



Curriculum Overview for Documentary Songwriters - 7 Modules for 7 Steps

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
<p>Module 1: Draw forth a story</p> <p>https://docs.google.com/document/d/1zDNGy_3EEJN42wrJoosF9_t6x5PSkUE_C4kgv6kRwLc/edit</p>	<p>At the end of this module, a teaching artist 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 	<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>source at ease</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Navigate Google Docs 6. Offer story guidelines (what kind of story?), one in which the story source: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Tells about a personal experience from any time in life b. Took some action c. Felt an emotion 7. Type the story as told 8. Ask follow-up questions 9. Bring out and identify the emotional message 10. 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>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>Module 2: Distill into a free verse poem</p> <p>https://docs.google.com/document/d/1j_SOgyVWcMWR72KTHGVJc87KvfkZCnAp7Sp08hCEh0g/edit</p>	<p>At the end of this module, a teaching artist will be able to...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Make a copy to preserve the original story 2. Highlight the phrases that: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Show emotion b. Might feel good to sing c. Move the story along d. Help to imagine the setting 3. Delete what's not highlighted 4. Repeat until down to close to 12 lines 5. Choose places to press return and break the remaining lines into a free verse poem 	<p>How do I know what to keep and 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>Module 3: Shape into lyrics</p> <p>https://docs.google.com/document/d/1edKFN6ejN0ctGqDlqE8QHjjuyKWJNYa7TbC05KHN5M8/edit</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Choose a few lines to test out as possible refrains and paste them all at the top. Look for candidates that might <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Convey the song's message in an image (Rock around the Clock) b. Convey the request of the singer (Will You Love Me Tomorrow) c. Feel rhythmically fun to sing (Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer) d. Might lend themselves to 	<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 style="text-align: center;">melodic leaps or held-out notes (Edelweiss, Edelweiss)</p> <p>Decide whether</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Divide the free verse poem into episodes or verses and make space in between to paste in the refrain candidates 3. Decide whether to test the refrain candidates at the <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Opening of the song (Joy to the World) b. Start of each verse (Somewhere Over the Rainbow) c. End of each verse (Walking in a Winter Wonderland) 4. Paste and assess the power of each refrain candidate. Select a favorite or combination of favorites if two or more candidates seem to work best as a multi-line chorus. 	
<p>Module 4: Design a melody for one verse and a refrain</p> <p>https://docs.google.com/document/d/1CvoRKBJE_XGC6njp2g8ck9YnvLaCt2gRGivbA18uwYI/edit</p>	<p>At the end of this module, a teaching artist will be able to...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Decide on the arc of the melody for the verse and refrain , choosing among: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. High point at beginning (Somewhere Over the Rainbow) b. High point in the middle (Amazing Grace) c. High point at the end (Take Me Out to the Ballgame) 2. Decide which verse already looks most promising to sing. 3. Decide whether to sing the opening line of the verse first, followed by the second, third, and so on, OR to sing and discover a melody for the refrain on its own first. 4. Slate the take on a smartphone for playback and review. 5. Allow the story source ample time to start singing. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Offer coaching if the story source experiences excessive 	<p>How do I get them to sing? And how do I get them to sing something distinctive?</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>How do I complete the process so that the story source doesn't feel the need to keep improvising and refining?</p> <p>How can I tell if a song is singable?</p>

	<p>self-doubt or an inability to try</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">b. Look for rhythmic pattern in words and use that pattern to form the basis of a hand-clapping or foot tapping groove and encourage the story source to sing along with that groovec. As a last resort, sing a monotone and ask the story source on which words the melody should rise or fall. <p>6. Listen to playbacks and choose the preferred raw idea</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">a. One that has a distinctive leap between pitchesb. One that has a distinctive rhythm suggested by the words <p>7. Create an emotional contour to the song; connect melody to key emotional moments</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Recall melodies with that contour to use as models and for internal reference <p>8. Expand and enhance the raw idea into a complete verse and refrain melody, using various techniques, if necessary:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Add space and pauses between phrasesb. Slide phrases earlier or later in relationship to the downbeat – leading into, starting on, and starting after.c. Choose words on which to change pitches higher or lower to enhance the emotional message<ol style="list-style-type: none">i. Sing a harmony and then use notes from the harmony to replace selected notes in the melody	
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	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Check the singability of the song <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. The melody suggests a pulse and groove to tap or dance to b. Ample time to breathe between lines c. Time in between lines to absorb lyrical messages d. Ease of finding the pitch of the next line e. Ease of adding a harmony f. Pleasure in singing the words and the held-out notes 	
<p>Module 5: Edit the remaining verses to fit the melody</p> <p>https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Y5JONpcc_dwJsOJKHXjklL5YjhtA9zp839BC4WRSZU/edit</p>	<p>At the end of this module, a teaching artist will be able to...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Adapt and edit remaining lyrics to work with the melody <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Reorder lines, reorder words b. Try out lines from the original story that may work after all c. Explore synonym possibilities, if necessary 2. Decide whether to add a bridge <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Explain that a bridge offers contrast in pitch or pacing b. A bridge provides a change away from the main melody but then leads the singer back into the main melody 	<p>How do I decide when the lyrics are done?</p>
<p>Module 6: (optional) Arrange the chords</p> <p>https://docs.google.com/document/d/1hw1uU8OLBC44w86q0NVVXDd74bl20diEHK0kpa4ovYQ/edit</p>	<p>At the end of this module, a teaching artist will be able to...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify primary chords of song <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Identify the key b. Test out the 3 probable major chords, I, IV, V 2. Identify chord substitutes to heighten the emotional message if necessary <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Test out probable minor chords, ii, iii, iv b. Test out flatted seven chord, VII c. Test out Major 7 chord, IV7 3. Identify lines of harmony 	<p>Which instrument should I use?</p> <p>What are the possible grooves and how do I test them out with the melody?</p>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Blend voice in moments of harmony 5. Identify strum or keyboard playing pattern 6. Recall songs with accompaniment patterns that might work with the melody. 	
<p>Module 7: Perform the song in a <i>recording</i> or a live setting</p> <p>https://docs.google.com/document/d/1HrLejF1PQ5JwWpRGqK2ca9WdmsrV0u3mkgMW-aQ_hEModule 7: Perform the song in a recording or a live settingc/edit</p>	<p>At the end of this module, a teaching artist will be able to...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assess the viability of the song: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Is this a song? b. Is it singable? 2. Test the performability of the song: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Would another 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 a first listen? 3. Rehearse the song together until story source and teaching artist both feel comfortable 4. Record and share the song <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. by text or email if it's a recording b. In a performance if there's to be an audience 5. Wrap up the session: Ask the story source to speak or write a comment for the website and to complete an evaluation form: <p>https://docs.google.com/document/d/1bMIATmdyIEdx8U6vThn5l_1hbbchzEn1Q-wrTcFU85M/edit</p> 	<p>How do I know if the song is done?</p> <p>How do I rehearse it, record it, and share it?</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>