

THE PERFECT AUDITION SONG

by VP Boyle



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MAXTHEATRIX

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The perfect audition song won't last forever.
Things change.
We change.

There are many schools of thought out there when it comes to the strategy of “building your book” for musical theatre auditions. I will state for the record that I actually coined this term myself and I get a giggle now that after many years, people use it as common industry speak. We never really do plan these things—sort of like nick names—they just happen to stick. I very specifically use the word “build” because that little book you’re walking into every audition with is a statement of who you are, what you love, what you do, where you’ve been and most importantly, where you are going.

It’s a fluid, artistic growth statement.

Pretty amazing, right? Well, it should be. And it will change. And change. And change. That is the work we aspire to as artists and you might as well make peace with the fact that it will always be changing. The shows change, the people change, the trends change, your life changes, your book will change. I invite you to consider your book as a living, breathing document. Can you revamp your entire audition book in a few weeks? Heck, no. Not if you are doing the work that is required to be competitive in the Broadway arena. If you have people telling you they can do that in a short class or workshop, they are selling you inappropriately on a quick fix, not helping you. Can you get excited about it, polish some material and add a couple well placed new songs that energize you in just five weeks?¹

YES. That’s a fair, yet ambitious goal. That is our job as your champion during this workshop. I think there is a lot of crazy-speak out there among all of the books and classes available to musical theatre people claiming to know it all. Unfortunately, it often comes from people not even tapped into what is actually going on in professional musical theatre at the Broadway level. Or it has hidden agendas they should be addressing in therapy, not the classroom.

¹ Five weeks is the length of our introductory and/or advanced masterclass offerings at MaxTheatrix. We sometimes run shorter sessions for alums who are dropping in to work on something specific. Wherever you are creating space and resources to do this work (private coaching, classes, personal study, peer groups, etc.), you should be realistic about the level of detail and craft required to be extraordinary. And it should energize you, not drain you. Being in the game of a professional audition book strategy requires a high level of detail and substantial coaching, research and performance practice to get a single new song up to speed for booking jobs at the Broadway level. It requires discipline, upkeep and consistency. You have to log the hours, hire the best coaches you can afford and do the work.

Let's just remind ourselves of a simple truth: Singing is fun. Storytelling is fun. Musical theatre is fun. Don't make it work or stress or insanity or [insert negative term of choice here].

This is "a get to" not "a have to" so don't be that obnoxious performer whose rails on and on about every audition and every micro-detail or theory about the casting process. Pick some songs that you love and get clear on the difference between "a great song" that you love and "a great audition song" that you love that also serves the casting process.

They are not the same thing.

Auditioning, while prone to moments of heightened emotion, should really be a fun little game to play over and over again. You'll have good ones and not-so-good ones, but they all should be part of the journey doing the thing you LOVE doing. Musical theatre.

PRO STRATEGY: Make a list of the song titles currently in your audition book and a list of possible song titles that you are considering. Consider each title and answer the following question:

"Does this make me a better person every chance I get to sing it?"

If you love it, love it, love it that much, draw a little heart after the title. Every other song in your list gets a question mark after the title, no compromise. Don't panic or judge the ratio of hearts vs. question marks. That being said, if you see less than 1 or 2 hearts on your list and are new to audition book-building strategies, you are not playing to win. Yet.

Sometimes those "question mark songs" have served us quite well for a very long time in the biz. I have talked hundreds of professional actors off the ledge who hold on to one song for dear life because it booked them one big gig. No, it didn't. *They booked the gig*, not the song.

Looking at that list with a couple of hearts and a whole bunch of question marks is a psychological detachment game. This activity is the first step in empowering your book with integrity and soulful strength. Imagine building an audition book full of "heart songs" over time, knowing that whatever song is requested in any room or at any stage of the audition process will thrill you because they are all winners! You become unstoppable and the casting process becomes less personal. You rock the house and leave. If they want more, fine. If not, fine.

