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MUSICAL THEATRE HANDBOOK FOR THE ACTOR

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Bachelor of Fine Arts, North Carolina School of the Arts, 2003

Director: DAVID S. LEONG
CHAIRMAN, DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE

Virginia Commonwealth University
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And I would like to dedicate this thesis to the children of Harlem
and the staff of Free Arts, NYC

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Abstract

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By Maggie Elizabeth Marlin, MFA

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Major Director: David S. Leong
Chairman, Department of Theatre

Musical Theatre is a performance style deeply woven into the fabric of the American theatre. We live in time and social climate where over half of the productions open on Broadway right now are musicals. If actor training institutions profess a mission to prepare their students for a career in the entertainment industry, why are so many components of an actor's skill set left to the side and considered peripheral? One can make the argument that their actor training program is exclusively for the theatre, and even more specifically for straight plays for the theatre. Of course, what your career preparation institution chooses to target is your prerogative and as long as that is clear to the incoming students who wish to specialize only in that one faction of the artist's opportunities for work then my argument is moot. However, if you believe that actor training has a duty to

prepare actors to work in an ever changing and transforming field and to be competitive in meeting the demands of various media, among many other areas of focus you should consider preparing your students to develop their craft for musical theatre as legitimately as you would for a classical or contemporary straight play. In this thesis I propose an approach to creating a role for musical theatre using as an example my character development technique for the role of Sally Bowles from a recent production of *Cabaret*. My desire is to illustrate a seamless continuation of the actor's craft to meet the additional requirements of skills necessary to perform in a musical. Rather than signifying a separate style of acting for musical theatre which is identified as being altogether different and often dismissed as inferior to the craft of acting in a straight play, I hope to challenge the reader to consider a new perspective in which the foundation of musical theatre performance is built on the fundamentals of acting in a straight play.

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Introduction

My professional work and training in the field of the performing arts has taken me back and forth across our country and introduced me to a multitude of performing arts practitioners and their theories. As many artist do, I like to experiment and explore, adopting and discarding methods, and develop techniques and theories that become my own personal poetics. The rich diversity that exists in theatre, in its varying methods and developments consistent with our ever changing media, is an inspiration and keeps our entertainment industry full and vibrant. This open atmosphere allows us to relish in familiar styles while simultaneously supporting new voices. However, in my experience I keep running into a wall. As time goes on and work progresses this aggravation keeps rearing its head, becoming more and more apparent. The wall that I speak of is a widely accepted dismissal of the craft of performing in a musical.

As opposed to the world of academia, inferior perspective of the theatre community at large of musical theatre performance isn't as noticeable in the business or at least it isn't verbalized. That doesn't necessarily mean that this perspective of inferiority toward musicals doesn't exist, it's just not as talked about, whatever the reason. Once I went

beyond the walls of my actor training institution and was out in the field it didn't take long to learn that there are casting directors, producers, directors, agents, and performers all around you. The notion that you may be over heard dismissing the actor's work in musical theatre by the wrong person could be enough encouragement to set aside any judgments on the matter. Perhaps looking through the weekly performing arts news publication, Backstage, where every two out of three audition listings are for musicals, is enough to make you reconsider the legitimacy of musicals, especially when you imagine what it would be like to be able to make your rent payment. My point is that musical theatre holds a very prominent position in the world of the performing arts. I think that alone warrants a second glance as to its relevancy and integrity.

Of course I have seen my fair share of musicals that I could easily write off either because of their composition, the direction, the choreography, or because of the performances within it. But this touches on the very point that I am interested in addressing; it comes down to the 'which came first' conundrum. Are musicals often performed in a-paint-by-numbers manner? Do they ever seem to be mechanical conventions of entertainment? Do they ever seem to suffer the absence of truth? Yes. Is that condition inevitable and is that all that they are? No. The clearest way to articulate my point is to draw a parallel. If you tell a child they are bad, they are lazy, and they don't respect others, that child will most likely fulfill that prophecy you have laid before them; they will act out, they won't work hard, and they will not treat others with respect. I believe the same goes for performers, especially in a young actor's training program. It's one thing if the theatre teacher flat out tells their acting students that acting in musicals is

somehow less than acting in a straight play. I don't even need to address how that could influence the students to believe that as well. But let's just say, as is more often the case, the students simply see their teacher write off the actor's craft towards musical theatre, if that teacher implies that there is a difference of acting integrity between acting in a straight play versus in a musical, the students will follow suit. The influence a teacher has as a role model is strong and in an academic performing arts setting where acceptance and approval is so fiercely sought, the power of teaching by example is astronomical.

I have been performing in musicals for over twenty years performing and in a variety of venues (from Off-Broadway, to LORT houses up and down the East Coast, in SPT venues, in university productions both graduate and undergraduate, in community theatres, and in high schools.) I have been in productions that run for months in resident theatres and I have traveled in national tours. I have lived and worked as a performer in such cities as New York, Washington DC, Los Angeles, and Richmond, Virginia. I spent four years studying and performing at the North Carolina School of the Arts and two years at Virginia Commonwealth University. Through my experience I have been facing the issue of the legitimacy of acting in musical theatre, but it wasn't until I dug into my graduate work and began performing along side my students that I started to hear the thoughts that spinning around through the students' minds and what's fueling these ideas.

I have had the unique opportunity to teach undergraduate acting students as an adjunct college professor by day and rehearse and perform beside them as a colleague by night. As much as I would try to put on different hats for different roles, no matter what I tried, I wasn't ever successful in hiding my teacher's hat. Frequently throughout the

rehearsal process for an academic production, the students I was acting with would approach me as a teacher to help them apply their acting work to our own scene. I would follow their lead and be as objective as possible, redirecting them to answer the questions themselves, more like a coach. I also found success in encouraging them to initiate this dialogue with our director. The balancing act came down to wanting to respond to the students as a teacher to facilitate their growth through this work while simultaneously trying to protect and grow their confidence in themselves so we could work as colleagues and acting partners. Day after day I would see the disconnect between the acting students' studio acting work on straight plays and the kind of work ethic they applied to the acting work in the musical we were rehearsing. Our director and choreographer, Patti D'Beck, is one of the strongest champions of rich, thorough acting technique in a musical theatre that I have ever worked with. So this disconnect wasn't the directing, it was something the students came in with. And not only did they come in with this idea of a musical theatre acting style that was somehow different than that for a straight play, this idea is so hardened in their minds and bodies that it is near impossible to break through. There would be moments when I could see something click, that they got it, and then for a moment, full of vibrant character life, they would aggressively pursue their objective in their partner and fight with all their might against their obstacles. The baffling part, which I believe to be the rigorous part of actor training is that click in for a moment here and a moment there. If the student is lucky the new understanding lingers for awhile and can be applied throughout their actor training. But then in the very next moment it can slip away as swiftly as it came. My work is dedicated to hanging in their and facilitating those

moments to happen again and again, more and more frequently until an understanding sinks deep into that actor's craft.

