

HOW TO SING A SONG FOR PERFORMANCE OR JUST FOR FUN

A Primer

By Emily Gleichenhaus
Sing Books with Emily

In early 2014, I lead a Girl Scout troop meeting to earn the Musician Badge and created this document to support my efforts. Developing this primer, my focus was to share some of what I've learned, techniques I've developed, and some of my personal practices for music making.

Today, I hope is that this information will be helpful to anyone who wants to sing a song for others.

Please find the most updated version of this document at this link:

<http://singbookswithemily.wordpress.com/2014/03/24/how-to-sing-a-song-for-performance-or-just-for-fun-a-primer-by-emily-gleichenhaus-mrs-g/>



THE MAJOR STEPS

Each of these items are explored:

- Choose a Song
- Obtain Printed Sheet Music
- Find the Right Key FOR YOU to Sing the Song
- Develop Your Own Arrangement
- Craft the Song
- Practice Your Song, Sing, Study and Perform at Every Opportunity

Choose a Song

- If you hear a song (musicals, concerts, cabarets, movies, TV, radio, CDs, records, YouTube, stage, etc) and fall in love with it, knowing you've got something special to share, consider it.
- If you choose a song because you think you will sound good singing it, you should probably consider a different song. Sounding good is great, but there is so much more to it than that.
- You can write your own song.



Obtain Printed Sheet Music

- Understand that learning how to get your music written up and arranged and what forms that printed music can take (full arrangement or chart, for example) takes time, experience and expense.
- Sometimes you just can't find the sheet music or you can't get it. In that case you can have it transcribed. Keep in mind, this can be expensive.
- When you are just starting out, it is probably best to stick with a song for which music is easy to find at places like libraries, music stores and online.
- Mrs. G's resource list might be helpful for locating printed music. It is called **EMILY'S LIST OF RESOURCES FOR SHEET MUSIC (ONLINE, IN PRINT, COMMERCIAL AND FREE)**. You can find it on the **SING BOOKS WITH EMILY** blog at this link:

<http://singbookswithefamily.wordpress.com/2011/09/13/online-resources-for-sheet-music-commercial-and-free/>



Find the Right Key FOR YOU to Sing the Song

- Singing in the right key for you is important because it has everything to do with your vision for the song (and your ability to convey that vision) and the overall sound of the song. If the song is too high or too low, you can't effectively communicate. Just because a song is printed in a particular key does not mean that you have to sing it in that key. Your job is to serve the needs of the song and the story you are trying to tell. It's the communication that matters, not the height of the notes.
- You can try out different keys by singing *a cappella* and changing just the first note of a song. A piano or pitch pipe are helpful.
- A music teacher, music director, performance coach or musician to help you try the song in different keys.
- Some pianists/accompanists are so skilled that they can play any song in any key. But since you often do not know about the accompanist's skills in advance, it is best to have your music printed in your key. Options for getting your music printed in the right key:
 - Some of the online sheet music sellers have software as part of their services that can alter keys for you. Mrs. G's resource list might be helpful. It is called EMILY'S LIST OF RESOURCES FOR SHEET MUSIC (ONLINE, IN PRINT, COMMERCIAL AND FREE). You can find it on the SING BOOKS WITH EMILY blog at this link:
<http://singbookswithemily.wordpress.com/2011/09/13/online-resources-for-sheet-music-commercial-and-free/>
 - Another option is to contact a musician you know who has special music software that can alter keys of printed music.



Develop Your Own Arrangement

- A song is made up of the words, chord changes and notes of the melody. Everything else is open to interpretation (and even those things are sometimes open for interpretation).
- Your arrangement is the **WAY** you sing the song
 - Your personal thoughts and ideas about the words and music
 - Your tempo and rhythm
 - Your style and mood (pop, swing, Broadway, major or minor, light or dark)
 - Your instrument choices
 - Your key
 - Your assembly of the song components (order of verses, chorus, lyrics...sometimes there are multiple sets of lyrics to choose from)
 - Arranging a song is like customizing it just for you. You might think of arranging like tailoring a dress to fit you or choreographing a dance.
- You do not want to sing someone else's version of the song. Sing your own version!
- You can work with an arranger (musician, coach, teacher) to develop specially arranged music for your song, but this can be very expensive and developing the skill to do this requires years of study and practice (which any serious performer should do).
- For beginners, the activity of researching the song (using the [SONG CRAFT WORKSHEET](#), see below), documenting the personal story you need tell with the song, customizing your thinking about the song (with personal experiences, thoughts and images), and making simple, personal choices about the music (key, tempo, rhythm for example), will go a long way making the song lovely, personal and unique.



Craft the Song

- Answer the questions and do the exercises and activities in the [SONG CRAFT WORKSHEET](#). The simple act of filling out the answers to the worksheet questions will help you make the song your own. You can find the SONG CRAFT WORKSHEET on the SING BOOKS WITH EMILY blog at this link: <http://singbookswithemily.wordpress.com/2010/09/11/the-art-and-craft-of-singing-a-song-tell-me-a-story-sing-me-a-song/>
- Read books on performing monologues, acting and song performance to give you other ideas for how to work on your song.
- Talk to musicians, music teachers and performers to find out how they work on songs.
- Make up your own performance and research technique based on your experience and all you've learned.
- The objective is for you to KNOW the song, MAKE IT YOUR OWN, to sing it well and communicate your ideas effectively.
- Take a song performance class or work with a private teacher.



Practice Your Song, Sing, Study and Perform at Every Opportunity

- Go to open mics, sing for indulgent friends and relatives, sing in choirs, audition for everything just for the experience, perform in talent shows, sing in your bedroom. Make singing a natural part of your life.
- Practice your song by singing with a recording of the music
 - Ask a musician friend to play the music (with your arrangement) while you record it. Then you can play it back and sing with it to practice.
 - Sometimes you can find a karaoke track that works.
 - Mrs. G's LIST OF RESOURCES FOR SHEET MUSIC (ONLINE, IN PRINT, COMMERCIAL AND FREE) has links to musicians you can contact online who can play your music for you and send you MP3s or can even alter the key of an existing karaoke track. To print or view this list, visit this link: <http://singbookswithemily.wordpress.com/2011/09/13/online-resources-for-sheet-music-commercial-and-free/>
 - There is a potential pitfall with recorded music, though. Don't get too dependent on it. Stay flexible. When you perform, you want the music to follow YOU and not the other way around. You want to be able to sing freely.
- Take performance classes (group and private)
- The point is for singing to be a joyous, thought provoking, and engaging experience (for you and the audience). And, you want the activity of singing for and with others to become as natural to you as walking.