How could you not have a great day when you get to do that?

The goal of this overview and song map is simply to have a starting reference for a small portion of the things I have said over and over in class for 20 years. Some of them have not changed in all that time.² Many have.

Evaluation. Innovation. Reinvention. Evolution. Excellence. Joy. Artistry. Humanity.

² As of 2017, I have logged over 12,000 hours teaching audition technique to Broadway-level performers in New York City. And I never planned to be an audition coach.

Pick your mantra words and put them somewhere to remind you of what's important for the long-game strategy, not the quick fix.

When it comes to your audition material—your personal and professional artistic statement—there are some things that must be left to experiential learning and the safety of a fun, nurturing-yet-challenging classroom environment. I like to think of an audition book as a savvy combination game of strategy, skill and intuition. You really need all three to make it special and there is always trial and error involved.

The irony is that if you get your book of brilliance to this yummy place, *you'll barely use it.*

It's true. You will master the art of carrying your book around in your backpack, roller board or car because you are being fed role-specific material for most of your audition appointments or callbacks. Yay, you win. When you consistently give great auditions, our friends in the casting world will know (and love) what you do and will move you to the most efficient stage of the casting process—further down the line. What a great place to be!

I don't believe in rules, please remember that. There are no rules. There are no rules. There are no rules. However, we have to start with some structure and build from there when it comes to song selection so I use tough love and a rubric that includes 6 song categories. Period. I want to keep you from making yourself crazy. I also want you to realize how imperative it is to keep your audition book specific, lean and still cover the massive amount of industry-specific requests that will fly out of mouths of both geniuses and idiots.

In the very least, it will expose missed opportunities you should be addressing and is akin to clearing out your closet to downsize your wardrobe so that you love what you keep and get rid of everything you haven't worn in the last year.

PRO STRATEGY: Less is more. Keep your book lean and mean. Most everyone can admit that they book 80% of their work on 2 or 3 songs. The amount of work required to keep 10-12 songs in shape for auditions is substantial. Mediocre doesn't book you the job. If you are right for something, you will be moved to the next step in the casting process if you deliver a powerful performance on material that makes a clear casting statement. Don't learn new songs for everything. And keep your book under 15 songs or suffer the consequences over time. I think 10-12 is ideal, but as in life, everyone has an opinion *and you get to choose.*

Bend the material that you have which already fits you like a glove to serve the specific show or role you are auditioning for before taking on any new material. If you do learn a new song because it's required by the casting/creative team—or you need something truly specific—make sure to pull it out of your book after that audition and file it as a “trunk song” to be

saved for the future.³ You can always polish it up only when needed. Song clutter is real. Cut the cord and move on.

SIX SONG CATEGORIES TO CONSIDER

- 1. Contemporary Ballad**
- 2. Contemporary Driving/Dramatic**
- 3. Standard Ballad**
- 4. Standard Uptempo**
- 5. Comedy**
- 6. Pop/Rock**

STANDARD BALLAD

These are the tried-and-true glorious Golden Age Broadway ballads written by the masters like Rodgers and Hart, Rodgers & Hammerstein, Lerner and Loewe just to name a few. I think it's almost mandatory that one of your standard ballads is one of pure joy written in this era. Bringing stories of joy into the room is a very good thing. If you are female, full-figured or define yourself as a character actor, *please* do not sing victim songs that live in self-deprecation or use the "I-wish-I-had-the-man ballads" in your audition life. I understand their use in Golden Age Musicals, but gender roles have changed and self-love is a posture everyone should own walking into the room. Everyone should feel that you love yourself in all your unique beauty without sending an odd subliminal (and out of context) message to the creative team. Choose empowerment when building your stories and you'll be reinforcing a great character trait for the casting process while you navigate the text of your story! While there are many other really awesome song options that are written "in-the-style-of" a standard ballad, make sure you have one in this category that the purists in the room will endorse, written before 1965. Examples: I Have A Love (*West Side Story*), I Have Dreamed (*The King & I*), My Romance (*Dumbo*), If Ever I Would Leave You (*Camelot*).