So which begets which? Does "bad musical theatre acting" warrant its poor reputation? Or does a poor judgment of musicals teach actors that musicals only deserve a bogus style of acting? I think the process is cyclical. I understand that one cannot just simply change another's point of view on the subject, much less the point of view of a collective. Where the change can start is in the studio.

In the paper to follow I want to present an approach to acting in musical theatre. Part one is an overview summarizing the steps of creating a role for musical theatre from start to finish. Part two is an in depth song analysis. As an example I will take you through the intimate details of my own experience preparing the song *Cabaret* for the role of Sally Bowles which I played in the spring of 2008 at Theatre VCU as part of my graduate work while I was studying theatre pedagogy. My desire in writing this process down is to initiate a dialogue about the process of preparing a role for musical theatre and if an actor should stumble upon this paper and make any discoveries at all toward enriching the process of their acting work, then this paper has served its purpose.

Part One

A Run Down from Start to Finish

Step One.

Read the play. In the genre of musical theatre, there are often several writers involved. That is not to say that you won't frequently come across musicals where the spoken dialogue, sung lyrics, and music are all written by the same person. But for our purposes, be aware that most often there will be the writer of the book, the writer of the song lyrics or the lyricist, and the composer of the music. Again I say, read the play. That means reading the spoken text and the sung lyrics just as spoken text. And read it again. And when you think you have a handle on it read it again.

Step Two.

Research everything that has to do with your musical. The span of your research should include the time and place of the play, the culture, and what is happening politically and socially. Become so familiar with the world of the play that you could step right into that world and live that lifestyle as freely as if it were your own.

Now research the details you find in that world. Get a firm understanding of every phrase of dialogue, especially if it is not a contemporary play set in your back yard. Look up every reference whether they are people, places or things.

Expand the research to include the world of the playwright. See the world from where they stood while writing it. Familiarize yourself with what the playwright living through, experiencing and responding to in writing this play.

Looking at *Cabaret* as an example, Joe Masteroff, the writer of the book for *Cabaret* based many of his characters, however loosely, on real people. So in addition to researching Berlin in the 1920s and 1930s, the Nazi Party, Weimar Berlin, the Cabarets in Berlin, the social classes, the position of women in society, abortion, fashion, sex, alcohol, drugs, standards of living, inflation, depression, the global perspective...my research opened up to include the biographies of actual people. Sally Bowles was an actual person who stumbled into Christopher Isherwood's life, who is the actual author that the character Cliff is based on. I even got to read the books written by Christopher Isherwood where he at length luxuriously illustrated the personality of Sally Bowles. And not only did I have the script for *Cabaret*, I tracked down several different versions of the play all the way back to it's original screen version called *I am Camera*. If you think you've researched everything there is, keep going. What undergarments do the women wear? How do they sit? Are they always in heels, wearing pantyhose? How do they dance? How do they pay for that drink?

And the last step of your research, read the play again.

Step Three.

Become familiar with the music. I will discuss this further in part two but for now it will suffice to just suggest that anyway you can become more familiar with the music, do so. That can be playing it yourself if you happen to play the piano, plunking out just your melody line if that's as far as your piano skills go. Meet with a vocal coach to lay down a recording of the accompaniment and walk you through your part. Note, anytime through out this process that you have access to an accompanist, be ready to throw down a little recording device and record anything you can to take home with you. Another option is to listen to a cast recording if one exists. If there is more than one cast recording listen to as many different versions as you can. I will go further into the efficacy of this later on so I will leave this subject for now.

Step Four.

This process can begin anytime. Often it will slip in right under your nose during the research portion but at some point your attention to script analysis needs to be intentional and it warrants your undivided attention.

My script analysis starts with questions. Just asking question after question. Begin with identifying the given circumstances in every each moment...Who? What? When? Where? Why? What happening here? What do I want here? What's keeping me from getting what I want here? How badly do I want what I want here? What am I willing to give up?

These questions will drive you further into the givens until you get to one of the most crucial elements of the actor's work, relationships. You cannot be too specific when it comes to relationships. Figure out your relationship to every character in the play. How do you know them? How well do they know you? What do you want from them? Is there anything you keep protected from them? Again, you cannot be too specific. The further you go into defining your relationship and the further you go into the behavior that is shared between you and each character in the play, the further you can go with making bold choices and you will experience unequivocal behavioral freedom in your scene with those partners whenever they enter the space.

Continue on with your script work outlining for yourself the Story of the Play, The Theme of the Play, The Spine of the Play, and The Spine of your Character. When you are able to tell the story of the play in paragraph, when you can declare a theme for the play in your own words, when you can articulate the spine of the play in one sentence, then you have a handle on the world of the play you are in and you are ready to be a player in the telling of this story. Your character is here to facilitate a greater story with larger themes to be shared by an audience, and the motor that drives the play and how it unfolds is its spine. After you have allowed your character to be humbled to a position of service to the story whether it be that of a necessary protagonist, antagonist, obstacle, tool, or mere perspective that the author has utilized to tell this story, then we can zero in our focus on your own character. What is your character's spine? Can you in one sentence articulate your character's mode of operation? Often it includes on a grand but simple scale what you want and at what cost you are willing to try to get it. It takes a thorough investigation

of your character. Stealing the title of David Ball's outstanding book, you need to explore your character "backwards and forwards" through the play; their lifetime up until page one of the play and their life as it continues after the play. Having this character spine under your belt, test it against different moments in the play. Through this process of testing your spine to see if it still applies and serves you and the story you will discover you have just unlocked your character's objectives and tactics. It can feel as though you have just discovered a key that reveals to you all of your character's choices in any given moment. This isn't mathematical science, your character can always surprise you, and at any moment you can decide, "Nope, that spine is bogus. I'm changing it." (Ball)

Also through this work keep in your mind's eye the arc of the play, the arc of your character, the arc of individual scene and beats. You can even throw down some initial as ifs or substitutions. Just keep going. And just as with the research element, as soon as you think you've opened it all up, ask more questions.

Step Five.

The next step is to dig into your character songs, all of them; solos, duets, small ensembles, chorus numbers, all of them. This is one of the richest elements of your work as an actor in a musical. Because that is the case, I have devoted all of Part Two to this element of our work. I'll meet you there in a few pages.

Step Six.

First company rehearsal! Most often this entails a discussion lead by the director regarding their overall interpretation of the musical; what makes this production different from another production of the same musical. This discussion leads into a designer presentation which includes, set, costumes, sound, and lighting. And then it is time for the silliest and most exciting part, the first company read/sing thru of the musical. Soak it all up. Soak up every word that drips out of your director. Try to ingest the feel you get from the designers. Really use this first read/sing thru of the musical. Odds are it may be the only one you get. Some directors will use table work with the whole cast present but for many reasons, often full company table work is sacrificed to get right into music rehearsals, scene work, and dance choreography. I can't reiterate this enough. Use every second you get. (This is also a time I would have my recorder with me, most likely a rehearsal accompanist will be there and depending on the individual, it may be very valuable to get your first hearing of the music recorded!)

