



Interlochen
ONLINE

MUSICAL THEATRE: ACTING A SONG Study Guide



A Guide to Assembling Your Rep Book

By Peggy Trecker White, Interlochen Online Course Instructor

Learn how to build your repertoire (“rep”) book for musical theatre auditions. This guide, excerpted from the four-week Interlochen Online course “Musical Theatre: Acting a Song” by Peggy Trecker White, gives you a step-by-step approach for preparing songs in various genres and tempos to help you land your next audition.

If you had just days to prepare for an audition, would you be ready? Professional singers generally are, because they maintain rep (repertoire) books, where they keep lyrics and accompaniment sheet music for the collection of songs they know deeply and are fully ready to perform. Your rep book should showcase your versatility and skills in a broad range of musical theatre genres, from classic to contemporary productions. It should also demonstrate your ability to deliver a range of emotion and intensity.

You develop a rep book so that you are ready to walk on stage and hand sheet music to an accompanist when that call for auditions comes. As the saying goes, “Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity.” The rep book is about being ready.

To create a rep book you need a few basic supplies:

1. Three-ring binder
2. Dividers for three sections
3. Ten clear plastic sheet protectors
4. Printer

What Is a Rep Book?

Typically, rep books are three-ring binders filled with clear plastic sheets that hold songs you know well, with the accompanying sheet music. They also usually have tabs for each genre and style.

For your rep book, you should have songs from the three main eras of musical theater:

- Pre-1920s and Jazz Age - 1930s and earlier
- Golden Age - 1940s-1960s
- Contemporary - 1970s and beyond

Within each genre and style, you should have at least one ballad (slow song) and one up-tempo song.

Taking Stock: What Do You Know Already?

Write a list of the songs you know well and love to perform. Now, do a quick online search for each of them and note the following:

- Year that they were first performed
- Era they are part of
- Playwright
- Lyricist (who wrote the words)
- Composer (who wrote the music)

Then, group the songs according to the three eras of musical theater: Pre-1920s and Jazz Age, Golden Age, and Contemporary.

This exercise will help you identify what you already have for your rep book and also clarify the areas that you can focus on in selecting a new song. Based on what you now know about the three primary eras of musical theatre, **what are you missing?**

How Do I Find a New Song?

Based on your assessment of what is missing for your rep book, you may need to find a new song or two. What's a song you've never worked on but would like to know, and that helps round out your rep book?

The best way to discover new songs is to go down the rabbit hole of listening to shows. As you probably already know, YouTube and Google can be the quickest tools to get you started. Here are some questions to ask yourself as you try to find a song that's right for you:

- Is the age range plausible for me to play?
- Can I relate to the conflict within the song?
- Is this song overdone? (A quick online search will give you loads of answers.)
- Does this song highlight my vocal strengths?
- Do I have any other songs already like this one? Are all the choices in my rep book upbeat, pop/rock, high school musicals? If so, then maybe I can push myself to look at other options.
- Does this song inspire me to dig in and dig deep?

There are so many resources for you online, as well as people with all the opinions. But to get you started, you might want to check out these websites. They will have clips that you can either view or listen to, to spark your interest. From there, look up a show or a song on YouTube, listen to the cast recording, and then watch other singers perform the song in cabaret settings. This research will quickly tell you if there is music in a show or a role in a show that you'd like to pursue.

- newmusicaltheatre.com
- rodgersandhammerstein.com
- www.mtishows.com/shows

Spend some time listening closely to a few songs you really like, within a genre or tempo that you need more of in your rep book.

Get the Lyrics

For each song you plan to include in your rep book, print out a copy of the lyrics. Searching online is the way to go. Make sure you check the words and punctuation with the sheet music (more on that follows). People transcribing lyrics to online sources often make mistakes, as do singers in a performance. Best course of action: go to the source, the written page.

Get the Sheet Music

The next best step is to buy and print out the sheet music. Going to the source of the song, the sheet music, is imperative. Even when we find the lyrics online and print them out, it is always necessary to check the punctuation on the lyric sheet to make sure it is exactly as what is printed in the sheet music.

Great places to get your sheet music include the following:

- www.musicnotes.com
- www.scribd.com/sheetmusic

Most sheet music is available at a reasonable price. If you have access to a library with a performing arts section, you may also be able to find scores to the shows or vocal selections.

Once you do get the sheet music, be sure to print three copies. You'll need one you can mark up with things like the song and lyric map, acting beats, and other important elements. You'll also need a clean one to share with an accompanist, and one to keep in a safe place in case you lose the others.

Put It Together

Now it is time to assemble your rep book!

1. Label your three section dividers with the following text:
 - Pre-1920s and Jazz Age
 - Golden Age
 - Contemporary
2. Place the dividers and 10 clear sheet protectors into your three-ring binder.
3. Create a title page for your rep book (it could be hand-drawn), and insert it in one of the clear sheet protectors. You can also create a table of contents for your book, if you like.
4. Print the lyrics and sheet music for each song. Double-check that you have one ballad (slow song) and one up-tempo song for each genre.
5. Write any pieces of your research that are not listed on the lyrics or sheet music in the margins or on a separate piece of paper to include with the print-outs.
6. Place the lyrics, sheet music, and any additional notes in the clear sheet protectors. If you have left-over protectors, you can use them for songs you may wish to add in the future.

Now that your rep book is assembled, keep it with you. Review what you have assembled for each song and practice often...the next audition is around the corner.

Instructor Bio



Meet the Course Instructor

PEGGY TRECKER WHITE

Peggy Trecker White is a founding member of Lean Ensemble Theater where she works as an actor and director. She most recently appeared as Elizabeth in *The Christians*. Other LET credits include Katharine Hepburn in *Tea at Five*, Nora in *A Doll's House, Part 2*, Veronica in *God of Carnage*, and Masha in *Vanya & Sonia & Masha & Spike*. Lean directing credits include *The Humans*, *Bad Dates*, *Constellations*, and *Love, Loss, and What I Wore*. Coming up: Blanche DuBois in *Death of a Streetcar Named Virginia Woolf*.

She has served as an Instructor of Theatre Arts for Interlochen Arts Academy in 2012 and 2018. As a part of the Interlochen Shakespeare Festival, Peggy has performed the roles of Gertrude in *Hamlet*, Marty in *Circle Mirror Transformation*, and Nora in *A Doll's House, Part 2*. Internationally, Peggy was the Assistant Director of Rossini's *Il Viaggio a Reims* at Teatro Filarmonico in Verona, Italy, Theatre Lübeck and Theatre Kiel in Germany. She has also appeared at Moscow Art Theatre, with Theatre Mitu in Abu Dhabi, UAE, and stages throughout Switzerland, and Italy. Domestically, Peggy has appeared with American Repertory Theatre, Mitu 580, The Warehouse Theatre, Reprise! Broadway's Best, Michigan Opera Theatre, Ordway Music Theatre, South Carolina Repertory Company, NY Fringe Festival, and the Piccolo Spoleto Festival, among others. Prior to graduate school, Peggy spent eighteen months on the second Broadway national tour of *Miss Saigon*. She is a member of Actors Equity Association.

Learn more about techniques for preparing and performing songs, and connect with peers from around the world who are also interested in musical theatre, by taking the four-week “**Musical Theatre: Acting a Song**” online course developed by Peggy Trecker White.

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