



Hey, What's **GOIN' ON?**

Telling A Story

Subtext

Situations in life that are the most interesting are ones in which there is a great deal of drama. We are feeling strong emotions, and we feel there is a lot at stake. For example, think of the types of conversations that you find yourself wanting to eavesdrop on, or the situations that you witness, or participate in, when you can't tear yourself away. Those words "you'll never guess what he said then," or "I wouldn't tell anyone but you, but." These are the same stories and situations that your audience is interested in. When you really care about what's happening and what you're saying, you're able to transmit that involvement to the audience. We rarely hear music written about just an ordinary day, with ordinary things happening, about which we have no particular feelings. However, sometimes a performer makes us feel that way. Particularly when they recite the lyric as if they had memorized it. The subtext is the story behind what you are singing. It reflects who you are, where you are, who you're talking to, how you feel about them, how you feel about what you are saying, and what you want to happen in this particular situation. The subtext has all prior information about your relationship with this person or persons.

*There is a world of
accumulated feeling
back of the trite,
dramatic expression,*

"I am going away."

-----Theodore Dreiser

Why develop a subtext?

1. To give us a sense of the whole. If we sing only from moment to moment, it doesn't always add up.
2. To galvanize our concentration. There are frequently distractions which take us away from what we are trying to say.
3. To get rid of the inessentials. In a 3 or 4 minute song, we can't possibly say everything we feel about any one subject. In order to make a clear picture for our audience, we have to have a clear picture for ourselves.
4. To express our own individuality, and add our own viewpoint what we are saying, and to make a song "our own."
5. To stimulate a belief in what we are doing.

Who's singing and to whom?

Each one of us has many aspects of ourselves that come into play when we relate to different people and to different situations. We act differently when we are in our work space than we do when we are with our close friends. We may be very confident in some situations, and extremely shy and uncomfortable in others. These are some of the things to consider when answering the question: who is singing and to whom?

1. Who are you talking to?
2. What is your relationship to the character or characters to whom you are speaking? Consider attitudes such as joyful, passionate, confiding, trusting, nervous, furious, curious, playful, suspicious, etc.

What's happening?

The dramatic situation

What circumstances or situation led you to singing this song? Are you seducing someone? Are you declaring undying love? Are you declaring undying hatred? Are they getting ready to leave town, marry someone else? Are they driving you crazy? How? Do you think you'll die without them? If it's not an intense feeling or interesting dramatic situation, why should the audience listen?

What do you want to happen?

The singer's intention

Intention is the singer's "point of view;" how the singer wants the situation to turn out. Intention is a verb. The same song can be changed dramatically, depending on the intention of the singer. For example, you might sing a sad love song with the intention of saying good-bye forever to a lover who has hurt you. You might sing the same song with the intention that your lover will feel sorry for how they have hurt you, and attempt to influence them to stay with you.

Intention is the part of the sub-text that is frequently unclear to the listener. Try to express your singer's intention in a simple sentence with vivid words. For example, your intentions might be to "melt your lover's heart of ice, Or to "crush your lover's resistance to your pleas," to "put stars in your lover's eyes," or to "sweep them off their feet." Try to use vivid words in your description. (Vivid or alive words that substitute for feeling sad might be: feeling "crushed," feeling "torn apart," feeling "washed-up," feeling "cast-adrift."

Some "alive" descriptions

That's funny	That tickles me, that cracks me up, we howled with laughter.
I'm happy	I'm walking on air, I went bonkers, I'm spinning, he knocks me out.
How about	Snug as a bug, wound up like a top, what a worm!, heart of stone, heart like ice, cut me like a knife, cry me a river, oozing malice, slithering into the room, floating through the door, glowing with love, etc.

Consider These Three Ideas:

1. Who is singing and to whom am I singing?
2. What's happening, and
3. What do I want to happen?

Answering these questions will bring you a long way toward understanding what you want to say in your song, how you want to say it, and toward an understanding of how to communicate your ideas to your audience in a personal and an engaging manner.