Step Seven.

Now we are into music rehearsals. Be as prepared as possible. Come in with a good handle on the music. Come in with strong choices. Come in with questions of cues, vamps, and where you want to breathe. If you're lucky, this is the time to start adjusting the music to fit into your voice. What I mean by that is if the music doesn't fit perfectly in your vocal range this is the time to shimmy up to your music director and pull out all the stops on trying to get him or her to change the keys of your music to fit you to a T! Find

where that “one note” just rings in your voice. Come in with suggestions. The more you come in with the further you will get and that will all be apparent opening night. Bring your recorder

Step Eight.

This is a pretty big step. It’s more like several that blur together and overlap. In the rehearsals that lay ahead, the bulk of your rehearsal process will be doing individualized table work, scene work, and blocking. For these rehearsals you can significantly help yourself by wearing any rehearsal clothes or shoes. For the men particularly, is it formal? Would you be wearing a jacket and hard soled shoes? For the women, would your character be caught dead in anything other than heels? Rehearsal skirts, shawls, aprons. All of this will immediately fill in your characters behavior and help you into the world, especially if you need time to practice walking in heels so you don’t walk like a horse. If your character has been walking in heels are her life, you don’t want to undercut your acting work each time you walk across the stage because the actress looks like she’s never worn heels before. Practice. Don’t limit your character.

You will also have your staging rehearsals and dance choreography rehearsals. You will help yourself AND your choreographer by wearing heels and skirts if they’re appropriate to your character, which you should already know from the designer presentations. God forbid, if it hasn’t been told to you that you come with a choice like a very specific accessory, costume piece or shoe. When I say it will help your choreographer I truly mean that. They are sculpting their choreography around you, onto

your body. If there is something that will be helped or hindered by wearing a skirt or heels your choreographer would love to know that from the start. And bonus, you look like a smart actor!

The third part to this step is combining all of these individually rehearsed elements of scene work and blocking, singing, musical staging and dance choreography. A key to this going more smoothly is to rigorously challenge yourself to apply each element to the other as you go. Meanings, while you are learning the dance choreography, infuse it with your acting intentions. In your blocking, connect your acting choices to motivating your movement on stage. To put it simply, don't give yourself permission to check out of your acting work no matter where the director, music director, or choreographer's focus is. They are counting on you to do your job so they can do theirs.

A half step.

Keep in mind that just because you are now in structured rehearsals, that doesn't mean you no longer need to keep doing your actor's work outside of rehearsal. That work not only includes getting everything you worked on, blocked, or choreographed yesterday in your body by rote so that you know it just as well if not better than the rehearsal before, but you can also be deepening your character development, reworking everything that will and should be affected by now actually having an acting partner and director. Come in with something new every rehearsal. If you master that idea, you will be called on for job after job.

Step Nine

As you begin nearing tech you will come to the point where you get to do run thrus for several different purposes. Initially, time permitting it will be a final run for designers to solidify their work and answer any of their questions before tech. Some where in there you will do a sitzprobe, which is a sing thru with the band who has been rehearsing on their own as well. In this rehearsal it will be imperative that you listen for any variations to how you have been rehearsing. Listen for other sounds from the band that may throw you off or for the absence of certain sounds you had been expecting that may throw you off even more. With your musical director hopefully you can solidify vamps and cues. Everyone is using this rehearsal for different things. Make sure you are doing the same thing; using it for yourself to get from it what you need.

Step...Tech.

Now we're just going to throw everything at you. The director and choreographer are going to need to space the whole show from top to bottom on the set. You are most likely going to be wired with a microphone and battery pack from day one of tech. A frequent error actors make once they get into their mics and hear their own glorious voice amplified through the theatre is to sit back and let the mic do all the work. Your acting will fall flat if you do this. We get lazy and drop our vocal production work up to this point, both singing and speaking. You must still send the energy of your acting intentions through the mics and wrap around the back of every seat in the theatre, even the furthest seat in the back corner of the balcony. Keep yourself in check. Do not fall into this trap.

Next come the costumes, which at least temporarily flip everything on its end. If it turns out that your staging requires quick changes, rehearse them with your dressers. Be patient through this period. It will all work out in the end. It always does. Finally you get the good props you've been waiting for and can retire the worn out make shift rehearsal props you've been using all along. And then there are the lights. Get good at finding your light, filling your light. The band comes back and we are going to stumble through this thing as many times as we can.

Last Step.

Hopefully we'll get in a few dress rehearsals and then it's opening night. The last thought I will leave with through these steps of creating a role for musical theatre is never stop applying your actor work to the process. Use tech to get familiar with props and costumes, the set, the lighting, but also use tech to grow closer to your acting partners. Never let your job as the actor fall out of the equation. Yes, you need to hit that mark. They will call hold, making you freeze in a spot light until you see stars. But the stage manager will always says continue at some point, and when they do, jump right back into the life of the play. It's exciting what you can discover when the pressure is off you because the director is so concerned with the lights and the costumes. It's a magnificent freedom. It like you're hiding right in front of their faces and you can make the boldest, most daring choices. Take advantage of that supreme freedom and continue digging deeper.

Part Two

Song Analysis: *Cabaret*

Chapter One:

First Glimpse

Below you will find the text to Sally Bowles' final song in the show, the title song, *Cabaret*. We come to this song after having read, analyzed and interpreted the story of the *Cabaret*. Already having a solid grasp of the play and what's happening driven by the character's given circumstances, objectives, obstacles and how the character goes about getting what she wants we are ready to take the next step going deeper into this scene, the song of *Cabaret*. We are now in a position to intelligently analyze this song. Beginning with the text, we ask more specific questions into what's happening in the song. What did the character do and experience in the moment before. What do they need now? How do they go about getting it? From a very intellectual standpoint I like to reverse my perspective and take a look at this scene in reverse. This exercise helps me to identify where we need to get to by the end of the song for the scene to immediately follow staying

in line with the story. By looking backwards I can figure out what needs to happen in the song to get me from point A, the moment before, to point B, the moment directly after. Once I have done so I start at the beginning and describe the arc of the story.

Moment Before – Text – Moment After

The moment before:

The shit hits the fan when Cliff orders Sally to pack insisting that he is taking her and their unborn child home with him to America. He is demanding to rip away the only life she's ever known. Cliff storms out slamming the door behind him. Sally runs away, back to the club. Cliff tracks her down and tries to tear her from the cabaret. She sees him for what he truly is, just like all the other pain in her life. Sally refuses to give in to him. Her muscle memory kicks in and in an urgent desperate attempt to reclaim her own life, she runs up to her stage. She hears him scream and she looks back to catch glimpse of him being physically attacked by Nazi patrons. The Emcee cautions her to really consider whether she wishes to step back in to Cliff's needs or to continue getting away from him. She turns and leaves and is immediately thrust back on to the stage. The band is vamping, waiting for her to come in. The spotlight hits her and she sings...

