HOW TO PREPARE FOR AND WHAT TO EXPECT IN SCENE WORK SESSIONS

Begin to work immediately TOGETHER!!
You will need time to prepare on your own AND with scene partner(s)!!

WORK SESSION #1:

OUTSIDE PREPARATION:

1. Read the script and listen to the original cast recording and any subsequent recordings of the show.
2. Get a taping and work on song for vocal production, musicality, harmonies, breath, diction, dynamics, articulation, etc.
3. Written Preparation – Libretto, World view and Scene Analysis

IN CLASS:

1. Discuss findings in analysis with class, review scene beats and turn in written preparation.
2. Table Read – 1st Read and Sing Through incorporating research – ON BOOK, IN CHAIRS.

WORK SESSION #2:

OUTSIDE PREPARATION:

1. Continue to work on song for vocal production and diction.
2. Written Preparation – Character Analysis and Song Chart
3. Create your environment using furniture available in the studio; if analysis proves that props are necessary and crucial to the scene and your character(s), please find and begin working with them.
4. Find a costume/silhouette that suits the time period and character and begin working in them.
5. Create basic blocking for your scene using the given stage directions as a starting point.

IN CLASS:

*Part One:* As a group, we will have one or two classes focusing on character, relationship and understanding of lyric/text. We will use exercises and improvisation incorporating your research and discoveries.

*Part Two:* Each scene will have a run through incorporation work in and out of class. This will be followed by notes. DUE: Character Analysis and Song Chart.

WORK SESSION #3:

OUTSIDE OF CLASS: Continue to work on vocal productions and diction; have an action rehearsal(s)
IN CLASS: We will do a work through of your scene focusing on actions

WORK SESSION #4:

OUTSIDE OF CLASS: Continue to work on vocal productions and diction and finessing details of the scene.
IN CLASS: Dress Rehearsal & Character Day (to be explained in class), followed by notes.
MTP3 SCENE PREPARATION

LIBRETTA & WORLDVIEW ANALYSIS

*Facts of the world of your script*
First, understand. Learn everything you can from the script. The circumstances your character lives in spring from the world of the play. This is a fabricated world. Even in a musical that has an historical and factual basis like 1776, the viewpoint of the story and the lives of the characters are inventions. In order to enter that world, you will need to understand it.

I. LIBRETTA

Initially, individually read the play looking for facts. Search out things that help you understand the plot, the characters, and the social and physical environment. On a separate sheet of paper, answer the following questions.

1. What is the story? Describe succinctly the series of events that lead up to your scene. For your scene only, why did the author include this scene in the story? What purpose does it have?
2. Who are the characters? List all characters in the play, define their age, social level, physical description, education, occupation and community.
3. What are their relationships?
4. Where does the story take place? (Answer this for each scene and do some research to learn about these places)
5. When does the story take place? (Look at the year, the season, time of day, weather, etc. for each scene)

At this stage, restrict yourself to just the facts that are established in the script and from your research. Get the facts straight before drawing inferences from them.

*Worldview*
Characters are shaped and limited by their perceptions of the world – what we call worldview. It affects their sense of what is real as well as what is possible. Certain things will be unthinkable for your character. Though many times a character is on the cusp of insight that is revolutionary (Tony and Maria thinking they could be together in West Side Story), every worldview contains limitations. In 1776, Abigail and John Adams can’t even think the thought that she might become president of the emerging nation. The gender roles of the time simply couldn’t allow the question to be raised in their own minds.
A worldview is pervasive. We could all be cats cavorting around a junkyard or gangsters who love to shoot craps. Each of these worlds is unique and complete. And none of them is like yours. Understand the world of the musical for what it is rather than interpreting it through the world we’re living now.

II. WORLDVIEW

Answer the questions below to create a list of worldviews that you share with your character, and another list of areas where you are different. Write this on a separate sheet of paper and be prepared to present your findings to the class and hand in to instructor. Address how your daily experience would change if you had the same worldview as your character.

1. Where do I live (urban, rural, east/west coast, desert, mountain, apartment, tenement, tent, palace...)
2. How do I speak? (formal, slang, hip, scholarly)
3. What is beautiful?
4. What is sexy? (turn-ons and turn-offs)
5. What are the gender roles (what are you allowed/not allowed to do, stereotypes)
6. What is good etiquette and what is taboo?
7. What do you do for fun?
8. What are your religious beliefs and sense of an afterlife? What is sin?
9. Who is in charge? (Social justice, politics). What is your relationship to authority?
10. What is your education?
11. What is your profession?
12. What are the recent advances in science, exploration and technology?
SCENE ANALYSIS
CIRCUMSTANCE, RELATIONSHIP, INTENTION

CIRCUMSTANCE

I. **WHAT IS THIS SCENE AND SONG ABOUT?** What is the “Essence” of the scene? What human need, experience or struggle did the author mean to portray when he/she wrote the show/song? What is the overall emotion of the scene?