A List of Emotions

Afraid:

abandoned, alarmed, anxious, apprehensive, cautious, concerned, desperate, fearful, frightened, hesitant, horrified, hysterical, nervous, panicked, petrified, scared, shocked, threatened, terrified, timid, troubled, worried

Angry:

apathetic, bitter, contemptuous, cross, cruel, defiant, disobedient, enraged, fuming, furious, hateful, heated, hostile, incensed, indignant, infuriated, irate, jealous, livid, mad, mean, outraged, raging, raving, resentful, spiteful, stubborn, unforgiving, vengeful

Confident:

amazed, ambitious, brave, calm, certain, convinced, courageous, determined, empowered, enthusiastic, exhilarated, hopeful, independent, loyal, positive, proud, respectful, secure, strong, triumphant, trusting

Doubtful:

bewildered, bored, cautious, confused, despairing, distant, distrustful, dubious, hesitant, evasive, indecisive, indifferent, insecure, powerless, preoccupied, puzzled, skeptical, suspicious, timid, torn, uncertain, uninformed, wavering

Happy:

calm, carefree, cheerful, comfortable, complacent, contented, ecstatic, elated, enthusiastic, exalted, excited, festive, glad, grateful, inspired, joyous, jubilant, lighthearted, optimistic, peaceful, playful, pleased, relaxed, relieved, satisfied, serene, thrilled

Hurt:

abandoned, crushed, disappointed, disillusioned, disregarded, heartbroken, helpless, offended, shocked

Interested:

absorbed, amazed, ambitious, attracted, awed, concerned, curious, eager, earnest, engrossed, enthusiastic, excited, involved, fascinated, inquisitive, intent, intrigued, sympathetic, pitying

Irritated:

annoyed, exasperated, frustrated, goaded, grumpy, impatient, offended, provoked, shaky, tense, upset

Loving:

accepting, admiring, adoring, affectionate, awed, close, compassionate, considerate, fond, humble, passionate, pitying, sharing, tender, understanding, warm

Sad

cheerless, defeated, depressed, despairing, dismal, dreary, dull, gloomy, grieving, helpless, hopeless, lonely, low, melancholic, miserable, moody, pessimistic, regretful, remorseful, somber, sorrowful, sulky

Shamed:

disgraced, dishonored, embarrassed, helpless, humiliated, mortified, regretful, remorseful, uncomfortable, weak

Guidelines for writing a subtext

1. What's this song about? For example: finding love, losing love, finding love finally, finding it for the first time, going home, leaving home, saying good-bye, saying hello, etc.
2. In a simple sentence, express the singer's intention in saying these words. Intention is a verb. For example, your intention might be to win back your lover, or expressed in "alive" words, "to melt your lover's heart of ice". Or an intention might be to arouse your listeners in a patriotic or a religious way, as in "to stir their hearts," or "set their hearts on fire."
3. Who are you? Sometimes an artist will play another role to make a point. For example, in songs such as Randy Newman's "Sail Away," or a song like "Something Cool," or "Guess Who I Saw Today." Even if the character is you, describe who that you is.
4. Who are you speaking to?
5. What is your relationship to the character or characters to whom you are speaking?
6. How do you feel about what you are saying? Consider attitudes and emotions such as joyful, worried, uneasy, cynical, incredulous, passionate, sharp, confiding, trusting, nervous, impulsive, furious, indifferent, blase. Use "alive" words for your attitude. Think about the physicality of these attitudes. How do you look when you're heart-broken, jumping for joy, on the prowl, how do you move?
7. Where is this scene taking place? What are your physical surroundings?
8. Why are you and the character involved in this situation? What happened right before this song started? What do you want to happen next?
9. When is the scene taking place? What year, month, day, time, time of life.
10. Write out a subtext. Use alive words. Start with a main intention for each section. then, go through your song line by line, observing and noting intention, the unspoken thoughts and feelings. This is so that as you learn the words to the song you will also be learning the intentions. The inner and outer line work together from the beginning. Make each line natural.

"Emotion is the genuine feeling from correct art. Understand the character, know what the inner action is, establish relationship to the other character(s), and find an appropriate reference from your own experience."

Advice to the Players