

From: How To Audition for the ⁴⁹
Musical Theatre
By Donald Oliver

Where to Find Songs

Although I have been tempted, I can't print a list of the songs that I feel would be appropriate for auditions. As you will see, there are so many possibilities that I would be severely limiting you by even listing a hundred or so. What I can do is tell you where you can find good material. It's not that difficult to do—it just takes time. And considerable research. But trust me, the results will pay off a thousand-fold over the years.

Too many performers know embarrassingly little about the musical theatre. I can't think of any other occupation wherein practitioners are not required to have even a minimal knowledge of their field. Can you imagine a doctor, lawyer, architect, or engineer doing his work without thoroughly knowing the history and craft of his chosen profession, and instead operating solely on "feelings," "gut instincts," and "natural abilities"?

In addition, I believe that every aspiring performer should have a basic knowledge of and familiarity with the songs in all the major musicals that have been performed on Broadway. You can call this part of your training, Doing Your Homework.

The minimum list of shows you should know includes the following:

- The five mega-hit shows by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II: *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel*, *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, and *The Sound of Music*;
- Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe's: *Brigadoon*, *My Fair Lady*, and *Camelot*;

- Jerry Herman's: *Hello, Dolly!*, *Mame*, *Mack and Mabel*, and *La Cage aux Folles*;
- Andrew Lloyd Webber's phenomenal successes: *Evita*, *Cats*, and *The Phantom of the Opera*;
- Stephen Sondheim's: *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, *Company*, *Follies*, *A Little Night Music*, and *Sweeney Todd*;
- Along with the following: *A Chorus Line*, *Annie Get Your Gun*, *Bells Are Ringing*, *Cabaret*, *Damn Yankees*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Finian's Rainbow*, *Funny Girl*, *Guys and Dolls*, *Gypsy*, *Kismet*, *Kiss Me Kate*, *Les Misérables*, *Man of la Mancha*, *Me and My Girl*, *ShowBoat*, *The Fantasticks*, *The Music Man*, *The Pajama Game*, and *West Side Story*.

This is by no means an exhaustive list. But if at the very least you have a familiarity with these shows, you will have a pretty solid grounding in what a good theatre song is, so when you select your songs you will have a strong basis for comparison. As a by-product, you will have a large list of songs not to sing—ever—at an audition. Why?

Because most of the songs in the above shows are much too well known—go back to “What Not To Sing” for the explanation. But many's the time a Director has said to a singer something like, “Do you have anything similar to ‘It Only Takes a Moment’ from *Hello, Dolly!*”—and the singer has sheepishly admitted not knowing “It Only Takes a Moment.” Knowing these shows gives you not only a background in your chosen field, but also a common vocabulary with your peers.

Also, the roster of musicals performed in summer stock and dinner theaters across the country is largely culled from the above list, augmented by whatever fairly recent shows have just become available. As you saw for yourself in an earlier chapter of this book, when those theaters put out audition notices in the trades they only list the names of the shows they are doing, not the full cast breakdowns. If you know the shows, you automatically know which roles are right for you.

Okay, now that you have taken the time to do the above, where do you find those “obscure” songs that I promise will work miracles for you?

The answer is coming in just a moment. I have to give you the explanatory buildup first.

Be aware of this: There have been well over 1,000 musicals performed on and off Broadway since the beginning of this century. Each show contains, on an average, 12 to 14 songs. Doing some simple multiplication in round numbers, we're now in the range of about 12,000 songs. Add to this number several hundred film musicals with about 5 or 6 songs in each movie and our total is now well over 13,500. To this total we can, if we wish, add songs that were written strictly for the pop market—or Tin Pan Alley as it was called in an earlier age—and the numbers skyrocket.

I do hear your immediate protests: “Most of those songs aren't that good, or they're not usable for our purposes. After all, your total includes opening choruses and other discountable material.”

Fine, I say. Even though I rounded-off on the low side, throw out three-fourths of them and we still have a staggering number to select from.

So, if there are so many to choose from, why do most people pick the same few over and over? Because, admittedly, many—if not most—of the songs I am alluding to are out-of-print, unpublished, or similarly unavailable for easy perusal. So what's left? The readily available standard repertoire. Too easy. You will find your audition material from the following sources:

STAGE PRODUCTIONS

We happen to be living in a lucky era right now. For finding songs, that is. In the last twenty years there have been many revues on (and off) Broadway presenting well-known and not-so-well-known songs by both major and—pardon the easy categorizing—minor theatre composers. Shows such as *Ain't Misbehavin'*, *Eubiel!*, *Leader of the Pack*, *1000 Years of Rock and Roll*, *Smokey Joe's Cafe*, *Stardust*, *Sophisticated Ladies*, and *Starting Here, Starting Now*. If you didn't see any of them, perhaps you know someone who was in one who may have the music

and could recommend some songs to you. All but two of the above shows were recorded. (The exceptions are *1000 Years of Rock and Roll* and *Stardust*).