STANDARD UPTEMPO

This should be your "meet-n-greet" upbeat song that is easy to digest, has a simple story that is all about you on a good day. A taste of how you look, feel and sound in context of a musical audition. In light of the current landscape of contemporary musical theatre, it is also the least used song in your book, so you really only need one unless you are funny, great at patter or book a lot of work in the song-and-dance-person category for classic musicals. There should be a conversational slant that feels like you talking to a good friend. *This is not the time to prove your vocal range or high notes*. Every song category has its purpose in the casting circumstance and I can guarantee that if you are being asked to sing a Standard Uptempo, it is

³ Examples could be genre requests that are super specific to certain shows like "comedic disco" or "female doo-wop." Or musical theatre songs that you will only use once in a blue moon like "Kurt Weill" or "Gilbert & Sullivan." Seriously, how often are you going to use a patter song by Gilbert & Sullivan to book a job in professional contemporary musical theatre? Just saying. Do the math because your audition book is prime real estate and should only contain power plays.

because we are getting a sense of the whole package and trying to figure out whether we want to explore you further. It's usually a prescreen scenario at open calls or in early appointments. If we like what we see, we'll move to something like a Standard Ballad to check your vocal technique and phrasing. Imagine being in the room all the daylong and listening to 100+ people sing ballads—most of them dreamy, glazy and lackluster. I usually have to jack up on coffee for the post-lunch haze to keep awake, and I'm one of the most attentive auditors you'll find! The effervescent, energetic, quippy, quirky standard uptempo is your friend. If you are given the choice to sing anything that is considered Standard Broadway, always opt for an uptempo instead of a ballad. Examples: Gershwin, Porter, Berlin, Coward, Comden & Green.

CONTEMPORARY BALLAD

The academic definition of Contemporary Musical Theatre is everything written after 1965 or 1968 depending on where you put your loyalties and the term is too broad. You have to look at styles within this category and cover bases based on your age, sensibilities and skill. Contemporary musical theatre songs can range from Andrew Lloyd Webber to Cy Coleman to Jason Robert Brown to Lin-Manuel Miranda. I think a lot of things fall into what I call the “musical theatre dead zone” circa late 60's thru early 80's, so choose material for your book that is a well-known example of contemporary theatre singing and serves the current landscape. Much of the repertoire in this category can be heavy handed, so remind yourself to have at least one option that is joyful. No matter what you choose, one song in this category should fulfill the request, “Do you have anything that is simple?” This is a must-have song in your book to back up everything else you bring into the room so the creative team can see conversational intimacy where you aren't throwing down big drama or big vocals . Examples: Alone In The Universe (Suessical), Fine Fine Line (Avenue Q), Anyone Can Whistle (Anyone Can Whistle).

You can also approach your contemporary section by composers based on specific sensibility. If you live in the world of Jason Robert Brown, Frank Wildhorn, William Finn, Sondheim or Andrew Lloyd Webber, then have one of their songs. They are all examples of “you either get them or you don't” and give up trying to do their songs if you are not emotionally and vocally equipped to navigate their unique demands. It's okay—you can't be all things to everyone. Know what you do and what you do not do. I can't tell you how frustrating it is to hear someone singing from a Frank Wildhorn show that doesn't have straight tone capabilities—choose other options. I think some of the best examples of brilliantly written material that is at the core of contemporary musical theatre today are Ahrens & Flaherty, Stephen Schwartz, Andrew Lippa, Pasek & Paul to name a few. They are universally appealing, very smart, beautifully melodic and dramatically relevant. I love many, many other choices and could go on forever with ideas, but they are a good benchmark for the core of this category.