II. **WHO, WHERE and WHEN?** Describe your character, location, date and time of day for your scene that will inform the actions you are going to take.

III. **MOMENT BEFORE or TRIGGER.** What is the precise event/moment in the scene that makes your character have no choice other than to speak or sing?
IV. DEFINING THE BEATS OF YOUR SCENE

Define the BEATS in the scene as well as the song, since together they comprise the “scene”. NOTE: Beats, also known as Units, are divisions in a dramatic action in a script and all segments of a plot. Whenever a character shifts lines of talk or action in a new direction or the writer shifts the dominant focus or subject from one character to another, a new beat/unit is formed.

TOGETHER you will define the story/journey/dramatic structure of your scene. On your copy of the scene, break it down into beats and label each beat with a title which sums up what action/event is taking place i.e., for a “one night stand” type of scene you may break it down as follows: Beat 1 – the meeting, Beat 2 – the flirting, Beat 3 – the interruption, Beat 4 – the walk to the car, Beat 5 – the kissing, Beat 6 – the “hot and heavy”, Beat 7 – the cigarette, Beat 8 – the awkward goodbye.

RELATIONSHIP

You are in a relationship with everyone and everything in the musical. From the central character, to the smallest prop, to the memory of your character’s grandmother, you have a personal relationship with all of it. It or they mean something to you.

I. LIST THE RELATIONSHIPS

1. On a separate sheet of paper, list the five most important people in your life. They don’t have to be family, though they might be. And they don’t have to be the people you’re told you “should” care about, though they might be that, as well. These just need to be the five most important people in your life. Next to each name, write why they matter to you in one sentence.

2. Now, list the three most important items in your life. Not most valuable in terms of replacement cost, but most important to you, for any reason. Next to those items, write a single sentence that describes why it is important.

3. You’ve just articulated relationships! Repeat this exercise asking those same questions of your character.

II. METAPHORIC RELATIONSHIPS (SEE SEPARATE HANDOUT)
Knowing you, knowing me
Playing your character’s relationships

BY JOE DEER AND ROCCO DAL VERA

YOU’VE JUST BEEN cast in the spring musical and can’t wait to get started on your homework. As you begin looking at that role, you’ll probably instinctively begin thinking about your relationships to the other characters in the show. He is my boyfriend, she is my mother, he is my teacher, and so on. While this may sort characters into generalized groups, it does very little to energize your acting. You need to see the other characters, in ways that matter to you—to elevate their degree of importance. Identifying why a relationship matters will add fuel to your acting fire.

Specific relationship
Every character you play has a specific relationship with every other character he encounters or talks about onstage. Even those characters in the chorus all have relationships to each other and to the more prominent characters in a show. The relationship is the kind of association between two people. The significance is the degree of importance carried by the relationship.

Let’s take a look at several key relationships at the beginning of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s Oklahoma! If you are playing the role of Laurey, you know that Curly, the cowherd who hangs around your farm, is important to you because:

He is charming and likeable.
He is physically attractive.
You have been flirting with each other in many different ways for months.
He offers protection from Jud, who scares you.
He is the man you privately want to marry and spend the rest of your life with, but he is a cowboy and you need a farmer.

That escalating list makes clear some of the reasons Curly matters to Laurey. It defines her specific relationship to him. He is important to her because he can help her get a range of things she wants. She wants visual stimulation from a man and he provides that. She wants to be charmed, flattered, and flirted with, and he does that, too (on occasion). He is capable of protecting her when she is in danger; something else she wants. Finally, he might offer her love and lifelong companionship—probably the highest priority for Laurey. So, for Laurey, Curly is defined by the ways he is important to her and what he can do for her.

However, if you’re playing Curly, you have a different, though somewhat related, specific relationship.
He can help her make Curly jealous; something she wants right now. He scares her and makes her feel that she might be hurt if she doesn't obey him.

He is the man on the farm and keeps it running.

That is a markedly different relationship, and one that clearly changes throughout the show. For Curly, Jud matters because:

He is a threat to Curly's successful courtship of Laurey.

He has Aunt Eller's confidence and Curly needs her to support him as Laurey's winning suitor.

He is menacing and dangerous and he scares Curly.

So, in just a few sentences, we have defined a series of totally different relationships among these three characters. All are intertwined, but each is specific to only one person and each provides the actor with strong reasons to care about the other characters. There are no weak or indifferent feelings between these three people.

By asking a few basic questions, we can define the specific relationship between the character we play and the others he or she encounters.