RECORDINGS

Ben Bagley's Painted Smiles Record Company issued many albums devoted to the undeservedly lesser-known songs of nearly every famous Broadway songwriter. The records, which contained an average of 15 songs per disc are now out-of-print (as are almost all vinyl records) But the indomitable Mr. Bagley issued them all on compact disc (to date more than 50 are in print). As a boon to disc buyers, most of his CDs have bonus tracks, raising the average to about 20 great songs per disc. Widely available in retail stores—and by mail, directly from the company—they are a treasure trove of great audition material.

Another company, Music Masters, issued over sixty albums containing both previously out-of-print recordings and never-before-issued-on-record material by show and movie composers and lyricists. Their "Music of Broadway" series alone—eighteen discs full of fabulous songs—will provide you with dozens of choices for audition songs. Several of their albums were remastered onto compact discs and are also worth exploring. These will be a bit harder to find, but are worth the effort.

In 1982, a treasure trove of musical theatre materials long presumed "lost" were found in a warehouse in New Jersey. Musical theatre archivists and historians have been busy ever since, exhuming the hundreds of recovered songs (and their original orchestrations) and making this material live again. Because of their scholarship and tenacity, another series of recordings exists which will benefit you, the seeker of rare and obscure material. Particularly noteworthy in this group are the distinguished recordings of Gershwin shows on the Nonesuch label, and all the recordings conducted by John McGlinn on EMI.

A bit harder to find, but well worth the effort to do so, are the compact discs produced by an independent label, Shadowland-Rialto

Recordings. On four of their releases are over 110 songs—most of which would make great audition material.

You should also check out early Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Judy Garland and Peggy Lee albums. These singers had great songwriters writing and tailoring material specifically with them in mind, and you just may find a not-too-well-known song to your liking on their recordings, while avoiding the "signature" songs. Obviously there are many more singers to add to the four mentioned—look through and listen to the records in your parents' collection.

So, now you've found a song you like on a recording and you don't have any sheet music. What do you do?

First, you call whichever local store sells sheet music to see if, by chance, they have it—most stores in small neighborhoods have very small selections, though. Check with your musical friends. Look in the piano bench in your parents' home. Call up your piano-playing aunt; if she has the song, she'll be delighted to give it to you. I asked her.

If you've still yielded no results, don't be discouraged. The great search is on! Your next step is to call a store like Colony in New York City, which maintains one of the largest collections—for sale, of course—of in-print sheet music. See if the song is still obtainable. If it isn't available as an individual sheet, the song may be published in one of the hundreds of published collections—including so-called Fake Books—which provide lead vocal lines and chord symbols for about 1,000 songs per book; as well as specialized volumes with generic titles on the order of Great Songs of the 1960s. Several decades worth of these last were issued.

If you have no luck at Colony, or a similar store, call the Music Exchange, also in New York City, which sells its extensive collection of out-of-print music.

If you are still coming a cropper, go to the Library and Museum of the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center. On the first floor, in the music division, there exists a large and unusual collection of out-of-print sheet music, which can be photocopied on the premises for fifteen cents a page. There is an index of songs by title only, so be sure to know the correct title.

The music division of the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. is another resource. They are surprisingly helpful—so long as they are not violating copyright laws.

If you still haven't found the song through any of the aforementioned sources and if the sales help at the stores or the librarians can't recommend anywhere else to try, you can surely get a pianist to write out the music—at least a lead sheet—taking it off the record on which you found it.

Or, have a professional copyist “take-down” or transcribe the song from the record. More on this later.

The above suggestions certainly do not represent the only places to find songs. I offer them merely as a starting point, and I hope my thoughts will inspire and trigger some clever ones of your own. Undoubtedly the pianist with whom you work will have some ideas for you; but please, do not rely on his advice alone without doing some work by yourself.

No, it's not easy, but doing all that listening and research can only help you in the long run. After all, you are immersing yourself in the worlds of theatre and music—could there be more pleasurable homework?

APPENDIX A

A Partial List of Some of the Most Overdone, Uninspired, (and Inappropriate) Audition Songs

Use this list as a guide to songs you should not choose for your audition portfolio. It is current as of this writing. Songs go in and out of vogue, and one season lots of people will be doing the same song and, inexplicably, the next season no one will bring it in.

Take note that songs also appear here for more than just the reason that they are overdone. Songs such as the brilliant tour de force "Crossword Puzzle" and *Carousel's* magnificent "Soliloquy" are way too long to use as audition pieces. And songs such as "All That Jazz" and "Stars" don't reveal enough about the performer, no matter how well they are done.

Both types of songs should, as detailed in the main text in this book, not be considered ideal audition material.