The text:

Cabaret

Sally:

What good is sitting alone in your room?

Come hear the music play.

Life is a cabaret old chum,

Come to the cabaret.

Put down the knitting, the book and the broom.

Time for a holiday.

Life is a cabaret, old chum,

Come to the cabaret.

Come taste the wine,

Come hear the band.

Come blow a horn, start celebrating;

Right this way your table's waiting.

No use permitting some prophet of doom

To wipe ev'ry smile away.

Life is a cabaret, old chum,

Come to the cabaret!

*I used to have a girl friend known as Elsie,
With whom I shared four sordid rooms in Chelsea.
She wasn't what you'd call a blushing flower.
As a matter of fact she rented by the hour.*

*The day she died the neighbors came to snicker:
"Well, that's what comes of too much pills and liquor."
But when I saw her laid out like a queen,
She was the happiest corpse I'd ever seen.*

*I think of Elsie to this very day.
I remember how she'd turn to me and say:*

*"What good is sitting alone in your room?
Come hear the music play.
Life is a cabaret, old chum,
Come to the cabaret.*

*Put down the knitting, the book and the broom,
Time for a holiday.
Life is a cabaret, old chum,
Come to the cabaret."*

*And as for me, as for me,
I made my mind up, back in Chelsea
When I go I'm going like Elsie*

*Start by admitting, from cradle to tomb
Isn't that long a stay.
Life is a cabaret, old chum,
Only a cabaret, old chum,
And I love a cabaret (Masteroff.)*

The moment after:

The next time we see Sally she comes home to find Herr Schultz and Cliff saying goodbye. In this scene we learn that she has had an abortion and says goodbye to cliff, refusing to go with him to catch a train out of Berlin. So, the moment directly after the song *Cabaret* happens offstage. Sally leaves the Cabaret, gets an illegal abortion paid for with the clothes off her back, and the following day returns to the room she has shared with Cliff.

Chapter Two:

Digging In

Looking through the lens of the emotional journey of Sally Bowles; from the moment before, through the song, and up through the moment after I see that somewhere in there she has to figure out what she wants, what her options are to get what she wants and to make a decision. At the same time I begin exploring the framing for the scene. I start by asking question after question. How do I feel about Cliff revealing this other side of himself to me, more or less thinking he can force me to give up my life and follow him to some foreign country? Have I thought about America? Am I interested in going, just scared of how Cliff is trying to force me? Is it just too fast? Am I starting to get scared of what's happening in Germany? Do I feel like a first class fool having fallen for Cliff? Am I pissed at myself for letting myself believe I could have a family life with a kind loving husband and a beautiful baby? Why do I want to stay in Berlin? Do I have to? Why do I have to? What do I want or need that means staying in Berlin and not following the man I love and his baby to America?

It's about asking the right questions. It's the questions that lead you deeper and deeper into the psyche of your character not necessarily the answers. It's the questions that lead to even more specific questions that bring you closer to an engaging, strong, yet

simple objective. This work reveals to you the spine of your character. It is the spine of your character that acts like a brilliant road map into making all the choices you need to make in a script about how your character does anything she does.

As my acting teacher Gerald Freedman would always say, your character life is all about the how, everything is all about the how. This deep investigation leads to your discovery of the answer to the fool proof character defining question, “How does your character buy a bottle of wine?” When Gerald initially presented that idea to me I found it so odd and I didn’t get it at first, much to my teacher’s great frustration. But once you can wrap your mind around that, it really feels like a magic decoder toy you might find at the bottom of a cereal box. If you can answer how your character buys a bottle of wine and the answer seems so obvious, it’s exciting to you and it makes you fall in love with your character even harder. You are on the road to breathing life into the powerful force that is your character living, desiring, and fighting in their world of the play.

How does Sally Bowles buy a bottle of wine? She slams into the corner store in her shady neighborhood just a few blocks down from the Kit Kat Club, sneaks up behind her friend restocking a shelf and asks if he has anything special for her. He shows her a bottle that he has stashed for her behind the counter with a fancy whimsical label. It’s cheap wine but the bottle is fantastic. She slowly reaches across the counter for it and shimmies her shoulders asking only with her eyes if she really needs to pay for it. He blushes, shakes his head, and says, “On the house.” She gestures with a head nod that she needs another bottle of gin which he was already reaching for. He starts to put both in paper bag but she snags them out of his hand and shoves them into her huge shoulder bag. A thin sexy piece of lingerie peaks out. She sees it, stops, gives a look to the clerk

and teases him with a smile as she tucks it back down inside her bag with the bottom of the wine bottle. She turns to leave, struts off towards the door, and waves over her shoulder while practically singing, “See you tomorrow.” The door bounces closed behind her, the bells jingle, and the clerk pauses for a moment tickled by the fact the he knows he’s still standing there smiling.

I decided to make the song *Cabaret* Sally’s process of figuring out what she needs to do and through this search she discovers what she wants, what she loves, what she hates, what she’s afraid of, remembers the things that have guided her through her life and finally makes the decision to get an abortion.

Below I have inserted the text of *Cabaret* again, but this time adding in an initial exploration of the sense of the song. Below each line I’ve written in my words what’s happening or what I’m saying; in other words, my internal monologue. This can reflect ideas of what I’m doing, what I’m thinking, my objectives, obstacles, intentions/actions, and discoveries. Some may refer to this as subtext, I prefer not to use that word as it makes me get stuck in my head, makes me feel like I am trying to play two different things at one time. Rather I like to think of the text and musical lines as what I get to say/sing but filled with what I am actually doing with that text. Some may prefer to make a separate sweep over the text of the song specifically identifying exactly what words mean, what any period catch phrase means, searching for substitutions for ideas, people or things so they make sense to you. I like to do it all together as one thick exploration. It’s up to you. This is a personal tactic that I use to keep the thoughts, the intentions active and playable. As with any actor’s craft, you use whatever really stirs you, whatever gets you going. This is a preliminary but informed step in the process. This is a

step in the direction of making choices as to the actions I am playing on each specific line. We will get to that in a bit, but I start here with an overview, anything goes. Theatre comes to life and changes before our eyes when we add in the elements of audience, acting partners, being present in the moment, the band... This is homework that I do ahead of time to become acquainted with my character through a specific song on my way to embodying them and living their story as my own, just a step.

Text with Inner Monologue

Cabaret

Sally:

What good is sitting alone in your room?

In the song as I “rehearsed” it with the emcee of the Kit Kat club, I know I am playfully asking the audience to consider, where is the life in isolating yourself away from the fantastic world outside? But in this moment my given circumstances of where I’ve just come from, what’s just happened to me and what I’ve just seen overpower any cabaret number for the patrons of the club. I am rushing through the dark maze backstage of the cabaret, still tugging at my dress and quickly straightening my hair. I hear the band, I can faintly see the house lights through the musty curtain. The air is thick with smoke and alcohol soaked tables and chairs. In this first

line of the song all I can think about is whether they tell that I am falling
apart inside!

