

Characterization is a Four Category Word

The Elements of the Expression Category and the Effect on Characterization

There are two parts to singing: the technical part, demanding mastery of the basics, and the interpretive part. With command of the fundamentals, the performer can devote mental energy to the job of expressing the message the song was meant to convey. The goal is a performance relatively free from technical distractions. Interpretation turns singing into a work of art. 'Singing the character' conveys the message. The performer is able to establish a definite mood in the mind of the listener and to transmit every emotion known. The infinite variety of mood and meaning suggested by the composition can then be brought to life.

BASIC REQUIREMENTS

Vocal skills Voices should demonstrate the following characteristics: a certain amount of power, properly produced, with agility and flexibility and be under good control. An ensemble will sound like one full voice, not an assortment of voices, creating a stronger, unified character.

Synchronization Unity strengthens characterization and emotional communication. Every basic and artistic element must be executed together in order to eliminate distractions and allow the listener to hear and understand the story.

Vowels and Diphthongs "The only source of rich, resonant, ringing tone in the human voice is the vowel." There should be no doubt to the listener which vowel is being sung. There should be beauty in the sound, no matter the volume. Vowel sounds can also be modified to represent a character. The change can be temporary or used throughout to add flavor to the presentation. Diphthongs can evoke different emotions and strengthen characterization when the initial sound and vanish values are slightly changed.

Consonants Delivery of the words requires proper application of the consonants so that words are clear. At the same time tone flow, essential to story telling, continues. In addition, utilizing voiced, stop and explosive consonants creates opportunities for characterization.

Enunciation This implies not only clear articulation, but also delivering words with those subtle inflections and shadings, which reveal the meaning of the words and make the character come to life.

ARTISTIC LYRICAL INTERPRETATION

Lyric flow/Phrasing/ Forward Motion Observing the natural flow of the music, phrasing is the art of proper expression of every note, bar, and phrase, and arranging them so that each phrase has some point of variety and contrast with every other phrase. At the same time it stays in context, merging into an artistic and well-balanced design. Maintaining the forward motion keeps the listener involved and the story or character alive.

Embellishments Embellishments can enrich the characterization and the inherent musical flavor of any given song. It is the job of the singer to effectively use the embellishments provided by the arranger.

Dynamics Characterization is achieved by using *pianissimo* to *fortissimo* and all the degrees of volume between. As well, the *crescendo*, the *diminuendo*; stress pressures and *sforzandos* are available to further draw the listener into the story.

Tempo/Rhythm Strict tempo and rhythm can be exciting and used to evoke emotions. Variation of tempo, such as *accelerando*, *rallentando*, *rubato*, *staccato* and *tenuto* and the pause, can also be used in creating characterization. Since rhythm is the vitalizing element in music, the 'character' of the song comes to life with appropriate use of rhythmic patterns.

Inflection Characterization is enhanced by means of variation of tone-quality and vocal effects such as a laugh, a sob, or use of onomatopoeic effects, such as the sighing of the wind. Inflection brings out the meaning of special words, which can highlight the character of the song. Differences in volume or time-duration should be added to the delivery so they do not disturb the musical flow or tempo.

Energy There is a spirit or energy that is congruent with characterization. Subtle changes in the application of energy evoke responses and enhance story telling.

Finesse In creating a character, departures from the regular and conventional, whether in accent, tempo, voice, or treatment, should be carried out boldly with an artistic delivery. The result should be the communication of the story, rather than a demonstration of the skill.

Emotional Communication It is necessary for the performer to become immersed in the character in order for the audience to 'see' the story unfold. The power of the performers' thought is transmitted to the listener through the medium of the voice. With this thought and the technique to back it up, the song is alive with the appropriate emotion, mood and intensity.

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The Elements of the Showmanship Category and the Effect on Characterization

Performance:

Vocal Skills. Solid vocal skills must be in place to allow the audience to buy in to the performance. Poorly supported sound and out of tune singing don't let the listener stay involved in the music.

Poise and Command. Putting the audience at ease is the performer's first job, and characterization can help in achieving that command of the stage. By developing the personality of the song and exploring the possibilities, the performer can step outside herself, perhaps take on a different persona and become totally involved in the music.

Physical Expression. Exploration of character can foster more natural physical expression from the performers and help authenticate the performance with the viewer.

Energy. Energy is the force that keeps the musical and visual performance moving. Facial, physical and vocal energy are necessary to sustain the performance. Characterization is a strong tool to help keep the performers animated, energized and reflecting the same story.

Unity. Just as the other three categories are looking for vocal unity, so the showmanship category is striving for unity in all the visual elements. Further, we are looking for congruity with all the elements of the performance – music that's appropriate to the appearance of the group and their skills, costuming that fits and gives a uniform appearance, make-up that highlights the features, and choreography that brings the song to life and helps create a cohesive musical experience. Approaching the music with a defined character reference helps to unify all the nuances of the visual presentation.

Audience Rapport. The communication between the performer and the audience is a two-way conversation, with the audience responding to the emotion established by the performer. Use of characterization can help to foster this process.

Choreography. The showmanship category evaluates how well the planned choreography is integrated into the musical presentation, and whether it enhances the music. Certainly energy and unity are a part of this evaluation. The use of characterization helps the visual plan to be driven by the emotion of the song instead of just being moves done in time with the music.

Preparation:

Costume & Make-up. Both these facets of the preparation area of the category are aimed at unifying the visual performance. Certainly costuming can have a huge impact on how an audience relates to the character being portrayed in the music. Developing character doesn't necessarily mean dressing to the particular song, but costuming without regard to the character being portrayed in the music being sung can severely limit the performer's ability to portray the character. Make-up is used to point up the facial features and make it possible for the audience to distinguish the emotions being portrayed by the singers. Sometimes character make-up is required to complete the costuming.

Choreography Plan. This encompasses all the planned movement for the song, exclusive of physical expression. A strong plan adds meaning to the music and helps the music come to life. It can help in achieving musical expression by adding vocal inflection associated with a particular move. Key moves will coincide with points of musical stress. The plan should complement the image and capabilities of the performing group. When characterization is integrated into the choreography plan it helps to bring meaning to the plan and make it come to life.