

PERF 340: *From Scene into Song* (Spring 2018)

Class Meeting Times: Friday, 2:30–5:20pm, Katzen 154

Instructor: Nathan Beary Blustein | nblustein@american.edu | (202) 885-3198 | Katzen 243

Office Hours: Tuesday and Friday, 11am–1pm; or by appointment

TA: Kaeli Patchen | kp4868a@student.american.edu

Accompanist: Paige Rammelkamp | paigeaustin79@gmail.com

Website: <https://edspace.american.edu/nblustein/course-pages/perf-340/>

Required Text: *Acting in Musical Theatre: A Comprehensive Course* (Joe Deer and Rocco Dal Vara)

Recommended Text: *Actions: The Actors' Thesaurus* (Marina Calderone, Maggie Lloyd-Williams)

OVERVIEW

The purpose of this course is to provide practical workshop experience and to develop proficiency in a range of musical-theatre genres and styles. This course builds upon foundations established in Musicianship and Fundamentals of Acting courses, as well as Applied Music lessons, and it is intended that the skills learned in this course will be seamlessly incorporated into the musical stage actor's personal artistic process. Students will develop vocal and acting techniques that allow them to dramatically interpret lyrics, to craft smooth transitions from dialogue to song, and to create characters within the specific context of the chosen musical.

Additionally, students will learn (or continue learning) to explore and develop their vocal and emotional range, select and prepare audition material appropriate for his/her abilities and the demands of the specific project, evaluate their own work, view and evaluate the performances of others, and read about the art and craft of musical theatre performance. The primary focus of this course is on acting a song. Students are encouraged to push physical, emotional, and vocal boundaries in personalizing their musical performance.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of the course, students will demonstrate their understanding of the following:

- Ensemble singing skills, both with other singers and when interacting with a collaborative pianist/accompanist.
- Performance principles applied to material from a range of musical theatre styles and genres, and their distinct vocal requirements.
- How to research and prepare a role: understanding the world of the play through given and imagined circumstances; writing analyses of action, imagery, and subtext; making interesting and appropriate choices in character physicality, voice, and articulation.
- The complex relationships between narrative text, lyrical expression, and interpretive choice in vocal performance, applying the basic principles of the Stanislavski approach.
- Methods of self-evaluation, and using guided elements of peer evaluation in order to articulate and create proactive plans of action in the pursuit of specific performance goals.
- Audition requirements for the full spectrum of theatrical opportunities.

METHODOLOGY

The format for this course will consist of:

- Rehearsing and performing two scenes/duets, one from the Golden Age (roughly pre-*Hair*/ 1967) and one contemporary, and six solos (two standards, one Golden Age, one “Scary song,” and one pop/rock).
 - Your contrasting standard can be replaced by an operetta aria, if you wish.
 - Scenes/duets ideally should be no longer than about five minutes. Solos ideally should be no longer than about two minutes. The standards will be assigned by the instructor and TA, but you will be required to find the sheet music in an appropriate key. Your “Scary song” and other solos will be chosen in consultation with (and with the approval of) the instructor and/or TA.
- Writing brief scene analyses and self-evaluations for every song performed in class.
- Reading and responding to excerpts on musical theatre performance.
- Viewing/evaluating musical films and live performances of musicals.

MATERIALS AND ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

- A hard 3-ring binder, 1.5 inches or larger, that can lay flat easily on a music stand/piano, with optional adequate matte (non-glare) sheet protectors for class handouts and finished repertoire.
 - Invest in good quality. These materials will become *your book* over the next few months... or decades. Please note that for the majority of class performances, the accompanist will be performing off of **YOUR** copy of the music.
 - For **ALL** songs and numbers, make 4 copies of your music:
 - One w/basic markings for your accompanist
 - One “clean” copy (keep in the back of your book in sheet protectors)
 - One “book” copy (marked as you would need for purposes of audition)
 - One “working” copy, that you will mark up in lessons, in classes, with analytical notes, etc.
 - For every class session, please bring a pencil, water, and clothes/shoes that permit comfortable movement.
 - Also, bring a recording device with enough space to hold 15-20 minute work sessions. Most smartphones, tablets, and laptops have adequate sound cards and data space. You may also use a classmate’s device and have them e-share the info with you, or may use some department equipment (contact instructor) but you are responsible for arranging recording as needed.
 - Right now, take a moment to pick a partner in the class who will help as your recording buddy. Write their name and contact info here:
-
- You will need to have a means to store audio/video clips from the semester for later viewing; I recommend a private YouTube page or thumb drive.
 - Please set aside a lab fee for photocopying materials and purchasing tickets.

