

Script Writing for a Character Driven Package

Class #3324 Thursday Period 3, 11:40 a.m. -12:40 p.m.

OBJECTIVES:

- To identify the specific demands of character driven packages and their uses.
- To look at samples and investigate techniques for designing character driven packages.

I. AN ORIENTATION TO CHARACTER DRIVEN PACKAGES

A. Why would I want to use a character driven package?

1. They're fun to perform
2. It's a great way to reach non barbershop audiences with our sound and build an audience base
3. It demands and develops new skills in our performers
4. It makes programming a performance easier
5. It is a necessary component for many contests

B. How is a character driven (musical theatre) package different from a regular entertainment package?

1. It is a "set" package
2. It uses more "speakers"
3. It is a totally fourth wall engaged (representational) style, as opposed to our normal concert (presentational) style. [video clip: RSC and Tuna]

II. TECHNIQUES FOR CREATING A CHARACTER DRIVEN PACKAGE

A. Starting with an idea: idea may be inspired by a song, story or other element, but it's always based on the character or character type

1. Where to find ideas?
2. Idea needs to be fed

B. Defining the character and the story

1. Begin to look at songs that might fit with this idea/character
2. You must eliminate: Understand that embracing one idea will mean the exclusion of some others. Some ideas just must be saved for another opportunity
3. Contest songs form the parameters
 - a. The lyrics to the songs are monologues
 - b. Forget the title, and look at the lyrics.
 - c. Research the lyrics, if possible
 - d. Address the lyrics as spoken word, and ask
 - 1) Who might be saying these words?
 - 2) What has just happened that would make them respond with these words?

3) What type of a situation would find all these characters together?

C. Writing the Scenario

1. Write for 2-4 major characters
2. Envision the risers as other possible settings represented by levels
3. Embrace the “givens”; they add to creativity
4. Write it as a narrative story at first
5. Start with “back story” (all the exposition that happens before the curtain ever goes up)
6. The actual “scene” should begin in the middle of something happening
7. Story should have a beginning, middle and an end
 - a. There is some problem to solve
 - b. The problem must be worth the time of the characters and the audience
 - c. Make it important: raise the stakes
8. Look for songs (2-3) that would help flesh out and define the story
9. Do a read through with the creative team, and take Comments

D. Writing the Script

1. Begin in the middle of the action: sometimes that is with song, sometimes it is with dialogue
2. Keep characters talking to each other, and not the audience
3. Do not put the name of the song in the dialogue: it must function as a title-less monologue. Let the audience make the leap
4. Break the exposition up between the characters
5. Understand that the audience does not have to know everything; they just need to know that there is something there
6. There is no rule as to the space between songs; let the story guide you
7. Do not try to write jokes. Rather, use real life situations and conversation that amused you
8. Write for an intelligent, non barbershop audience
9. Each character should have a different “sound”. This is easily accomplished by “casting” the show in your head, and hearing those characters talk as you write
10. Write in crowd responses for the rest of the chorus
11. Fill your head with the sounds of well-written dialogue before you begin to write. Most sit coms are cheaply written, look at the modern classics of TV writing
12. End the scene with a song

E. The First Read Through

1. Do what playwrights do: host a living room read through
2. Ask several “dramatic” types to read as one of the characters
3. Get recordings of the songs to play in the right spots
4. Invite the creative team to listen
5. The writer must listen to this, and not read. The writer must hear the words as they are spoken
6. Look for lines that get friendly groans
7. Take comments from the creative team
8. Rewrite; it might take several drafts
9. Do not show the script to the whole chorus until the almost final draft

III. WISDOM FROM THE WORLD OF MUSICAL THEATRE

- A. If the dialogue and the song both say the same thing, one of them is not necessary
- B. Songs must drive the story forward
- C. Characters in musical theatre do not sing “to the audience;” but the performers do cheat out and stay open
- D. Use musical theatre staging techniques to help tell the story
 1. Groups instead of rows
 2. Body angles
 3. Off stage focus
 4. Freezes and tableaux
- E. Remember that not everyone is a writer: they only think they are
- F. When it works, it is pure magic

IV. SUMMARY

Creating the script for a musical theatre package is very much like writing a Broadway musical where the songs already exist: like the Gershwin musical, “Crazy for You,” or the ABBA musical, ‘Mama Mia.’ The techniques are the same: The songs are story. We must approach these character driven packages as mini musicals.

