

Making the Ballad Live!

Some of the comments from our Judging Panel for 2010 were:

1. Create classes to help choruses learn how to make a real commitment to the story lines of their songs. (LD)
2. Lyric flow is often missing. (CG)
3. Many songs come out in "chunks" or isolated sentences resulting in lack of continuity in the sound or the message. (CG)
4. Need to be more passion-driven so everything is more meaningful and less mechanical. (SW)
5. The freedom of expression that is a hallmark of the barbershop style is missing for many of your competitors. (LD)
6. Artistry is not strong in this region. (LD)
7. Many quartets need to make their phrasing plans more conversational. (CG)
8. Let go of "self" and get more into the characterization. (SW)

Commitment to the story line: Take a look at the lyrics. What are they telling you? How can you make them PERSONAL? It doesn't have to be the same story person-to-person. It just has to be the same emotion.

Lyric flow is often missing: When the lyrics are approached away from the music, a natural flow will be present. Sometimes the music notation gets in the way of a natural flow to the phrase delivery. This causes the song to come out in "chunks" or isolated sentences.

Need to be more passion-driven: Only when we look at what the lyrics are saying can we find the passion in them and then be able to deliver that passion.

Freedom of expression: Isn't this one of the great things about barbershop? We don't HAVE to do it the way the original composer wrote it! Not only do we have the opportunity to make it fit US, it is one of the HALLMARKS of barbershop harmony! (This is one of the things that drives "strict musicians" crazy when they first become a barbershopper!)

Artistry is not strong: Just what is artistry? How can we make art out of notes and words? Paint the picture with words, with texture, with passion, with freedom . . . all of the things mentioned above!

More conversational phrasing plans: Once again, pulling the lyrics away from the music allows the performer to make them conversational, and not forced into the plan of the composer.

Letting go of "self": All of our music has a story. That story is held in the lyrics. It may or may not be a story which we have had personal experience, but we have to find that story and let go of who we are today and find it in us to deliver the story as it was intended to be told.

Let's play with our new regional song, *Yesterday*. Look at the music. Let's read the lyrics exactly as they would be if we sang it JUST LIKE THE MUSIC.

Now, pull the lyrics away from the notes and look at them alone. How is that different? Does how the lyrics are written down make a difference in how they are read? Let's see

Version #1:

Yesterday all my troubles seemed so far away.
Now it looks as though they're here to stay.
Oh I believe in yesterday.
Suddenly I'm not half the girl I used to be.
There's a shadow hanging over me.
Oh, yesterday came suddenly.
Why he had to go I don't know, he wouldn't say.
I said something wrong now I long for yesterday.
Yesterday love was such an easy game to play.
Now I need a place to hide away.
Oh, I believe in yesterday.

Version #2:

Yesterday all my troubles seemed so far away. Now it looks as though they're here to stay. Oh I believe in yesterday. Suddenly I'm not half the girl I used to be. There's a shadow hanging over me. Oh, yesterday came suddenly. Why he had to go I don't know, he wouldn't say. I said something wrong now I long for yesterday. Yesterday love was such an easy game to play. Now I need a place to hide away. Oh, I believe in yesterday.

What is the difference in those two written versions?

Now, let's play with different characters.

- 14 year old girl and her first love - she has no idea what she did, but he's moved on to another girl and she'll never love again!
- 50 year old woman with her husband of 30 years - she knows exactly what she did to make him go away. Is he coming back? Gone for good?
- A mother and her grown son - she butted into his life one too many times. Will he ever forgive her?
- Your ideas?

Obviously, the director has the final word on how a song is interpreted. But we all must experience the story line, the passion behind the words, the freedom to express what the character is trying to say, using a conversational approach to the delivery within the framework of the plan, and doing it all within the character that allows our story to be told.

Remember - - the song is just one snapshot in time! There was a story before this song and the story continues after. You can decide what that is to make the story complete!