COURSE WEBSITE

Our course's Blackboard site has submission pages for Guided Journals (see below) and our course gradebook. We will primarily use a separate course site via American University's EdSpace. The URL for our specific page is <https://edspace.american.edu/nblustein/course-pages/perf-340>, but you can also access this page via blustein.org.

SOURCES OF SONGS AND SCENES

Once you have decided what you are doing, you ideally should read the entire play in order to make sense of it. Our library and the consortium library may have the script or score you need (although many in the consortium will not loan out scores). I also have posted on the course page the scores that I own and the scores and libretti the AU library possesses.

If consortium universities won't loan materials, as a last resort you can go to that university's library and photocopy what you need. You can try The American Backstage Company, (703) 212-8982 (www.americanbackstage.com), 5380 Eisenhower Ave., Alexandria, VA 22304—a few blocks from the Van Dorn Street Metro. The DC Public Library system has a large collection of play scripts. You can also try ordering from the Drama Bookshop in New York City (1-800-322-0595; www.dramabookshop.com) or leave requests for plays or songs on the callboards or on the DPA Facebook page.

A very useful resource for finding scenes (and possibly solos) is *The New Broadway Song Companion: An Annotated Guide to Musical Theatre Literature by Voice Type and Song Style* by David P. DeVenny. The index in the back is particularly helpful. The book is on the reserve shelves of the music library – ML128.M78 D48 2009. If you find something promising, you will of course still need to locate the script and/or score.

ATTENDANCE AND TARDINESS

Attendance is mandatory. Regardless of whether or not you are present, *you are responsible for all of the information given*. If you must miss class, please let me know ahead of time, and turn in any assignments in advance.

You are allowed one unexcused absence for the semester. Use it wisely. Each subsequent absence will automatically result in the reduction of your final grade by one third of a letter (e.g. A to A⁻, B⁺ to B). Bring documentation to the Dean of Students (they will advise instructor appropriately) within one week of the absence. Please see American University's academic guidelines regarding excused absences. Three late arrivals (or early departures) are the equivalent of one absence.

ACCOMPANIST

We have a professional accompanist and coach, Paige Rammelkamp, who is an integral part of this class. As we continue our work during the semester, she will make herself available to help with your assigned songs by playing (1) melodic and harmonic lines, and (2) piano accompaniment.

Unless otherwise instructed, all communication of tempi, cuts, etc. is to be handled prior to in-class performances.

Music, unless noted, must be submitted at least two weeks in advance to Paige's folder, in my mailbox in the administrative office. Always include the sheet music for the FULL song; in the case of performing a 16- to 32-bar excerpt, include clear markings for your cuts.

TEACHING ASSISTANT

For both Golden-Age and Contemporary scenes/duets, as well as your "Scary Song," you (and your partner) are required to meet for a coaching session with Kaeli, our teaching assistant. While not required, you are encouraged to meet with her to coach your other solos (Please see more about this below in "Office Hours").

PARTICIPATION

Warm-up before every class and coaching session.

If you sign up for a time with Paige or Kaeli and you cannot make the appointment, you must communicate directly with them and give at least 24 hours' notice. Missed appointments will be communicated to me. **Each missed coaching with less than 24 hours' notice will lower your participation grade by ten points.**

Rehearse scenes and songs outside of class regularly and have them ready to present, regardless—in the case of solos—of whether or not you are scheduled to perform. Always bring your current script or score to class, always bring copies of your scenes and songs for the instructor and accompanist, and always bring writing materials.

Between readings, viewings, written work, and rehearsals, you should expect to commit at least five hours of outside work every week.

Your participation grade will include all interactions with other students, both digitally and in-person; your interactions with the class accompanist; and your readiness to sing at each class. This grade will also include your full participation and attendance for the entire final examination period.