CONTEMPORARY DRIVING/DRAMATIC

I really don't think we have the contemporary equivalent of a “standard uptempo” when it comes to text and purpose because of how the art form has evolved.⁴ This category should

⁴ I completely stole this term from my friend Jamibeth Margolis at Johnson-Liff Casting in the late 90s. She was way ahead of the game during her tenure maintaining all the North American companies of *Les Miz* and *Cats* and was always asking performers for something “driving” and “dramatic” in style/tone that showed off the voice.

cover any contemporary musical theatre in your book that is not a ballad as defined in your book. Some songs could fall into either category, but you will decide how to use them based on your commitment and everything else you are considering in tandem. Today, songs that have driving tempos and energy tend to be dramatic tour-de-force numbers. The “Act One Closer” or the “Eleven O’clock Number” or the “Star Turn” all tend to be really big. These are heightened dramatic moments that require you to demonstrate that you are a principal actor and can hold the stage without moving sets, ensemble support or special effects.⁵ I think at least one of your contemporary driving/dramatic songs should have a darker edge and dramatic weight since so many shows require that quality for leading roles. Examples: Words Fail (*Dear Evan Hansen*), If I Can’t Love Her (*Beauty & The Beast*), Back To Before (*Ragtime*), So Much Better (*Legally Blonde*), And I’m Telling You I’m Not Going (*Dreamgirls*).

There is some overlap or “tweeners” as I call them in your two contemporary categories. For instance, where does one place I Dreamed A Dream (Les Miz) or Unusual Way (Nine)? They can legitimately live in either category as a “ballad” or “driving/dramatic” song. However, once you commit a song to a certain category, you will know immediately what can or cannot live next to it based on how you are building your book. That is why this structure weeds out the deadwood and noise to help you look at your audition repertoire strategically for the most depth, color and casting specificity.

COMEDY

This category is a red hot mess these days I know that it’s a struggle for everyone to find a good comedy song that isn’t overdone. I know, I know, I know. It’s the bane of everyone’s audition book plight. Comedic timing is so unique to the individual that it is your responsibility to find something appropriate to your skill set. One of your comedy songs really needs to be something that sets up and lands jokes that are written into the lyric. Physical comedy, parody, satire, word play and sending up text that was not written to be funny can be great options, but should not be your only one. I think the best place to look for well-written comedy songs is prior to 1965 as librettists were still on point in terms of vaudevillian timing where all comedic skills are still based today. While you can learn something from Saturday Night Live, you’ll be better versed by watching Carol Burnett and her gang, Laurel & Hardy, Abbott & Costello, The Three Stooges, The Little Rascals, Charlie Chaplin, Danny Kaye or Lucille Ball. Do your homework here! Your comedy song can come from any era, classic to contemporary. Just make sure it’s funny! Some examples are: Adelaide’s Lament (*Guys & Dolls*), I’m Calm (*Funny Thing...Forum*), Why Do The Wrong People Travel? (*Same Title*), I’m Not Getting Married (*Company*), I’m Breaking Down (*Falsettos*), Have A Little Priest (*Sweeney Todd*).

I think your second choice in this category can be anything that is fair game. I love Marcy Heisler and Zina Goldrich, Carner & Gregor, William Finn, South Park, and a slew of stuff that is lurking in the crunchy Off-Broadway shows that any true flea market surfing sensibility can uncover. NOTE: There is a new breed of “comedy song” which is taking non-comedic text and creating some strong choice with it that is irreverent, ridiculous or bizarre. Please no more stalker versions of *On The Street Where You Live*. I think that twisting material to be funny is an acceptable choice if it isn’t the only option in this category AND you know that it has been

⁵ Okay, *Defying Gravity* requires some serious production value and SFX. Duly noted.

tested and developed in numerous non-audition environments prior to bringing it into the room. Tread carefully here.

