, a memory, a reaction, an image, quotes, philosophy, whatever! Then move your way through the song.
43. Write out the words (and, if needed, the subtext) many times. The goal here is to know the words so well that you couldn't get them wrong even if you tried. But since "Practice makes permanent," make double sure you are learning the correct words!

44. Create a song "road map, write the lyrics on one side of a sheet and explain the journey of the song on the other (what's going on? What are you doing in that moment, where are you trying to go?).
45. What clues do the punctuation give to about the writer's intentions and your experience of the song?
46. Read the lyrics aloud as a poem. Understand the meter and internal rhythm. Analyze the poetic structure. What does this analysis reveal?
47. Study the musical composition. How is the song structured? What clues does the notes, key, tempo, and music notations give you about the composer's intentions and your experience of the song? How can a unique arrangement better suit your purposes?

Rehearsal Exercises:

48. Speed through the words, without punctuation, a few times FAST. What words/ideas stand out? Any new images/ideas/thoughts emerge?
49. Learn the lyrics as a monologue. Reading and understanding it as a monologue will help you discover your own voice in the song and to work out the acting beats.
50. Rehearse the song with every broad emotion you can think of: happy, sad, mad, confused, exasperated, giddy, in/out of love, sarcastic, etc.
51. Rehearse slowly at first. First see each image in your mind, decide how you feel about it and react to it, THEN sing put the lyric (and your reaction to the image) on the pitch. Take as much time as you need. Eventually, you will knit these images together into a movie for which the song becomes the soundtrack and the images will flow through your mind at the speed appropriate to your version of the song.

Craft Your Singular Version of the Song:

52. Take classes, workshops or get coaching sessions to work on the songs with a trusted Master Teacher.
53. Work with a Music Director to craft an arrangement that suits the all the work you've done.
54. Have an accompaniment rehearsal recording made of your arrangement.
55. Sing the song for others as often as you can. You can do this in a class, for your neighbors, at an open mic, for your family (anytime, anyplace you get a chance). Just get up and SING. Singing for others is a TOTALLY different experience than singing in your car or your living room, and you can't know a song until you've attempted to communicate your story to others.
56. Be ready to add new thoughts, images, experiences (etc) to written work and be ready to change your arrangement as you perform and discover what works best for you.

Master Teachers

Heart thanks to each Master Teacher listed who enhanced my life as an artist and contributed to the formulation of this process.

Wendy Lane Bailey, Karen Berman, Howard Breitbart, Michele Brouman, Robert Cohen, Elizabeth Dillon, Carole Everson, Tovah Feldshuh, George Fulginiti-Shakar, Jason Graae, Michelle Grace, George Hall, Bob Harrington, Rick Jensen, Howard Jensen, Noel Katz, Lina Koutrakos, Andrea Marcovacci, Amanda McBroom, Dale McFadden, Marion Michaels, Michael Miyazaki, George Pinney, Erv Raible, Charles Nelson Reilly, Chris Reintz, Judy Simmons, Alex Tang, Paul Trueblood, Lauren Weedman, K F. Williams, Julie Wilson

The Basic Outline of the Process:

- **ANSWER THE QUESTIONS:** Sit down and fill in the blanks so that the answers fill up both your conscious and unconscious mind with knowledge and understanding
- **DO WHAT YOU'RE TOLD:** Stand up and do the exercise so that the experience of even just going through the motions (although it really is better to put your heart and soul into it) will give you a feeling of achievement and "I've done this before."
- **HUSH UP AND SING:** This is the hardest part. Let it all go and fly free. You do the work and trust that it is there, engaging your subconscious and flowing through you and over you like a river over a water fall.

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