

Training Overview for Documentary Songwriters

Training Outcome

At the end of this training, DocSong teaching artists will be able to work with diverse groups of people to generate and record songs from people's spoken words. The songs will be sent to the home office, with melody, lyrics, and chords, ready to be arranged so that they can be recorded in the studio for release on streaming services.

Foundational principles and shared understandings:

1. Everyone's life has meaning.
2. When we create and share beauty, we help ourselves and others feel more alive, more connected, and less alienated.
3. When we hear beauty, we feel more alive, more connected, and less alienated.
4. Music is a way of expressing and communicating emotion.
5. "Talent" is a set of skills that anyone can learn.
6. The creative process is a process.

Essential Questions

1. What is the impact of documentary songwriting?
 - a. On the story source?
 - b. On a listener? (while observing the song being written, or when it is performed, or when it is recorded and released?)
 - c. On the teaching artist?
2. What is powerful about an act of collaborative creation?
3. Why can striving for artistic excellence be inspiring? (What is the benefit of striving for artistic excellence?)
4. What is artistry? What is authenticity? What is accessibility?

Curriculum Overview		
Training Module	Key Skills	Essential Questions/Module
Module 1: Finding the Story Source (2 hours)	<p>At the end of this module, students will be able to...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Determine possible story sources 2. Know how to articulate documentary songwriting 3. Contact and make arrangements for a session 4. Create a safe space and set the story source at ease 	<p>Who can be a story source?</p> <p>How do I connect with possible story sources?</p> <p>How do I establish trust with a story source?</p>

<p>Module 2: Drawing forth a story (2 hours)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Navigate Google Docs 2. Offer story guidelines (what kind of story?) 3. Type the story as told 4. Ask follow-up questions 5. Bring out and identify the emotional message 6. Identify archetypal themes in story 	<p>How do I make sure that a story source tells me a story that has sufficient emotion to warrant a song?</p> <p>What makes a viable song?</p> <p>How do I identify what the emotional message of the story is?</p>
<p>Module 3: Developing lyrics (2 hours)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Break the story into a prose poem 2. Identify a probable song form and structure, e.g., <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. 8 bar verse, 4 bar chorus b. Series of 4 bar verses with no chorus needed 3. Recall songs with that structure to use as models and for internal reference 4. Decide where the title occurs in the song structure. E.g., <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Chorus contains title b. Or if no chorus used: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Title occurs at the <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Opening of the song 2. Start of each verse 3. End of each verse 4. Start and end of each verse 5. Break lyrics into possible refrain or chorus, verses, and possibly bridge 	<p>How do I know what to eliminate in order to turn a large amount of text into a short amount of lyrics?</p> <p>How do I know if I have enough material from which to draw lyrics?</p> <p>How do I know how many lines long the chorus and verses should be?</p> <p>How do I choose a model song form to guide me in guiding my story source?</p>
<p>Module 4 (Part I): Starting to sing and design a melody (3 hours)</p> <p>https://docs.google.com/document/d/1CvoRKBJE_XGC6npj2g8ck9YnvLaCt2gRGivbA18uwYI/edit</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify the line to begin singing with the story source 2. Slate the take on a smartphone for playback and review 3. Coach melody development 4. Build on melody offered by the story source 5. Identify the melodic identity or motif 6. Create an emotional contour to the song; connect melody to key emotional moments 7. Recall melodies with that contour to 	<p>How do I get them to sing? And how do I get them to sing something original?</p> <p>How do I create the arc of a melody from a shorter melodic idea?</p> <p>How do I decide when the melody is good enough?</p> <p>How do I decide how much direction I should give them?</p>

	<p>use as models and for internal reference</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Sketch out the length of phrases and the spacing between phrases 9. Position phrases appropriately in relationship to the downbeat – leading into, starting on, and starting after. 10. Apply melodic pacing features: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Space between lines b. Repetition c. Cadences d. Slow words e. Fast words f. Big moments g. Vocables 11. And melodic pitch features:: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Scale choice b. Step motion c. Leaps d. Arpeggios e. Melismas f. Slurring into the desired chord 	<p>How do I complete the process so that the story source doesn't feel the need to keep improvising and refining?</p>
<p>Module 4 (Part II): Building a complete song of melodic and lyric phrases(3 hours)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify groove 2. Use the interaction and relationship between groove and melody to build the song 3. Check the singability of the song <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Time to breathe between lines b. Time to absorb lyrical messages c. Ease of finding the pitch of the next line d. Ease of adding a harmony e. Pleasure in singing the words and the held-out notes 4. Adapt remaining lyrics to work with the melody 5. Decide whether to add a bridge 	<p>How can I tell if a song is singable?</p> <p>How do I decide when the lyrics are done?</p>
<p>Module 5: Chords & Accompaniment (2 hours)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify primary chords of song 2. Identify strum or keyboard playing pattern 3. Recall songs with grooves that 	<p>Which instrument should I use?</p> <p>What are the possible grooves and how do I test them out with the</p>

	<p>might work with the melody</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Identify chord substitutes to heighten the emotional message 5. Identify moments of harmony 6. Blend voice in moments of harmony 7. Assess the viability of the song: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Is this a song? b. Is it singable? c. Is it portable? 8. Test the performability of the song: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Does the singer find it easy to feel and express the drama in the arc of the lyrics and melody? b. Can a live audience grasp the setting and emotion on first listen? 	melody?
<p>Module 6: Navigating different contexts and settings (varies depending on musical background) (2 hours)</p>		<p>How do I manage a private session?</p> <p>How do I manage a public session, with an audience?</p> <p>How do I manage my own emotional responses as I go through this process?</p> <p>How do I manage the post-workshop reflection period when the story source or I have follow-up ideas to improve the song?</p>

Additional Curriculum Resources	
Training Module	Module-specific resources
Module 1: Finding the Story Source (2 hours)	
Module 2: Drawing forth a story (2 hours)	
Module 3: Developing lyrics (2 hours)	
Module 4 (Part I): Starting to sing and design a melody (3 hours)	
Module 4 (Part II): Building a Song (3 hours)	
Module 5: Chords & Accompaniment (2 hours)	
Module 6: Navigating different contexts (2 hours)	

Student Self-Assessment & Reflection

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