1. **Who is the other person to me?**
   She is my __________. This statement acknowledges that we are at the center of our own private universe and everyone in it orbits us. They all play roles and have functions strictly in terms of us. Go beyond the general to define them specifically.

2. **Why do I care about her?**
   List the most important reasons why she matters to you.

3. **What can she do to help or hurt my chances of achieving my goals?**
   I need __________ from that person. You need this for yourself. Try answering this using “me” or “for me.” “I need you to love me.” “I need you to be there for me.” “I need you to stop Jud for me.”

4. **How important is she to me?**
   I would __________ if I were to lose that person. You don't know what you've got 'til it's gone. Ask what you have to lose.
Endowing relationships with titles

Our relationships with other characters are not only defined by why those characters matter to us, but also by how we treat them. The way we conceptualize relationships between characters may be irrational, metaphorical, out-of-date, or otherwise highly personal. For example, a girl can treat her boyfriend like a baby. Or a mom might be a best friend to her daughter. You can make someone else the bad guy, the hot guy, or the nerd just by thinking it, and it will be true for you. Your best friend might see you as his confessor, his smarter half, his dupe, his brother, his counselor, etc. Endow every relationship with a strong metaphoric side by giving it a relationship title. If you choose bland descriptors like buddy, wife, or cousin, you will miss the potential of this. Don’t be afraid of strong characterizations like, you are my nemesis, my replicating flower, my obligation, my source, and look beyond the literal to the deeper nature of your relationship.

Here is a short listing of some metaphorical relationships:

- my savior       - my slave
- my captor       - my accomplice
- my healer       - my mentor
- my protégé      - my seducer
- my attacker     - my henchman
- my playmate     - my co-conspirator
- my captive      - my sidekick
- my oppressor    - my nag
- my nemesis      - my inspiration
- my millstone    - my suck-up
- my love-slave   - my addiction
- my crutch       - my master
- my cellmate     - my tiger
- my lieutenant   - my captain
- my competitor   - my cutie-pie
- my patron saint - my angel

You can add hundreds of richly stimulating metaphorical relationships to this list. Dig through a thesaurus and keep looking until you find the metaphoric characterization that engages the essential nature of the relationship you are working with.

Exercises

Specifying relationships

For these exercises select a role for which you can get a script and score (or at least vocal selections and a complete recording). Identify two characters that have important relationships to your role.

1. Use the four-step inventory listed on the previous page to define and personalize your relationships with these two characters.
2. List at least five reasons for their importance to your character in the show. Remember that importance doesn’t only include the positive reasons. A person can be important because of what he can do to you or against you.
3. Now, prioritize those reasons from 1 to 3 (or more). See how those reasons give you a personal stake in the relationships.
4. Does this list start to help you see what you want from each of these characters and why they really matter to you?

When I look at you

1. Do the exercise described in “Specifying Relationships” by trading places with one other character that matters to you, and do it from that character’s point of view.
2. Now that you know what the opposite character wants from you, you can make a decision about whether you can fulfill that need. Does your character recognize what she wants you to be?
3. Is this a unifying element between you or a source of conflict?
4. Should you play into her desires, or resist?

Playing the relationships

1. Choose a musical duet or song that requires an active partner and is a neutral text.
2. Put a range of metaphorical relationships on paper and cut them up into individual slips. Place them in a hat or cup, then draw a relationship, but don’t tell your partner, and play that relationship using the song as your text.
3. Do it again and have you and your partner each choose a relationship slip at random. Don’t tell each other what the relationships are.
4. After you’re done, ask each other and your classmates what they thought the relationships were. Then you can reveal what they really were.
5. Try this again, but this time do it in the open, selecting a relationship that you think would be ideal for your song. Allow your partner to pick a complementary relationship (either sympathetic to your need or in conflict with your need). After you’re done, discuss what it did for you in the song.
6. Try it once more, but now be sure that your partner has picked a relationship that is contrary to the one you want. If you are calling her your “savior,” she cannot make you her “apostle.” Let her make you her “competitor,” “servant,” “attacker,” “spy,” etc. Now see what happens.

—R.D.V. and J.D.
You are characterizing the other person when you endow a relationship in these terms. This characterization may or may not be objectively true. It only matters that it is true for you. In Phantom of the Opera, the Phantom is Christine's mentor or Svengali. She follows him blindly, almost to her death. But, he is Raoul's competitor, Carlotta's tormentor, and the managers' puppeteer. These opinions don't tell us much about who the Phantom really is but they do tell us about the people who hold them. What's interesting is, in the process of characterizing all the people and things around you, you'll solve another important acting issue—you'll establish your own character.