VOCAL HYGIENE

OCCASSIONAL illnesses are obviously not preventable and will occur time to time despite the best of efforts. However, attention and discipline regarding your physical health may affect your ability to improve in this course beyond any other factor; singers who are repeatedly unable to participate (or who have compromised participation) due to obvious vocal misuse or failure to seek medical attention when necessary will not be eligible for full credit. **PACE YOUR SINGING CAREFULLY**, especially if you are involved in other singing or speaking activities!

A FEW WORDS ON PARTICIPATION AND WORK ETHIC IN PERF 340

Because this course is specifically designed as a requirement for musical theatre majors, it is assumed that you are either interested in becoming a professional musical stage actor or wish to understand how professionals work. If that is the case, this class needs to be a priority for you, and you need to develop the dedication and discipline required for the crafts of acting and singing and for success in the rigors of the theatrical world. Your attendance and participation in all of the classes is essential. It is impossible to make up work from a missed class. The work is

largely experiential and requires you to engage and invest physically, mentally, and emotionally, and to actively support your peers.

Also, this class will involve the necessary intensive, immersive environment to allow participants to begin to distinguish between a “working” space and a “performance” space. This course will focus on making a transition from one to the other. A note about where we will begin, or the “working” space:

In order to develop as a singer, you *must* allow yourself to make sounds that seem foreign, strange, or outside-the-box—in other words, make sounds that are unpolished, and that aren’t necessarily ready for prime time. It takes time for muscles to develop coordination, and this class is intended to offer you a practice session with which to hone those skills. Although the goal of the class is to enhance your performance skills, our aim is not to impress each other; this tendency, present in the most dedicated of students, may prevent you from developing an awareness of your own kinesthetic behavior.

In this class, you may find yourself pushing a technical or emotional envelope. Be aware of this in your journey, and sensitive of it in others’. By the very nature of approaching our vocal fears (which even the most experienced or seemingly poised of performers possess), you will have great days and not-so-great days in this class.

As your instructor, I ask for your trust in the process, and rest assured that your *efforts* earn you your grade. It is much harder to struggle in front of a group than to present something so easy that it will be immediately successful. And the “not so great” experiences are invariably followed by vocal and artistic gains that would have not been possible without a degree of vulnerability.

OFFICE HOURS

My posted office hours are a time when I can meet with you to discuss your work, your assignments, and any challenges and triumphs you may experience in class. Please feel free to utilize this time to enhance your success in this class. I am also available by appointment.

You will be required to schedule a 20-minute meeting during my office hours once over the course of the semester for one of your solos. Space permitting, you may also use the time to have an additional coaching. You must schedule your meeting **at least one week prior** to your final presentation. However, you will benefit most if you schedule it early in the process. Failure to fulfill this requirement will result in a 10% loss in your final performance grade.

WITHDRAWALS AND INCOMPLETES

The last day to drop a course or change a grade option is **Friday, March 23**. A grade of incomplete (I) is reserved for serious circumstances at or near the end of the semester. If you feel that you are in such circumstances, get in touch with me immediately.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

I encourage you to discuss ideas and issues in this course with your classmates, as emphasized above. In *preparing* for assignments, you are welcome to keep this discussion going—but once you put pencil to paper (literally or figuratively), *all work must be your own*. If you have questions or concerns, ask me.

All students must act in accordance with the American University Academic Integrity Code (<https://www.american.edu/academics/integrity/code.cfm>). Academic integrity demands that students not engage in or tolerate acts of falsification, misrepresentation, deception, and plagiarism. Evidence of academic misconduct will be taken seriously and dealt with swiftly.

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

Type all writing assignments! Use 1-inch margins and a 12-point Times New Roman font. Double-side printing whenever possible. Please staple if submitting multiple pages.

Each Character Analyses should be submitted with each applicable performance.

On the other hand, consider your Responses a log/diary. I will collect this log approximately every four weeks (announced in advance).

Each Guided Journal (there are three total; the first is below) should address (but not necessarily be confined to) the questions listed. Be as detailed and specific as possible in your answers. I am the only other person who will read these assignments, so be candid.

Character Analyses • Single-spaced. No longer than one page.

For every performed song and scene, on the first day you perform the work in class you must submit a brief scene analysis including the following information:

- Musical title and character name (if appropriate);
- Super objective (objective for entire play—duets only);
- Scene objective;
- Obstacles (internal and external);
- Range of tactics (actions or beats in verb form, clearly marked on an attached libretto);
- Moment before (where, what, why, etc.);
- Expectations at beginning of scene/song;
- Relationship to partner (and how it changes);
- Stakes; and
- Subtext.