POP ROCK

I'm a purist here. When I ask for pop/rock, I mean pop/rock. Songs off the radio in any genre that fall into the category of "popular music" that can include: Rock, R&B, Hip-Hop, Doo-Wop, Disco, Indie Folk, Alternative, Singer/Songwriter, Jazz, Country, Punk and many more. I want real-deal-non-musical-theatre music so I can evaluate someone's vocal style, aesthetics, sensibilities and physical presence in light of this musical category. *Hair*, *Spring Awakening* or *Hamilton* do not count as popular music in the context of musical theatre auditions. They are rock musicals and you need to be clear on the distinction. I even advocate not using anything that has become part of the musical theatre catalog such as *Footloose*, *Beautiful*, *Billy Joel*, *Smoky Joe's Café*, etc. You want to get as far away from your vibrato and "musical theatre sound" as possible because that is the quality that can get you into or eliminated from the casting mix when the creative team is asking for pop/rock. You also have to be able to turn it on and off in the room while still singing healthfully. Imagine if you are asked to sing a standard ballad right after you've rocked the house on a Janice Joplin staple. It happens, particularly if you are auditioning for regional theatre where the season has many role possibilities for you. If the style sets are melting into each other, you'll miss the mark in both arenas. This is the category where you can have colors that suit your unique style set, and if you do something well, such as country, be sure at least one of your pop/rock selections demonstrates this because it's great for a lot of shows.

PRO STRATEGY: Take all of the songs currently in your audition book and reorganize the titles on a sheet of paper into the six categories we've established. I think any professional who is really on their game has a dozen songs in their book, give or take two. This doesn't mean that you will have exactly two songs in each category. You should have more options in the category you do most. If you are a gifted comedian, you'll probably have three or four comedy songs because you will be expected to have more colors available in that category when you are auditioning. If you are a real-deal pop/rock singer, you'll need more than two songs because you'll need to cover a pop ballad, a rock-n-roll song, comedic pop, something recent or alternative, etc. For example, I'm a contemporary theatre singer with pop sensibilities so I only have one standard ballad. I love it, love it, love it! Every time I get to sing it, my heart leaps with joy. If they don't like that one song, too bad. I know it's a perfect statement of my work and I will never be the legit guy going in for *Phantom of the Opera*. Know what you do and build your book to your strengths while still covering all the bases need in the professional circuit.

In the end I believe that you can't read it in a book when it comes to the technical stuff. That is why I love teaching in the classroom. The mind can grow, but we have a holistic experience in the audition room that includes everything from breath work, vocal technique, physical awareness and good old-fashioned spiritual centering. Good luck reading up on that and making it all work without any hands-on experience. Keeping that in mind, I will throw out some ideas that you can percolate on when choosing material.

TEN THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING AN AUDITION SONG

1. DO YOU LOVE IT, LOVE IT, LOVE IT? I'm talking about songs that make you (and everyone in the room) a better person every time you sing them. Experiences that energize you every time you are asked for song titles from your book and your heart leaps with joy because we just chose one of your favorite songs in that moment. The stuff that vibrates from some deep, juicy part your soul. All of the songs in your book should do this and it won't happen overnight. Your work is your life as an artist and with that comes growth. The starting point must be stories that you love to tell. Every chance you "get to" sing your song should resonate with a sense of gratefulness that you had the opportunity to do what you love and tell stories that you love. If you are doing a song because someone told you it was good for you or that you should be singing it (even if you get results from it), I guarantee there is something better out there. That being said, remember that some material that piques your interest but doesn't feel totally great at first has the potential to become a tried-and-true favorite once you work on it, so keep your intuitive instincts open and give things a fair shot. You can always let them go later. If you have something in your audition book that you know you really don't enjoy, replace it—or start the process—immediately.⁶

2. Does it suit your age, gender, energy, life experience, spirituality, and way of thinking? We are talking about your *core essence*. It's tough for people behind the table to get past certain things and we can sniff the slickery that isn't authentic a mile away. You aren't getting away with anything by doing material that doesn't make sense to you on every level. While interpretation of the text can be based on your life experience—and should—if it's not in sync with the original intent of the material, you'll be up against headaches at every turn. Why make it harder? There's bound to be something better if you do the research and do the work. Be relentless in your pursuit of the perfect audition material and then everyone will feel great from the experience. You will also see tangible results.

