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## Tips for Expressive Singing

By Nikki Blackmer

When a performance has complete command of the technical elements of singing and then adds true emotional communication, making the audience unaware it is hearing anything other than a beautiful song, straight from the heart, the performers have achieved the ultimate: true musical expression. Here are some things to try to help identify the key elements in a song's emotive message:

1. Write out the lyrics in script. Pay attention to how long it takes you to write the words, and what words seem to tug at your heartstrings. Those will be important words.
2. Notice the musical plan. Regardless of the words, notice what shape the musical line takes, what notes are held a long time, what notes are high, or what musical embellishments are present. Composer and Arrangers use these musical elements to highlight the story.
3. Sing the melody line on a neutral vowel, and notice where the melody seems to be effortlessly drawn out.
4. See if the important words, long notes, high notes, and interesting musical embellishments line up. These will become musical climaxes that help to give the piece ebb and flow.

Using these tips, try to make a musical and interpretive plan. Every piece should have the shape of an arc, where the highest point is at or near the end. There are words, notes and phrases that can be moved through, and others that need to be extended for emotional impact.

An emotional story should be imprinted upon the words and music. Draw on personal experiences as guides for the emotions you think you would feel during the song. If personal experiences are not possible (for whatever reason) then substitute something else.

Use your face and body to convey the message of the song. If you sing a happy song with a blank face, you are not helping to sell the emotional story. Likewise, if you have extraneous body movement, a solemn song would be interfered with.

Lastly, realize that only after the basic technical elements of performance are achieved is it truly possible for a passionate performance with complete commitment to the lyrical and musical

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message to be attained. However, strive to master the basics so that you can move someone with what you sing.