Your objective and your actively expressed tactics/verbs should be directed at your scene partner or the imaginary person to whom you are singing.

You should also briefly discuss the practical choices (intellectual, vocal, physical, psychological, etc) you are making to enhance the effectiveness of your analysis. What conscious, deliberate things are you doing to maximize the dramatic potential of the scene? Make your choices very personal, and articulate these choices emotionally, rather than academically or dispassionately. Keep this analysis in the first person.

Responses to Film Viewings and Live Productions • Single-spaced. Minimum: 400 words; maximum: 500 words.

These short responses are not formal papers, but they should do more than simply demonstrate that you've seen the assigned works. They should indicate that you are thinking about these performances independently, analyzing them, interpreting them, and drawing on your knowledge

about musical performance from this class. *Focus primarily and specifically on what makes the individual performances emotionally compelling (or ineffective).*

You might address some of the following questions: What are the vocal requirements for this work? What is the most emotionally effective song? What song tries for emotional significance and fails (Be very specific about why)? Is vocal beauty ever sacrificed for dramatic power, and if so, is it appropriate? Are the vocal choices made appropriate to the character? What balance do performers find between singing as an integrated part of dramatic expression and singing as pure entertainment? Please don't answer all these questions, unless you feel it helpful or necessary to your response. *Analyze and demystify the magic (or horror) of the performance by describing it and analyzing its effectiveness in detail.*

Responses to Readings • Single-spaced. Minimum: one-half page; maximum: one page. By the day each reading is due, you should prepare *roughly* five substantive observations or discussion questions/responses for each reading or viewing. Engage in dialogue with these sources. Challenge them and your own thoughts and preconceptions.

Guided Journal #1 • Due February 2. Double-spaced. Minimum: 2 pages; maximum: 3 pages.

1. What are you hoping to get out of this course? What do you feel this class should focus on? What do you want to work on? What are your biggest fears or concerns relating to this class? Are there any thoughts, questions, or concerns that you would like Nathan to know about, or that you would like to discuss?
2. Describe your experiences with performing the songs on the first two days of class. What did you do well (at least three things)? What would you do differently if you had your life to live over? Any surprises or discoveries?
3. Honestly evaluate what you would bring to a potential career in musical theatre. Based on the "Do You Have the Stuff?" reading, attempt to evaluate your Talent, Charisma, and especially your Castability and Type, as well as Skills and Know-How.

GRADING BREAKDOWN

INDIVIDUAL/ENSEMBLE PERFORMANCE: 380 points

Weekly performances (20 points each): 220 points

25% each: preparation • technical execution • artistic mastery/expression • follow-up on considerations/issues from previous performances

Character analyses (5 points each): 40 points

Guided journals (20 points each): 60 points

Final performance: 60 points

HOME- AND CLASSWORK: 220 points

Viewing evaluations (15 points each): 105 points

Reading responses (5 points each): 65 points

Class participation and preparation: 50 points

TOTAL: 600 points

RUBRIC

A: Reflects outstanding overall effort, dedication to exemplary work, and comprehensive mastery of course material. An “A” student exceeds all aforementioned class requirements and demonstrates continued evidence of dutiful scholarship, original thinking, and creativity. They take seriously their role as a citizen of the classroom community by proactively engaging in all course activities. Improvement over the semester in these areas will be considered for final evaluation.

B: Reflects positive effort, generally excellent work, and demonstrates mastery of the majority of core concepts addressed in course. A “B” student meets and occasionally exceeds all aforementioned class requirements and demonstrates periodic evidence of dutiful scholarship, original thinking, and creativity. They are committed to improving their involvement in the classroom community. Concerted efforts for development in these areas over the semester will be considered for final evaluation.

C: Reflects a neutral/occasionally passive effort, generally satisfactory work, and demonstrates mastery of most core concepts addressed in course. A “C” student approaches or casually meets aforementioned class requirements, although frequently needs to be prompted for full participation in classroom activities.

D or F: Reflects insufficient efforts both inside and outside of class, and student has not achieved the majority of course learning goals and objectives to an acceptable standard. Student has fallen significantly short of “passing” criteria in some or all stated requirements.

GRADING SCALE

You must receive at least a grade of C (435 points) *and complete the final performance/guided journal* to pass the course.

