

## Assignments

**Bookwriters: Creating characters with clearly defined goals** -Write an outline for a short musical. The central character is a young songwriter in Nashville (male or female, your choice) and another important character is a Nashville recording executive. The songwriter is trying to get the executive to listen to his(her) song. In the beginning, the executive is too busy to listen, but in the end he or she relents and agrees to hear the song. This gives you a beginning, middle and end organization to the scene. You fill in the details of the middle. How does your singer convince the executive to take the time to listen to the song? The time span of this short libretto should be less than a single day – it should begin during office hours and end before closing time.

Before doing the outline, think about the characters. Who is your songwriter? What is he or she willing to do to get this audition? Will your character lie, cheat or steal to get a foot in the door? Is your character principled, determined to make it on the merits of his or her work? Is your character down to the last hope – no money, no place to stay, etc. or is this person still reasonably comfortable, has a day job, is on lunch hour and might lose a job if he or she doesn't get back in time? What's at stake here? The songwriter's ego? Next meal? Job? Spousal relationship (This is the last straw, Harry. Sell that song today or you go to work for my father -- or we're finished.)? What about the recording executive? Male or female? Is there a romantic attraction? One-sided or mutual? Is the exec under some stress not related to the songwriter's audition?

This will be a short one-act musical. However each event in your libretto must grow logically from the wants and needs of the characters, and the cause-and-effect relationships between events must be clear, even if unstated. (You don't have to say Johnny dated his best friend's girl, therefore his best friend punched him in the nose. Just say Johnny dated his best friend's girl. His best friend punched him in the nose. We'll see the cause-and-effect.)

Unless you are working with a songwriter or songwriting team, don't confuse this assignment with that given to the composer and the lyricist. Invent your own characters, with their own reasons for what they are doing, then write the scene.

**Composers: Creating music to reflect character and theme** -The following lyric is to be sung by a young songwriter (Man or woman) who is seeking fame and fortune in Nashville. You may find the lyric somewhat ludicrous, but the character is deadly serious. He or she has written this song and is going to perform it as an audition, hoping to get a job in a publishing house, or better yet, hoping some important singer will include the song on an upcoming album. The songwriter thinks this song has the potential to make it to the charts. Write music for his or her lyrics:

I'LL PAY A PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS  
A NICKLE FOR YOUR KISSES  
A QUARTER FOR YOUR ARMS  
AND A DOLLAR FOR YOUR HEART

I'LL HAVE TO CHECK MY BANK ACCOUNT  
EVALUATE MY SAVINGS  
TO SEE JUST WHAT AMOUNT  
I CAN AFFORD TO PAY FOR LOVE.

BY THE STARS ABOVE ME  
THIS IS NOT A JOKE  
WILL YOU STILL LOVE ME  
AFTER I AM BROKE  
I AM NOT A RICH MAN  
BUT FOR A START

I'LL PAY A PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS  
AND A DOLLAR FOR YOUR HEART.

You'll notice that the B section is extended beyond its usual 8 bars...and the final A section is not complete, probably only 4 bars long, to compensate, unless the notes are extended to create a finale effect in the last line.

Now, the audience may laugh at this song, but the singer is earnest and serious. The music is meant to be music he wrote. Make an effort to get into his head. Write your version of *his* music.

*If you are working with a lyricist, you may write music for the lyric created below rather than the lyric given above.*

**Lyricists: Creating lyrics about the character's thoughts and feelings about the action of the play** - Let's stay with the hopeful Nashville songwriter, although you get to choose whether your character is male or female. Let your songwriter be young (early 20's) and star-struck. This audition is going to go well. Everything is riding on it. Write a song, in your character's voice, that will be sung either before, during or after the scene in the executive's office. Your lyric will not be the audition song as in the composer's assignment above. The lyric is about the character's aspirations *before* the meeting with a recording industry executive. This lyric is about what the character wants. You decide what that is: I want to sell the song and make enough money to buy a new car? I want to sell the song and prove to Sally (or Harry or Mom or Dad) that I can really make it in this business. I want to get this executive's attention because I think he (or she) is the most attractive human being I have ever seen...whatever you think is uppermost in the character's mind. This should be written in the A-A-B-A form.

*If you are working with a bookwriter, you may write your lyric to fulfill one of the beats in the bookwriter's outline above.*