

The Conflict Duet – A Definition

A duet is a song in which two characters sing simultaneously for at least a portion of the song. They could sing in harmony, unison, or counterpart; they could sing the same or different words, or even descant. But at some point they sing at the same time.

Typically the first character to sing is attempting to convince the second person about a particular point of view. The most straightforward duet is one in which one character sings first, then the second joins in with the same words and music, or has a stanza by himself, followed by a section in which both singers sing simultaneously. Generally, you know the second singer has been converted to the first person's point of view when they're both singing together. A "convincing song" if you will.

However, we are interested in a duet in which the characters do not reconcile to the same point of view: a conflict duet. In a conflict duet, the characters typically do not sing the same music...the different music is an illustration/metaphor of their different world vies. The second character's music or words are in contrast, or rebuttal, to the first character's stanzas. However, the goal is still for both characters to sing simultaneously at some point, not merely alternatingly. It's often very rewarding to have both characters sing exactly the same lyrics, but their point of view makes the meaning entirely opposite. If the lyrics differ during the simultaneous portions, craft the lyric to make effective use of rhyme and assonance, not only internally within each character's stanza, but with each other's stanzas as well. e.g., if one character is ending on a long whole note with an OO vowel, you'll want the other character on an OO vowel as well, not an EE vowel, or they'll clash.

The actual sound of the lyrics might differ as well: one singer has clipped, rapid phrases with a lot of consonants, while the second has round tones on sustained notes. For example: Quarter-notes vs. half notes.

You might find the following structure serves you very well in constructing a conflict duet:

First A -- first character states his argument

Second A -- first character sees he's not been convincing; tries a second tack

B-section: second character's rebuttal

Final A -- both characters sing together (perhaps including elements of the B-section if they're still arguing)

Examples of Conflict Duets

Classic:

I'll Never Be Jealous Again (*The Pajama Game*)

Like Everyone Else (*Side Show*)

Anything You Can Do (*Anything Goes*)

In Praise of Women (*A Little Night Music*)

Contemporary

Who I'd Be (*Shrek*)

Crazier Than You (*Addams Family*)

Chip on My Shoulder (*Legally Blonde*)