Come hear the music play.

No matter what, don't let them see. Beg the gods to give me all the
strength I can possibly muster to not let the audience see me suffering.

Life is a cabaret, old chum,

Please don't let anyone be able to tell. Seriously. Hide it. Smile. They
can't know. Get yourself together.

Come to the cabaret.

Breathe, Sally. Breathe.

Put down the knitting, the book and the broom.

Ok, what am I singing about...knitting, book, broom. All the mundane
chores of a wasted life, just sing them the song, but don't let them see that
this is killing you.

Time for a holiday.

Yes, a holiday. A vacation. A break. God, give me a break.

What I wouldn't give to just make it all go away. I need a break. What's
happening to me? How could this have happened?

Life is a cabaret, old chum,

Life shouldn't be like this it should be carefree and decadent and huge.

Breathe! I need to breathe!

Come to the cabaret.

This isn't working. I am sure they can see right through me. They see this sad little girl scared to death shaking in front of them. I have to make it stop. Make it stop now!

Come taste the wine,

Make this huge. Really sell the good life. Show them how good it is in here. Show them how great you have it.

Come hear the band,

Remember that first time the band was playing behind you? A wall of sound resonating under my dress, under my skin. The sound bouncing off the walls. The warm glow of red and yellows, the smoke floating up in a stream from all the little tables. That was fantastic, I felt like I really was somebody, like I was bigger than life. Hearing the band behind me is like having the whole world in the palm of my hand. I am unstoppable. I am on fire. Life is mine and it's going to be huge!

Come blow a horn, start celebrating;

I love the crack of a trumpet blast! It's always the cutest and quietest guys sitting in back with the trumpet. That sound cuts through, nothing can hold it back, nothing can dampen its voice.

Right this way your table's waiting.

You belong here. I belong here. This is my home. I know these people. It's the same fiery couple that sits over at that table. The bartender always winking at me. The shy waiter who always brings over my drinks. Those

young students who stumble in wild and rough and can't hold an ounce of their liquor. This is where I belong.

No use permitting some prophet of doom

Prophet of doom, anyone who tries to bring you down, anyone who tries to trap you in, tries to lock you into guidelines and rules. Anyone who tries to tell you how you need to live your life and take away the freedom you want.

To wipe ev'ry smile away.

They want everyone to be as miserable as them. Want to control everyone else, killing their spirit.

Life is a cabaret, old chum,

Life truly can be whatever you make it. Life is a game, a charade, a parade, life is life.

Come to the cabaret!

The solution is to continue in this parade. Live the parade. If you try to make it something more you will just be left empty and disappointed.

Let's all join in!

I used to have a girl friend known as Elsie,

Substitute dear college friend, NYC roommate and successful Broadway actress, Jennifer Lyon for Elsie! She was the most thrilling, dangerous and exciting woman I've ever known. I wanted so badly to be like her. The best part was she got a kick out of me. She made me feel great. She made me feel like I was as dangerous and thrilling as her!

With whom I shared four sordid rooms in Chelsea.

Tease the audience, dangling the beginnings of a great secret. Tell them about the sexy, trendy flat we shared full of color and fabric and lace and pillows and lamps and on and on and on. It felt so good to be home, it was our sexy boudoir.

She wasn't what you'd call a blushing flower.

I know just how to tease and charm my audience. Elsie was no virgin, quite the opposite. She knew how to play every single man and woman she came across. She could get anything she wanted from anybody, and it was effortless. And I was learning from her.

As a matter of fact she rented by the hour.

Shock them! Ha! She was the hottest thing and she made all the decisions. She did only what she wanted to do. She called the shots with every client she entertained. Incredible.

The day she died the neighbors came to snicker:

She died of some kind of overdose. There were too many things in her system to know what killed her. I wasn't home but found her being held by a couple of our friends. Our door was wide open, everyone in the tenement building was watching and I knew they had all been just hoping something would happen to her.

"Well that's what comes of too much pills and liquor."

Those lame aristocratic wannabes couldn't wait to wrinkle their noses and swish past me in the hall, whispering underneath their breath purposefully

loud enough for me to get the point that we had it coming. It was exactly what we deserved.

But when I saw her laid out like a queen,

See my grandmother lying in her casket, her lips glued shut. She had finally given up. It wasn't my grandmother anymore. My grandmother wasn't in that body, it was just a body. My grandmother had let go, she was so tired and now she was gone.

She was the happiest corpse I'd ever seen.

Finally quiet. Finally peaceful. I know sometime after my grandfather died she felt she had no good reason to be here anymore. She began to feel like she was just a burden to her family. Before she died she had even secretly been emptying out her closets and the garage so there would be less for us to 'clean up' when she was gone. She was ready, even inviting god to let her leave this place. She wanted him to let her go.

I think of Elsie to this very day.

I think of my beautiful grandma to this very day.

I remember how she'd turn to me and say:

Nothing beats cookies and milk, does it Maggie?

"What good is sitting alone in your room?"

She can see me now. She can see me stuck, frozen in time, at an apex. It is time to make a decision.

Come hear the music play.

I can feel her urging me to get up, get out. Telling me that I have so much to do and pushing me to go do it.

Life is a cabaret, old chum,

It's just life, my dear. It is a parade, a celebration, a game

Come to the cabaret.

Do it. Get up. GET UP!

Put down the knitting, the book and the broom,

Stop pitying yourself. You got off track. YOU GOT OFF TRACK! Pull back the curtains, open the window...open the door!

Time for a holiday.

Too long. You've been gone too long. You let yourself get swept away.

It's time to return. It's time. IT'S TIME!

Life is a cabaret, old chum,

It's just life, sweetie

Come to the cabaret.

Your world is out there. Now is the time where you have to make a decision. Yes things went horribly wrong but don't drown it. It is time to act. What do I want?

And as for me,

It's me. It's my life. What do I want? I'm that one that gets to say, I'm the one that gets to choose. What do I want?

As for me.

It is time to look long and hard at myself. Forget what I've done that has brought me here. That all doesn't matter. If I can do anything I want, what would that be?

I made my mind up, back in Chelsea.

I decided a long time ago how I wanted to live my life. I know who I am. I have known the kind of life I want to live for as long as I can remember and I've never let anything or anyone get in my way.

When I go I'm...

I'm doing what I have to do and nobody can stop me.

...going like Elsie.

I am going to let my baby go!

Start by admitting from cradle to tomb

An insignificant little lifetime in this world is nothing in the grand scheme of things. Accept that and you are free!

Isn't that long a stay.

It'll all be gone. It'll all be dust. Someday. Why sweat the small stuff?

Live. Life is a cabaret!

Life is a cabaret, old chum,

It's ok to let go of my baby. It's ok. It's just a baby. It isn't even real yet. It could be gone in an instant and it would be like it was never even here, just a dream.

Only a cabaret, old chum,

This is not the world for her. This is not a world to live in. This is not a life. I am rescuing her. I am saving her from a lifetime of pain, suffering, and loneliness. It's my choice! It's my baby! It's mine! My life is mine!

