

Performing in Contemporary Musicals

by David Sisco & Laura Josepher

Six Steps to Learning a New Song

1. Research the song.

- 1.1. Opera or musical: read the scene in which the aria or song takes place. Consider reading the entire libretto and any source material.

2. Write out the text by hand.

- 2.1. Notice where you naturally put line breaks and how it appears on the page.

3. Recite the text as a monologue.

- 3.1. Read the text aloud at different speeds, paying attention to where you breathe.
- 3.2. Endow the text with "Shakespearean intent" - reciting the text with sense of heightened language and breath flow in preparation for singing.
- 3.3. Focus on breath connection and honest language.

4. Learn the rhythm by intoning and the melody by singing on a lip trill, ni or n + vowel.

- 4.1. Intoning is extended, energized speech without a musical pitch.
- 4.2. After intoning the entire song, mix and match the other exercises throughout, discovering which ones help you in different sections of the song.
- 4.3. Use IPA to clarify the vowels.
- 4.4. Take your time with this step - taking apart the song this way will allow you to bring your full technique to the piece.

5. Translate the text into your own words.

- 5.1. Sung text is often poetic. You must find the essence behind each phrase and clearly communicate it.
- 5.2. Translate the text line by line then try a real-time translation with the music.

6. Mark the high point of each phrase in the score.

- 6.1. Remember high notes are not always the high point of the phrase.
- 6.2. Notice if this changes where you breathe or how you experience the meaning of the phrase.

IMPORTANT: At no point during this process should you listen to a recording or watch a video of someone performing your song.

After these steps are completed, ask yourself one question: *What of myself can I offer in service of this song?*