

THE CHALLENGE OF THE *WHINY* BALLAD

Character: the development of a real person, living truthfully, in imaginary circumstances.

1. Read the song lyrics as if they are prose. What is the story of the song?
Example: In the ballad "I Never Meant To Fall In Love" a woman describes her reluctance to become involved in a relationship. Hurt in the past, she has resolved not to allow herself to fall again.

lyrics: "I never meant to fall in love"

Lovers everywhere, full of hope and then despair. Oh, I know the feeling well for I'm caught within its spell! I never meant to fall in love; but here beneath the moon above, I'm deep within the rapture of your lips on mine.

It really isn't fair, you know, to turn my world around, as though I never had a place to go - til there was you.

Who said the words that seemed so clever? "Love is forever, come what may!" Once long ago my dreams were shattered, 'til nothing mattered. That's why I say, "I never meant to fall in love....but here I am again, in love." To lose the fight and toss the glove would be all wrong. But wrong or right tonight, please hold me tight! I never meant to fall, didn't want to fall, in love.

2. Who would say these words and in what circumstances?

3. Find a movie character whose circumstances and personality seem to fit the song. The characters and their stories will help to provide singers with *emotional context* for the ballad.

4. After you have found a character in a movie, answer these questions as the character: Who am I? Where am I? What do I want?

Continuing with "I never meant to fall in love"

a. **Who am I?**

Am I Erica in *Something's Gotta Give*? Or am I Francesca, in *Bridges Of Madison County*? Or perhaps Alex in *Fatal Attraction*?!
Do the ballad lyrics fit these characters and their stories in style and substance?

b. Where am I?

As Erica, am I on the beach gathering stones and talking with Harry?
As Alex in her apartment in bed with Dan?
As Francesca am I dancing with Robert, in my kitchen?

c. What do I want?

In *Something's Gotta Give*, does Erica want to protect herself or give in – or both? In *Fatal Attraction*, does Alex want to harm? Seduce? Does Francesca want to “do the right thing”?

Feelings are intangible. The way for singers to evoke feelings is to use the actions that are given to the characters in the movie. When you do, use playable verbs (to warn, explain, reveal, seduce, give in, reassure). They will help to provide action, which produces the emotion.

Commitment to character makes the difference between one-dimensional and emotionally truthful performances.

THE BIG QUESTION:

Why can't we use our own circumstances or experiences?

Because we are all different. The same lyrics, if left to each singers' interpretation, will be different. Finding a common character through whose eyes and heart the song lyrics can be sung will strengthen the unit performance of a flesh and blood human being.