And I love a cabaret.

I'm sorry... I'm so sorry. Oh God. If there is a god, please forgive me. Take her, please just take my baby. Forgive me. Oh please forgive me. Grandma, watch over me and take care of me. Take care of baby. Please don't let it hurt her. Please don't hurt her (Masteroff.)

Chapter Three:

Digging Deeper

Having done this textual work and making sense of Sally Bowles' experience in a way I can emotionally connect to her, I feel a certain ownership begin to settle in. I am falling in love with her. I am beginning to feel connected and active in creating a life for my character. This inspires the next step in the process. As we continue through this diagnosis please keep in mind this is all geared to supporting the creation of the life of the character, full and complex, driving toward their objectives, active and serving the story of the play.

With this work under my belt now would be the time where I would want to get the song, text and music “up on it's feet” meaning revisiting actually singing the song with or without accompaniment, whatever I have access to at that time. At the very least I play my part on the piano following the dynamic markings of the composer/lyricist. Through this process I can explore where what happens; where in the song does this discovery happen, and then this discovery and then this discovery? In addition to plunking out my own part and listening to the melody line as I sing it, I want to listen to either the recording of the accompaniment played by the music director or a few different versions of cast recordings...if any exist. This listening exercise allows me to feel the story of the music

both the melody line and the accompaniment underneath and by listening I explore the characters emotional journey. I will elaborate on the further later on but I want to suggest that you always keep in mind that this is a musical after all. The emotion gets to live on the wave of melodic lines. The emotion dances through the dynamics and swells into rich harmony and soften to a simple smooth string tone floating away almost out of your grasp. Let the music move you. Let the music speak to you. Listen for the highs and lows, listen to the tension and the relief. Let the emotion living in sound enter your body and speak to you. Open yourself up to listening hear one voice and then another, and then another. Perhaps something different jumps out to you on each listen. Allow yourself to be moved, to interpret and to use this information. This is all part of your craft, your ability and willingness to be open to the music.

I want to take a moment to address the controversial issue of listening to cast recordings. There are two opposing sides to this idea. I for one happen to be in favor of listening to any cast recordings. I want to listen to anything and as much as possible. When I am exploring a certain song, character, or musical, I want that music to get under my skin. I want it to get into my body, my heart beat, my style. I want to be so familiar with the sounds, the style, the fullest sounds of the accompaniment that I feel like I own it and that it comes from me. Of course I do not want to get stuck in hearing it one way, feeling like it can only be done that one way and then spend the rest of my time learning to imitate what I've listened to. This may and will be different for many people so you need to make this choice for yourself, but I do not fear that I will imitate or get locked into a certain way of doing a song. It is not a struggle to avoid that. Simply know that that is not

what I want to do, it doesn't happen. Rather I am challenged by hearing different recordings and hearing different interpretations to try out another choice and another choice instead of just going with the first obvious one that came to my head. I love the challenge of looking for truth in the less obvious choice. That is what makes my Sally Bowles different from Bebe Neuwirth's Sally Bowles, who is different from Liza Minnelli's Sally Bowles. And not for the sake of being different but rather as actress challenging each other to go deeper and deeper and explore different directions. Besides, a character, whether based a real person as Sally Bowles was or not is as complex as you and I are, how dismissive and belittling to think they could only be portrayed one way.

In support of the other side of this argument I would caution artists to be honest with themselves and recognize if in listening to a recording you can't help take in that artist's interpretation and embody it to the point of nailing a dead on imitation of them. Or perhaps as an artist you know about yourself that you are highly impressionable and subconsciously soak up what is around you, I would suggest you highly consider what would be helpful to you or what may put limitations on you. Personally, I have somehow evaded getting stuck when it comes to hearing an interpretation of a song however that is not the case at all when it comes to creating choreography. Whether I have been in show myself or just happened to have seen a show, if I have an idea in my head of how that show is supposed to be done I'm going to have to kick and scream to get around doing it the way it's 'supposed' to be done. If I want my choreography to be original and to come from me then I need to not watch other productions. This is something I battle with to this day. I will see a production, and those ideas will put up walls when it comes time for me

to choreograph. Through this struggle to create choreography free of imposed ideas I will have failures and successes in trying to do so, but that's okay because I am aware of it. So even though you may be highly impressionable listening to a recording, that still doesn't mean you can't listen to it. Just know yourself and know that you are choosing to engage in that struggle to break free of it, of those impressions. There is no right or wrong. And where is the richness in theatre if not in a struggle anyway, right?

I want to discuss one of the benchmarks of my process in creating a role for musical theatre. If your text is a song, you are given twice as much information from the author of the book, the composer and the lyricist as you are given from the author of the text for a prose straight play. The song is your monologue. As with a great monologue for example from a Eugene O'Neill play, you apply your text analysis process to the monologue breaking it down. In the simplest of terms, you have your overall scene objective which you break down and score into beat objectives, which you break down into line objectives, which brings you to the most important element that embodies live theatre, you search, discover, and make choices as to your actions/intentions/tactics; you make it playable action, you bring it to life. That is part one. That part is what is shared with scoring a monologue for a straight play.

Part two of text analysis for a song is then analyzing the music. A good comparison for the kind of information I am talking about is the kind of information you take from working on heightened text, verse; Shakespeare. Not only do you have the actually words of the text but you have the meter, the rhythms, the tempo, the almost musical flow painted for you by the author. There is a sort of musical line that informs the

actor of heightened text. One small but striking example of direction written into a script is the use of the couplet. When Shakespeare tags a soliloquy or a sonnet with a couple he is directing the actor and the audience to discover the irony of the thought being spoken. The comparison of musical theatre text analysis to that of heightened text analysis is true on so many levels.

I want to keep moving forward with the information we are given in the text but we will return to music analysis later on. That however, in no way indicates that the musical line is less important. Depending on the individual it may be quite the reverse. If you respond to deeply to music, as is true for myself, then make sure your personal emotion response to listening to the music is thoroughly woven into your private study. I also strongly encourage you to further consider that comparison I made between musicals and Shakespeare; when is a character moved to speak in verse, moved to sing, moved to dance, or moved to lash out in violence? The stakes are at their peaks in such moments as when the character must erupt into song, let each time you sing be a discovery in and of itself. A character's need to express itself is burning in their heart, desperately needing a voice, needing a way to express what is stirring inside.

I play around with trial and error. I try using a certain section of the song as instruction to the audience. Then I try that same section but as pure discovery right in front of the cabaret audience as though it was unplanned. I keep experimenting with different ways until I find one that feels the strongest, that really gets me going and has the substance to steer me to the discovery of what I want. In the song Cabaret, that final discovery is the choice for Sally Bowles to leave right now and have an abortion.