Any song from *Jacques Brel*
 Ain't Gonna Let You Break My Heart Again
 All That Jazz (*Chicago*)
 And This Is My Beloved (*Kismet*)
 Anthem (*Chess*)
 Anyone Can Whistle (*Anyone Can Whistle*)
 Art Is Calling For Me (*The Enchantress*)
 A Simple Song (*Mass*)
 A Wonderful Guy (*South Pacific*)
 Be A Lion (*The Wiz*)
 Being Alive (*Company*)
 Cabaret (*Cabaret*)
 Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man (*Show Boat*)

Corner Of The Sky (*Pippin*)
 Crossword Puzzle (*Starting Here, Starting Now*)
 Don't Tell Mama (*Cabaret*)
 Empty Chairs at Empty Tables (*Les Misérables*)
 Everybody Says Don't (*Anyone Can Whistle*)
 Everything's Coming Up Roses (*Gypsy*)
 Extraordinary (*Pippin*)
 Feelin' Good (*The Roar of the Greasepaint...*)
 Funny (*City of Angels*)
 Gethsemane (*Jesus Christ Superstar*)
 Glitter And Be Gay (*Candide*)
 God Bless The Child
 Gorgeous (*The Apple Tree*)
 Her Face (*Carnival*)
 Hit Me With A Hot Note (*Sophisticated Ladies*)
 I Can Cook Too (*On The Town*)
 Ice Cream (*She Loves Me*)
 I Could Have Been a Sailor
 I Don't Remember Christmas (*Starting Here, Starting Now*)
 If I Loved You (*Carousel*)
 If I Sing (*Closer Than Ever*)
 I Got Rhythm (*Girl Crazy*)
 I'll Build A Stairway To Paradise (*George White's Scandals*)
 I'll Never Fall In Love Again (*Promises, Promises*)
 I Love A Piano (*Stop! Look! Listen!*)
 I Met A Girl (*Bells Are Ringing*)
 It Never Entered My Mind (*Higher and Higher*)
 I Wish I Were In Love Again (*Babes In Arms*)
 Joey, Joey, Joey (*The Most Happy Fella*)
 Johnny One-Note (*Babes In Arms*)
 Keepin' Out of Mischief Now (*Ain't Misbehavin'*)
 Losing My Mind (*Follies*)
 Love, I Hear (*A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To The Forum*)
 Love, Look Away (*110 in the Shade*)
 Luck Be A Lady (*Guys and Dolls*)
 Mama, A Rainbow (*Minnie's Boys*)
 Maria (*West Side Story*)

Marry Me a Little (*Company*)
 Maybe (*Annie*)
 Maybe This Time (*Cabaret—movie*)
 Metaphor (*The Fantasticks*)
 Moonfall (*The Mystery of Edwin Drood*)
 Much More (*The Fantasticks*)
 My Ship (*Lady in the Dark*)
 Never (*On The Twentieth Century*)
 Nobody Does It Like Me (*Seesaw*)
 Not a Day Goes By (*Merrily We Roll Along*)
 Not Since Ninevah (*Kismet*)
 Nothing (*A Chorus Line*)
 On My Own (*Fame—movie*)
 On The Other Side Of The Tracks (*Little Me*)
 People (*Funny Girl*)
 Promises, Promises (*Promises, Promises*)
 She Loves Me (*She Loves Me*)
 Soliloquy (*Carousel*)
 Someone to Watch Over Me (*Oh, Kay!, Crazy For You*)
 Stars (*Les Misérables*)
 Stranger In Paradise (*Kismet*)
 Strong Woman Number (*I'm Getting My Act Together ...*)
 The Greatest Love Of All (*The Greatest—movie*)
 The Impossible Dream (*Man of La Mancha*)
 The Joker (*The Roar of the Greasepaint...*)
 There's Always One You Can't Forget (*Dance a Little Closer*)
 They Call The Wind Maria (*Paint Your Wagon*)
 They Were You (*The Fantasticks*)
 Think of Me (*The Phantom of the Opera*)
 Tomorrow (*Annie*)
 Tonight At Eight (*She Loves Me*)
 Try Me (*She Loves Me*)
 Wait Till You See Her (*By Jupiter*)
 What Am I Doin'? (*Closer Than Ever*)
 What I Did For Love (*A Chorus Line*)
 Where Am I Going? (*Sweet Charity*)
 Why Can't I Walk Away? (*Maggie Flynn*)

You Can Always Count on Me (*City of Angels*)
 You're Nothing Without Me (*City of Angels*)
 Your Feet's Too Big (*Ain't Misbehavin'*)

It's also a good idea to avoid brand new hit songs. Even before *Cats* opened on Broadway too many singers performed "Memory" at auditions, each one thinking that they would be the only one to be doing it at that point in time. (*Cats* opened in London a year and a half before it came to New York.) And avoid "rediscovered" songs from currently playing revivals. No sooner did the 1994 revival of *Damn Yankees* open on Broadway than "Whatever Lola Wants" enjoyed an immediate resurgence of popularity as an audition song. It's too obvious a choice. Play it safer with little-known older material. There's tons of it to choose from!