V. CONCLUSION

Musical Theatre packages are a fun way to perform and a smart way to engage an audience. Although the techniques for creating them are a little different, the payoff for learning to use this color in our performance palette is huge.

METRO NASHVILLE CHORUS

Baseball Park Scenario

Revised 2-14-02

It's 1908. The town of Gary, Indiana has supported it's local baseball team for several years. The ballpark has been a popular gathering place in the evenings for the games, which draw quite a following. Men take their wives to games, or they meet up with their friends after work. Old men gather in the stands and talk of ball players from previous seasons. Teenagers cheer their favorites on. And young boys trade in pop bottles for pennies to get into the game, or they sneak in when the ticket taker isn't looking. The sun is always hot, the cokes and lemonade from the vendors are cold, and women sit in their hats and gloves in the socially approved way, watching America's favorite pastime.

The ballpark has been a source of pride over the year; donated by the city council and maintained by volunteers and fans. A small budget from the city council pays for maintenance. The park has been named after one of the early local ball stars, and the first paid coach for the local team, Johnny Hartman. Hartman Park has been around for over 20 years.

Katie Casey is responsible in a large way for the success of the ballpark. The daughter of one the earliest players for the local team, Katie, was playing ball when most young girls were dressing dolls. In high school, she stood on the baseline during baseball practice and second-guessed all the coaching. She spent every spare minute at the local ball park, and was one of the first collectors of the bubble gum baseball cards. It was Katie who led the crusade to get the city council to donate the property for the field, and build the stands and the press box.

It was Katie who suggested naming the field Hartman Park, and always lead the way in fund raising.

But its about to be the end of an era. The city council has been given a bid for the property, to put up one of these new grocery stores. And the team has been on a losing streak for the last two years. The city council says that Gary no longer has a team they can be proud of, so why not sell the property? It's

a prime location, and they resent the money they've spent on upkeep on the park the last few years. This year has been declared a watershed year. If the team produces a winning season, the city council has promised to let the ballpark remain open, and allow the team to continue. But if this is another losing season, then the ballpark will be closed and the property sold to the company that so desperately wants it for the grocery store.

As the lights come up, the crowd has gathered for the last game of the season, and possibly ever. They are standing in small clumps; frozen in anticipation. The team has won as many games as they've lost this year, and in fact, it has all come down to this last game. If the team can hold it together and win this game, they will be able to keep the park. If not, the park closes. The town is positive and supporting. Only this last game to win, and Hartman Park remains open.

The game is in progress. Bud is up to bat. As the ball is hit, and sails to left center, Katie cannot keep still, and makes her way from the top of the stands toward the field. She has made one last effort with the city council, but they are firm. She knows more than any one else how desperate the situation is.

As the ball is caught by the center fielder, Katie comes out onto the field, to encourage the team and Bud. The crowd becomes frustrated. The team and some of the crowd try to cheer on the second base runner who has tagged up and is running toward third.

SONG: TAKE ME OUT TO THE BALLGAME

During this song, the game proceeds. The song ends with the umpire making a highly disputed call; three called strikes. The batter and Katie both argue with the ump. The ump calls the player out again, and the stands go after the ump.

SONG: UNDECIDED parody with comedic choreography

Our hero strikes out, and the game is over. The town is heart broken. The performers all melt out of their last freeze, and turn upstage. Dialogue between two of the characters, now, commenting on the change, now that the park has been torn down.

And Katie Casey, oh, she still comes down here every game night, and walks the bases, which is now a parking and load up area for buggies and cars at

the grocery store. She stands where the stands used to be, and in her eyes you can see the game that only she is attending. When Katie walks by, you can almost smell the popcorn and hear the roar of the fans.

SONG; OH THERE YOU USED TO BE A BALLPARK

On “and the children try to find it...” a young child makes his way to Katie who explains to him about the ball park that used to be. At the end of the song, the young boy crossed DS to audience, with his glove in hand, on “what’s going to happen next year?”