Now I play specifically with when in the song Sally Bowles makes the choice to have the abortion. I try making the discovery on this line, or at the end of that line, or in the breath right before this line. Which ever one feels the strongest, the most urgent, and the most like a discovery is the one I will go with and then it's time to put it all together to see if it holds water. If it doesn't then I open it up again...and again and again, until it does. As a side bar, having done all this work and experimentation leaves me open to discovery each and every performance. If the discovery happens here one night, but here that next night, that's ok. That's great in fact. And it's possible because I've done the work. Keep in mind, this is all part of the actor's work before they get to rehearsal with the director, the music director and the rest of the cast. This is your homework. Then you let it go. Then you can play.

At this point, I now feel informed enough to take another swipe at the song *Cabaret*. It is time to make choices as to the playable action of my beats, assign different action verbs to each line to get what I want. It is time for the action/intentions/tactics. Below you will find the text to the song one more time with actions assigned to each line. Before you read this, keep in mind this is all my homework. This is all done; all of these choices are made before my first rehearsal with the director. I take all my work with me into rehearsal studio but as soon as it is no longer just me but I am working with a director and music director with their interpretation and not in this song but in any song where you have an acting partner, you are also working with your partner's interpretation. That rehearsal is where the divine exploration happens. You bring something to the table; you bring your interpretation, your choices, your strong objectives and actions to get them

while simultaneously being open to leaving any of that work at the door for the new ideas to come in, to be present with your partner and discover the scene that lives between you and your partner or in conjunction with the director's interpretation. But this work must be done, even if you end up throwing out all the specifics it's the work that prepares you for that rehearsal. It's having done work, even if you leave all of it behind you that makes you ready to explore in the space with your actor partner(s), directors, choreographers, and so on.

Please note that not unlike a Shakespeare soliloquy, often times in musical theatre you do not have a tangible scene partner. When that is the case, as with the song *Cabaret*, obstacles are a great source of focus. Obstacles are a strong element of all scene work and text analysis but I want to strongly drive the point home that obstacles are of particular importance in sculpting the playable action for your character in a soliloquy or singing solo when you are alone on stage. The reason for this is that your obstacle essentially becomes your scene partner. Of course you can be speaking to the gods, to yourself, in some cases trying out what you want to say to the person in the next scene but if you give yourself a strong internal obstacle then you have something to really wrestle with, to struggle with through the arc of the monologue/song.

In *Cabaret*, Sally Bowles' strongest obstacle was herself. In this particular song most of the journey is a push against myself. To dig through all the crap that is burying me alive to come out on the other side in a new place. Myself and my givens are my greatest obstacle so most of the actions in this scene are directed against myself and the givens. It begins with trying to control her emotional state and then struggling through the

transformation into really taking in her current conditions and needing to, in a heart beat, decide if she is going to sink or swim. Through the duration of the song *Cabaret* I played with the notion of sinking into an ocean of the rapidly disintegrating Weimar Berlin, Nazism, depression, divine decadence, violence, sexual exploitation and loneliness. I had finally been thrown into a tidal wave of despair; my life was slipping out of my hands. That was my obstacle and my objective to overcome was rooted in the obstacle. I use the song to fight, struggle and grapple with the condition in which I suddenly find myself thrust into. If it's sink or swim I choose to swim and I will fiercely fight for life until the end.

There is one more element that I would like to address before we look at the scored text of *Cabaret*, albeit brief. It may seem insignificant but the fluctuation between referring to Sally Bowles as both "she" and "I" is intentional. I certainly do not claim that there is a mandate that this needs to happen nor would I insist that your use of referring to your character as "she" or "I" consistently one way or other is a necessarily good thing or bad thing. What I offer up to you is a consciousness in knowing that you are doing that, if that so happens to be that case. And if you don't tend to do that I challenge you to consider why you don't. I challenge you to perhaps even try it out for yourself the next go around. See if that freedom and level of personally relating to your character can offer you anything in terms of insight, intensity, fire, compassion, or choices for stronger positive actions to play.

That said, here is the culmination of my text analysis work up to this point before the first rehearsal.

Text Scored With Intentions/Actions

Cabaret

Sally:

To hide my fear	<i>What good is sitting alone in your room?</i>
Hide that anything's wrong	<i>Come hear the music play.</i>
Find someone I know in the house	<i>Life is a cabaret old chum,</i>
Beg the gods to show you a friend	<i>Come to the cabaret.</i>
Try to pull myself together	<i>Put down the knitting, the book and the broom.</i>
Try to soothe my racing heart	<i>Time for a holiday.</i>
Beg someone to rescue me.	<i>Life is a cabaret, old chum,</i>
Scold myself to face that I'm alone	<i>Come to the cabaret.</i>
Pull my focus to remember wine	<i>Come taste the wine,</i>
Pull my focus to remember music	<i>Come hear the band.</i>
Fill my head with good memories	<i>Come blow a horn, start celebrating;</i>

Comfort myself that I belong here *Right this way your table's waiting.*

Scold myself, stop pitying myself *No use permitting some prophet of doom*

Challenge myself to step up *To wipe ev'ry smile away.*

Insist at letting go of pain *Life is a cabaret, old chum,*

Beg myself to let go *Come to the cabaret! (Masteroff)*

(Musical interlude transition where I discover a memory of my dear girlfriend.)

Tease the audience *I used to have a girl friend known as Elsie,*

Dangle a sexy secret *With whom I shared four sordid rooms in Chelsea.*

Saddle up with audience *She wasn't what you'd call a blushing flower.*

Throw a zinger at 'em! *As a matter of fact she rented by the hour.*

Mock the aristocrats outside *The day she died the neighbors came to snicker:*

Mock aristocrats thru imitation *Well that's what comes of too much pills and liquor.*

Paint the picture for them *But when I saw her laid out like a queen,*

Discover and really see her *She was the happiest corpse I'd ever seen.*

Taunt audience with this info *I think of Elsie to this very day.*

Intrigue their interest to listen *I remember how she'd turn to me and say:*

Teach audience by impersonating *"What good is sitting alone in your room?"*

Impersonate Elsie seducing me	<i>Come hear the music play.</i>
Impersonate Elsie teaching me	<i>Life is a cabaret, old chum,</i>
Impersonate Elsie loving me	<i>Come to the cabaret.</i>
Comfort myself	<i>Put down the knitting, the book and the broom,</i>
‘Wrap’ my arms around myself	<i>Time for a holiday.</i>
Forgive and comfort myself	<i>Life is a cabaret, old chum,</i>
Soothe myself	<i>Come to the cabaret.”</i>
Ask myself what I really want	<i>And as for me,</i>
Demand I face the truth	<i>as for me,</i>
Declare I know exactly what I want	<i>I made my mind up, back in Chelsea</i>
Force myself to face what I want	<i>When I go I’m...</i>
Shout my decision from the rooftop	<i>...going like Elsie</i>
Apologize to my baby	<i>Start by admitting, from cradle to tomb</i>
Beg her forgiveness	<i>Isn’t that long a stay.</i>
Beg her to understand	<i>Life is a cabaret, old chum,</i>
Forgive myself	<i>Only a cabaret, old chum,</i>
Give my sins up to God	<i>And I love a cabaret (Masteroff.)</i>

