

Music Lab

Identify Types of Musical Theatre Songs — Unit Four

Consider the three shows you outlined in Unit One. Work through the song lists and categorize the songs in the four song categories: Ballade, Charm Song, Comedy Song, and Musical Scene. If you are unsure about an ensemble number, use the fifth category.

As you categorize the songs:

- What observations can you make about each type of song?
- How does each song conform to the definition of a category?
- How does each song differ from the definition of a category?
- Do any songs seem to straddle two categories? If so, why?
- Do any songs seem to contain elements of three categories? If so, why?

Other analysis of musical theatre songs consider the following:

The Opening Number: The song which opens the show.

The Want Song: Nearly always the second song in the show where the main character states his or her desires or needs — the items which drive the plot.

The Eleven O’Clock Number: The song the main character sings at the climax at the show coming to terms with the journey he or she has made. In the golden age of musical theatre the timing of the shows with an eight o’clock curtain caused this number to happen right around eleven o’clock.

The Finale: The last number in the show.

Each of these four songs can fit into the categories at the top of the page.

- Can you identify these four songs in the scores you have outlined?
- What are the similarities between these songs in each of these shows?
- What are their differences?
- Do the each of the four song types in the shows you are modelling tend to fit into one of the categories more than another? If so, which one and why?