3. Does it fulfill a very clear, specific gap/need/style in your audition book? I really believe in keeping your audition book lean and mean. If you've got more than twelve songs in it, you're kidding yourself that they are all laser sharp and polished to meet professional expectations at the Broadway level. I speak from experience. Save the other ten slit-your-wrist ballads for your cabaret at Joe's Pub or your EP release. If it doesn't fit into the six song categories, you're wasting brain cells trying to keep it polished in your book. Once you have the six bases

⁶ A note on composers. I think it's very useful to take a look at your audition book from a composer point of view. You will be asked for Sondheim or Kander & Ebb or sometimes want to sing something similar in tone to the creators of the show for which you are auditioning. Don't get stuck on the dot—and don't mistake a composer as a category. While "Sondheim" could easily be its own category, it's a slippery slope that leads quickly to a diluted, messy book. Cy Coleman is my favorite example of "category overlap" to prove my point. Even though he is considered a contemporary composer, he has successfully written "in-the-style-of" all the great masters. One of his songs could easily live as a standard ballad or a contemporary ballad, based on the genre he was working in for any particular show. Furthermore, consider Sondheim and you actually have someone who has written songs that could fall into all six categories. *West Side Story* to *Into The Woods*—it's all there. And if you are great with Sondheim, you should have him somewhere in your book. And if you suck at Sondheim, skip it. But if you are looking at a dozen or so songs in your book, why would you have more than one Sondheim song when you could be featuring another prolific to expand the net of possibilities your lean-and-mean audition book can cover?

covered with a strong option, you'll probably want to find another color or two in the categories you do the best (and the most). It won't be all of them! Remember the goal is not to have the entire musical theatre catalog "kind of, sort of" in your brain, but rather have a lean book that showcases everything about you that is fierce.

4. Does it vocally show you off without any weakness or casting concerns? If you reveal the break in your voice, look like you're working way too hard, tackle text that is outside of your personal experience or let the singing get in the way of the storytelling—you have a problem. Try different key signatures if they are published, creative cuts or acting choices that solve any minor challenges, but if they don't work, let the song go. You may want to keep a song in your working file for personal growth or to possibly include in the future, but don't keep it in your audition book. Anything you walk into the room with is fair game to the artistic staff. Be warned.

5. Do you trust that the song is well crafted or easily understood through your choices? If you're singing Rodgers & Hammerstein, Stephen Sondheim or Kander & Ebb, you know you're on sound footing in the audition room. Any of the great masters are proven time and time again. However, you might be totally enamored by a one-of-a-kind song that you got from some new reading or that your friend wrote for your cabaret. Be careful. Not only do we have to spend time learning new material as you sing it in the audition room, but it may not be as great as you think in terms of craft. Check it out with your vocal coach and classroom settings to see how it lands—and be sure the folks giving you feedback on it are the same folks who are actually a part of the Broadway casting community.

6. Is it a role you could honestly play? It's not required, but helpful. Particularly in audition settings where people aren't always thinking outside of the box. Why? We interpolate a ton of information based on the requirements of the originating actor/actress or role. If you sound like Idina Menzel and sing from *Wicked* (and I pray to the musical theatre Gods, that you would choose not to), then we will mentally file you away in all things that fit that "Idina Menzel" niche. This can be a good thing or a not-so-good thing depending on where you are professionally. If everyone is telling you that you sound like Ben Platt in *Dear Evan Hansen*, and have the acting chops to back it up, then get something in your book that fits the bill without singing "Waving Through A Window."