Chapter Four:

Playable Action

The ultimate goal of my text analysis work is to find the playable action. I want to find what I can play, what I am doing, and how I am doing it. The text scoring up above has me prepared to go into rehearsal and in every moment know what I'm trying to get and I have a really good idea of how I'm going to get it. Having reviewed my acting intentions line by line I wish to offer you one more thought by way of text analysis work for your song. I am sure we have all heard and spoken the phrase ourselves, "make each one different," referring to lines that repeat in any monologue or song. Of course we all intellectually understand that. There really isn't any room for disagreement. I challenge you to find anyone who would argue, "No, I think if you repeat a line in your song, however many times, over and over, you need to make sure you say/sing it the exact same way every time." So, if we all agree on that each time should be different, why do we still catch ourselves, myself included saying/singing that line the same way. I have been coaching acting for years. But put me in a musical and I can almost guarantee that at some moment or another, my director will want to delicately let me know that I need to make a certain repeat different each time. To myself I'll think, "I am, can't you tell?" It's a rhetorical question. No. They can't. If they could they wouldn't have given me the note!

We know to make each repeat different, so let's really do it. Make it very clear. Your text and music analysis and breaking each line down into its own objective and action is the strongest tool to avoid that nails on a chalk board note. If you're pursuing your objective with a strong playable action then there is no way it could be the same as the time before. You repeat yourself because you didn't get what you were trying to get. If you got it, then you wouldn't be repeating yourself. Look at how many repeats you have. That is the strongest and simplest indication of how strong you are fighting to get what you want and how strong and relentless your obstacle needs to be. This is where it gets really exciting. Just talking about this makes me want to go find a song with as many repeats as possible so I can really bite into the dramatic action and tear it to shreds.

Another Hundred People Just Got Off of the Train from *Company*... Stephen Sondheim knows what he is doing. Every consonant, every vowel, every pitch, every accent, every repeat, every key change has a purpose.

Chapter Five:

The Music

Through this exploration I have centered much of my focus for song analysis on the actual text. But as mentioned that is only half of the greater “text.” The other half just as crucial is the music. This includes several factors. First there is the melody line. We follow the need, temperament, style and urgency as expressed through the melody. Then there is the accompaniment, whether it’s just a piano underneath or a ten-piece band with several different voices. But more importantly we need to open up our awareness to be informed by the dynamics the composer and lyricist have written into the song. Again I refer to it as a map, an intricate roadmap left up to the actor’s artistic interpretation.

In a piece of music you have so much information laid out before you in the dynamics. Pay attention to tempos. Does it start slowly and pick up speed? Or does it start at a moderate tempo but then get pull down to a deep legato pace? Or does it race through and suddenly crash to a stop throwing you and everyone else in the car into the dashboard. On top of paying attention to what the tempo is telling you about the character, pay attention to the tempo changes. Part of your ownership of the song comes in taking ownership of the tempo changes. As part of your investigation, ask yourself are you driving the band or is the band driving you? In one section are you being thrust forward by

the given circumstances (disguised as the orchestra underneath)? And then does it switch? Perhaps your character makes a choice and refuses to be pushed around by the gods or the whims of fate. Instead she puts her foot down and says that she is the boss, she is going to make all the decision for herself from here on out and it just so happens that this emotional life is illustrated through the actor taking control of the tempo and driving it into a steady, throbbing pace to finish the song. These are all your choices as the actor, and our choice in this case is informed by what our composer has laid down in the vocal score by way of tempo changes.

What about the key signature? What does the song tell you by being written in a driving 4/4 time, growing in speed, following key change after key change until it rings out in a belted note right in the actor's sweet spot? Or what does it mean that we follow a $\frac{3}{4}$ waltz merrily from start to finish with no key changes. I find key changes to be one of the strongest indicators of a change happening with the character. There is something happening and no matter what the composer isn't going to let you ignore it. Even if our acting of the song doesn't address the issue and we miss it completely, the audience will hear the key change and experience the character's transition despite us!

With this in mind I want to take another look at my final action scoring of *Cabaret*. As I have only written in the text of the song you do not see what is happening musically. At the very moment I have decided to make Sally's decision to abort her baby is right smack on the key change of the song. In reviewing the process that led up to that decision I can't conclusively say which was the initial or strongest indicator, the text or the musical key change.

Following the story and the arc of the song, it had to be around that time and something huge had to happen on the key change. Those were the two huge flashing red arrows that directed me through shaping this song. It is all in the text, and by text I mean the greater sense of the word text; as far as musicals go that means both the lyrics and the music. It is our job to master the craft the learning how to listen and interpret what the writers, lyricists, and composers give us. To fully prepare a character for musical theatre we must apply the text analysis work or our acting craft and deeply utilize music analysis. We are given both we must use both. If acting for a musical is different in any way from acting in a straight play is the factor of having even more information to utilize, investigate, and own. There is even more work to be done.

Conclusion

The actor's work for preparing a role for musical theatre is just as intricate, demanding, and thorough as for a straight play. The tools available to the musical theatre actor including the book, the lyrics, the music, and the choreography rival that of the tools available to an actor working on a classical piece. In straight theatre you usually will only have the play as place to start and inform your research. In a classical play you get the prose, you get verse, you get rhyming schemes and a sort of melodic line which all serve as tools to help you in your investigation. In musical theatre you get everything I mentioned about and described in great detail of Part Two. I wouldn't go so far as to claim the opposite is true, that acting for musical theatre is more extreme than acting for a straight play, I am just positing the idea for you to consider the integrity of musical theatre acting, or maybe I should say how YOU can choose to work on a musical. The additional skills necessary to be a successful musical theatre performer demand attention. You can't pretend you have a strong, well trained singing voice. You can't pretend to be gracefully proficient in dance. You must train. As actors, unfortunately we think we can get away without the rigorous hours spent training our instrument in the acting studio. What if you had as much discipline in training your acting instrument as dancers and musicians? This is the work that goes into being a musical theatre performer; apply it to your acting.

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VITA

Maggie Elizabeth Marlin was born in Iowa City, Iowa on September 15, 1979. She studied classical music as a vocal performance major at Drake University for two years. Then she studied with the National Theatre Institute both at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center in Connecticut and with the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford, England. She went on to receive her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the North Carolina School of the Arts in acting under Gerald Freedman in 2003. She spent the following year as an Actor-in-Residence at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, DC.

The next four years she lived in New York working as a performer in theatre, film, and television, a dance choreographer and fight director, and as a teacher of acting, musical theatre, movement, and stage combat, traveling up and down the East Coast as a guest artist at several universities and regional theatres. One of her richest experiences was volunteering with Free Arts, NYC where she assisted art therapists in working with children in the shelters of Harlem as a mentor. Maggie insists that an actor's work is enriched by experiencing life to the fullest and chasing after adventure. Make time to experience and give back to the world around you.