

The Comedy Song – A Definition

A comedy song is defined as a song in which the lyrics make us laugh out loud more than once. Comedy songs are generally complaints, and very often indulge in self-pity. Self-pity is only attractive when it makes us laugh.

Ballads and uptempo songs are characterized by the style of the music, but in comedy songs the words take precedence. Frequently the music to a comedy song is very attractive and charming, but the audience seldom cares as long as it supports the lyrics, which make us laugh out loud.

Topics for comedy songs are usually in the nature of a complaint of some kind, may be dripping with self-pity and always are rooted in some sort of problem. In “I’m Just A Girl Who Cain’t Say No,” Ado Annie thinks she has a terrible disease. She believes that the other girls don’t have the feelings she experiences when she’s with a “feller.”

“Adelaide’s Lament” in *Guys And Dolls* is that her perpetual cold is probably psychosomatically induced by her unwed status.

In *Brigadoon*, a young girl’s search for “The Love Of My Life” thinly disguises her questionable virtue.

Tevye’s “If I Were A Rich Man” from *Fiddler* is mainly about his misconceptions of wealth.

In each case there is an element of complaint – and something real to complain about: poverty, lack of virtue, chronic sniffles or the painful realities of puberty. Normally a complaint is not attractive and writers eschew self-pity like the plague – and they ought to! Except when writing comedy songs.

Comedy songs are much harder to write than they are to define. However, there’s at least one in every successful score, and two or three are to be hoped for. Audiences love to laugh. When attending a musical, the audience’s expectation is that a fair amount of entertainment will ensue. Originally, remember, the form was called musical comedy, and the responsibility to help an audience laugh remains strongly a part of the genre.

Examples of Comedy Songs

Classic:

I'm Just A Girl Who Cain't Say No (*Oklahoma*)

Adelaide's Lament (*Guys and Dolls*)

The Love Of My Life (*Brigadoon*)

If I Were A Rich Man (*Fiddler on the Roof*)

Contemporary

The Internet is for Porn (*Avenue Q*)

Sex is in the Heel (*Kinky Boots*)

You and Me (But Mostly Me) (*Book of Mormon*)