7. Is your song a Red Flag Song? I use the term "Red Flag Song" to describe any song with a price tag in the room. It doesn't mean that you shouldn't have it in your book if it serves the casting circumstance well. Red Flag Songs can be anything that is currently performed frequently as an audition piece, written by composers that some people despise, associated with a legend, from a show currently playing on Broadway, etc. Why put yourself up against the nauseous barrage of the way-too-trendy audition material? Is it a song people always love or always despise? Are you setting yourself up to be compared with a performer who just won a Tony award for singing that song? If you really know you can perform "Popular" better than Kristen Chenoweth, bring it on! Check in with your gut and get some feedback before you hit the big guns in the casting world—you may be better off to find something with less association. Remember there are no rules, so if "Defying Gravity" is your go-to hit in the room, keep singing it until you're green.

8. Can it be cut down to an audition cut that feels complete in dramatic storytelling and character arch? With rare exception, try to ballpark in the 90 second range. Anything over that will feel long in the room under most circumstances. For the record, I personally don't believe anyone can take me through a detailed character journey in 16 bars or less. But you can drop into a world with great specificity and give a glimmer into your work. I know that sometimes they are the unfortunate result in a not-so-perfect situation, but you must build your book on complete stories. Find the dozen or so songs that are your personal/professional/artistic statement and THEN go looking for possible mini-cuts within your book. Not the other way around. If you're building your book with incomplete stories, money notes and "the perfect sixteen bars", I guarantee you that you are not booking roles. It's a chorus-call mentality that will get you thrown right into the ensemble file. Build that and you build yourself into a problem that is going to be hard to overcome. We hire principal actors. Even when we're hiring Broadway-level ensembles, *we are hiring principal actors*.

9. Is the arrangement something that sounds good on piano? Is it accompanist-proof? If your entire book is sticky-tricky Guettel, LaChiusa, Sondheim, Jason Robert Brown, or has six sharps in the key, you are building some guaranteed stress to your audition life. I will never coach anyone to use the accompaniment difficulty level as an excuse to water down their book because I expect Broadway-level caliber talent behind the piano when I walk into the room and when I hire it because I'm behind the table. However, sometimes we have to embrace the circumstance and we won't always have our favorites at the keyboard. Sometimes it's simply a style/fit issue—there are some brilliant accompanists out there that I can throw any musical theatre song in the catalog at them and they will soar while a pop/rock song could send us both crashing into a brick wall. And vice versa. That's when you need to be smart, not right. Have a good balance in your book to navigate the accompanist compatibility if it is something to consider at that particular audition. I personally had a very challenging audition book and it was the reason that I was at every appointment a half hour in advance so that I could relax and acclimate to the vibe of the room based on the people coming and going before me. Have options—and always trust your gut.

10. When finding pop/rock cuts, less is more. Never sing the chorus twice because it feels too repetitive in audition-land. Intro, verse, bridge, chorus and then get out. If you're edging anywhere near 2 minutes on your pop/rock song, you are heading into tedious territory for the attention span of the room. Pop/Rock audition cuts are an entirely different beast to navigate on acoustic piano. The necessity for this type of audition material to land powerfully is so important that I offer a five-week workshop focusing on it specifically. In general, just be sure that the arrangement you end up with for pop/rock sounds good on piano even if it was written for guitar. This may take some work in hiring an arranger, but well worth the investment. **DO NOT BRING IN DOWNLOADED MUSIC TRANSPOSED FROM ONLINE SHEET MUSIC SERVICES.** They suck and are not keyed properly the way pianists are used to reading specific key signatures.