Relationships keep changing
Relationships are multi-faceted and change constantly. A girlfriend can shift from being my playmate, to my nag, to my comfort in a single encounter. The changing qualities of a relationship can also mark your character's journey or arc through a play as your enemy might evolve into your ally, then your lover. At the beginning of the wildly comic The Drowsy Chaperone, the title character views Latin lothario Adolphe as her irritating or her plague, and proceeds to avoid him until she starts to view him as her charmer. Finally she sees him as her hot-blooded lover. The relationship shifts radically as her experiences with him redefine it. Be prepared to revise your view of the characters around you as important events redefine those relationships.

This evolution of a relationship can even happen within a song as you discover feelings or are acted on by someone else. Try the exercise described in "Playing the Relationships" we did above using a song that has several verses or clearly divided musical sections. Assign each verse or section its own metaphorical relationship. Now, sing the song using a partner who has chosen an appropriate relationship. You might even assign one to him. As you sing the song, see how the changing characterization affects your work. You may discover some wonderful possibilities that you never imagined.

Defining the characters using metaphoric relationships can clarify every moment in a role and will help you figure out who is important and why they matter to your character.

—Both of these approaches to character will automatically and unconsciously kick your reactions and interactions with other characters into high gear. Do this homework and then let it act on you.

FORTHCOMING FROM ROUTLEDGE

"A LIVELY, ENGAGING READ..."

—Judith A. Sebota, University of Missouri-Columbia

Packed with practical tips, useful exercises and advice from professionals, this book offers step-by-step instruction for an integrated performance, looking at:

• the fundamentals of acting
• how to analyze the script and score for clues to developing your character
• how to make a song come to life

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INTENTION

I. **SUPER-OBJECTIVE (DESIRE):** What does your character want to accomplish in life (before, during and after the show)? A superobjective can be consciously chosen, but more typically, it seems to choose the character. It might be a basic need like, “I must protect my nation” (KING in *The King and I*). It can be a compulsion as in, “I must win at all costs” (MAMA ROSE in *Gypsy*). It can also be something the character is forced to assume by circumstance such as, “I must avenge my father’s death” (SIMBA in *The Lion King*).

II. **OVERALL OBJECTIVE (DESIRE):** What does your character want to accomplish in the play? Determine your #1 wish to be fulfilled i.e., what would satisfy your hunger, appetite, longing, craving, urge or will? Keep asking “Why That?” until you reach your core desire.
III. **IMMEDIATE OBJECTIVE(S):** What does your character want to accomplish in each scene? *Note each scene you are in and identify an immediate objective for each.* (Example: Act One, Scene 1 – I want him/her to help me). What does your character want the other character(s) to do in each scene? Highlight or underline the scene you are working on in class.
IV. **EXPECTED OUTCOME OF OBJECTIVE:** Objectives need to be tested in rehearsal to see if they inspire you to a passionate connection with the role. Every objective comes with an expected outcome. FOR YOUR SCENE ONLY, answer the following questions:

1. If I got exactly what I wanted, what would happen?

2. How would I know I got what I wanted?

3. What does winning my objective look like?

V. **WHY THE URGENCY?** Why do you want what you want? FOR YOUR SCENE ONLY, review the objective and note its Seriousness, Insistence, Pressure, Importance, Necessity or Emergency.
VI. **OBSTACLE(S):** What is keeping you from getting your objective? FOR YOUR SCENE ONLY, what things inside you and outside of you stand in the way of the action you plan to take and the things you want to accomplish?

VII. **CHARACTER JOURNEY:** What does your character experience to make them change and develop in the course of the play? Does this happen before, during or after your scene? Does your scene set up this change?

VIII. **AS IF:** Describe what you are using from your own experience or your imagination (or a combination of both) to connect to the “Essence” of the scene to make it truthful and emotionally alive for you?
CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Read through libretto again making notes as follows:

1. KEY PHRASES – Underline words and phrases that you think seem important to your character.
2. ADJECTIVES – circle all the adjectives that relate to your character
3. NOUNS – box all nouns that are people, places or things that your character should or would have in memory.
4. LABAN/ANIMAL – identify 4 (strong vs. light, quick vs. sustained, direct vs. flexible, bound vs. free) elements that best make up your character and choose an overall Laban. Then choose corresponding Animal.
5. What GUTTERAL SOUND best represents your character?
6. For all FIVE SENSES (sight, sound, touch, smell and taste), name your favorite and least favorite.
7. How is character LIKE ME vs. UNLIKE ME? Make two columns and note accordingly.

On a separate sheet of paper, list all of the above and star (*) each that are actually a part of your scene. For adjectives, also choose four or five that most accurately describe your character and list them in order of importance with the one being most like your character most of the time as #1.
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Song Title: ___________________________________________ Composer/Lyricist: _______________________________________
Your Objective in ONE Sentence: ___________________________
Moment Before: _________________________________________
## MUSICAL THEATRE SONG CHART

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