MAXTHEATRIX

VP'S SONG MAPPING GUIDE

by VP Boyle

These are just brain-riffs and things to consider when choosing songs, doing the work, creating your song map and telling musical stories that are powerful. Add your own to the list and remember: *There are no rules.*

- Think about why you respond to and love the song.
- Write out the lyrics and search for themes.
- Listen and watch every available recording of the material.
- Read the entire source script or material surrounding the song.
- Learn exactly what's on the page musically.
- Try different keys to see how it lands vocally.
- Write out the lyric and make it your own style of speech.
- Study the punctuation in the score/music/libretto.
- Know the original story and study why the song was needed in the show.
- Study the character who sang it and why.
- See who originated the role and how's it is perceived now.
- Listen only to the music for clues and opportunities.
- Write out your story context, using a real environment that you know.
- Create your story around a scene partner who actually exists in your life.
- Create an important and laser sharp "moment before" to earn the right to sing.
- Chunk out the song with broad emotional strokes to shape a dramatic arc.
- Start to create and set sign posts for your journey.
- Flag all transitions musically and lyrically.
- Create acting beats to earn the next phrase or musical section.
- Do half of them as opposites to see what you discover.
- Pick juicy contrasting ideas that can live simultaneously.
- Find everyday activities or behavior that you can apply to your story.

- Work the lyric as a monologue in different daily scenarios of your life.
- Draw from experience and moments in your life that are not traumatic.
- Work as a monologue and do not match meter or punctuation for the song.
- Work your monologue as an improv with different (live) actors.
- Make your monologue conversational (Starbuck's 101 Acting Technique).
- Add something totally random during your scene that surprises you.
- Isolate any vocal hurdles (musically) and create acting choices to navigate them.
- Plant triggers to keep you from falling into any traps.
- Laugh, sigh, breathe. Don't be afraid to communicate through human sound.
- For any repetition, decide why you have to say it again.
- Isolate any vocal lines that counter natural speech and solve the problem.
- Create acting beats to earn any money notes or modulations.
- Create mini three-act plays on any sustained notes.
- When in doubt start small and find ways to get back there.
- Wrap your song up with a realistic, vibrant final beat/button.
- Think of the end of the song as a new beginning (moment before).
- Make sure you know and earn the moment where you can never go back.
- Tell a story from your soul as if it is the last time you ever sing.

Questions to ask yourself as you create the journey of the song. Add your own reminder questions to this list!

ENVIRONMENT

Where are you? What time is it?
 Who is in the space? What is going on around you?
 What are you wearing?
 What are you doing?
 What does your body feel like?
 What objects do you notice?

SCENE PARTNER

Who are you talking to? (Yourself, God, Therapist & Dog NOT ALLOWED)
 What do you want from them?
 What do they want from you? Why is it important?
 How will it change everything (yourself included) if you get what you want?

THE MOMENT BEFORE IN THREE PARTS

PART A: THE EVENT/CATALYST

What just happened?

What did your scene partner say?

What did you just witness?

PART B: INTAKE

How do you process the event?

What shifts psychologically?

What shifts emotionally?

What shifts physically?

How do you struggle to wrap your mind around it?

PART C: THE CHOICE TO RESPOND

What is your point of view on the event?

Why do you now have to speak?

Once you begin, why can you never go back?

What don't you know when you start?

THE STRUGGLE/OBSTACLE/CONFLICT

What happens if you lose?

What does your scene partner do to NOT give you what you want?

How do they react in a way that shocks or surprises you?

What makes it terrifying, life or death, important and/or transformational?

How do you work it out?

Where does your brain argue with your heart?

What will the world around you do to keep you in your box?

What happens if you actually get what you want?

Are you sure or do you ever become sure that you really want that?

THE DISCOVERY

When is the moment when you realize you can never go back?

Do you resist the discovery of who you have to be to get what you want?

Do you relish the task of navigating uncertainty to get what you want?

What do you find out that you didn't start out to discover?

How does the person you are talking to manifest by the end of the song?

Can you not get what you thought you wanted only to discover something better?

How do you feel about solving or not solving the original intention?

Who is the person you need to be to win?

How do you own the moment of discovery physically, emotionally, and psychically?

Based on what you learn, what is next?