A+	585–600	A	555–584	A–	540–554
B+	525–539	B	495–524	B–	480–494
C+	465–479	C	435–464	C–	420–434
D	360–419	F	359 or lower		

SEMESTER OVERVIEW (*This schedule is subject to change; changes will be announced well in advance.*)**Overture****Week 1**

January 19 Welcome; syllabus; expectations; introductions
 Perform: Two contrasting “wheelhouse” songs (no more than 3 minutes)

Week 2

January 26 ****Golden Age Scene and Standard solo music to accompanist****
AMT, “Auditioning and Attitude”
 Perform: Another try at the wheelhouse songs

(Continued on next page)

Act One**Week 3**

February 2 ****Second Standard (cut) and Contemporary (non-pop/rock) music to accompanist****
AMT, chapter 17 (“Do You Have the Stuff?”), pp. 303–49.
 Due: Guided Journal #1
 Standard Solo: 1, 2, 3, 4
 Golden Age Scene: 5/6, 7/8
 OFF: 9, 10

Week 4

February 9 *AMT*, “Acting Basics”
 Due: *H.M.S. Pianfore* vocal response
 Standard Solo: 5, 6, 9, 10
 Second Standard (cut): 1, 2
 Golden Age Scene: 3/4
 OFF: 7, 8

Week 5

February 16 *AMT*, “Musical Analysis”
 Due: *Kiss Me, Kate* vocal response
 Standard Solo: 7, 8
 Second Standard (cut): 3, 4, 9, 10
 Golden Age Scene: 1/2
 OFF: 5, 6

Week 6

February 23 ****Contemporary Scene and Golden-Age Solo music to accompanist****
AMT, “Working with Words”
 Due: *Assassins* performance response
 Second Standard (cut): 5, 6, 7, 8
 Contemporary (non-pop/rock) Solo: 1, 2, 9, 10
 OFF: 3, 4

Week 7

March 2 *AMT*, “Storytelling”
 Due: *Passion* vocal response
 Contemporary (non-pop/rock) Solo: 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
 Golden Age Scene: 9/10
 OFF: 1, 2

Week 8

March 9 *AMT*, “Character Analysis”
 Perform: Golden Age Scene and Standard or Contemporary (non-pop/rock) Solo

March 16 *Spring Break!*

Act Two**Week 9**

March 23

****Singer's Choice solo music to accompanist****

Due: Guided Journal #2

Golden Age Solo: 2, 5, 7, 10

Contemporary Scene: 1/6, 3/8

OFF: 4, 9

Week 10

March 30

AMT, "Song as Journey"Due: *Putting it Together* vocal response

Golden Age Solo: 1, 3, 6, 8

Pop/Rock Cut: 5, 10

Contemporary Scene: 4/9

OFF: 2, 7

Week 11

April 6

AMT, "Relationships & Intensifiers"Due: *Jesus Christ Superstar Live!* vocal response

Golden Age Solo: 4, 9

Pop/Rock Cut: 1, 6

Contemporary Scene: 2/7, 5/10

OFF: 3, 8

Week 12

April 13

AMT, "Phrasing"Due: *Elaine Stritch at Liberty* vocal response

Pop/Rock Cut: 2, 4, 7

"Scary" Solo: 1, 3, 6, 8, 9

OFF: 5, 10

Week 13

April 20

AMT, "Staging a Song"

Pop/Rock Cut: 3, 8

"Scary" Solo: 2, 4, 5, 7, 10

OFF: 1, 6

Week 14

April 27

Due: Outside production performance response

Perform: Contemporary Scene and Golden Age or "Scary" Solo

Finale/Bows/Exit Music

May 4

Due: Guided Journal #3

Perform: Standard, Golden Age, Contemporary (non-pop/rock), "Scary"

Solos (choose 3 of 4; combined total time not to exceed eight minutes)

Submit updated character analyses for each solo to reflect performance choices

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

If you wish to receive accommodations for a disability, please notify me with a letter from the Academic Support and Access Center. Accommodations are not retroactive. I strongly recommend timely notification at the start of the semester. To register with a disability or for questions about disability accommodations, contact the **Academic Support and Access Center** in Mary Gradyon Center, Room 243 (email: asac@american.edu; phone: x3660).

ABSENCES DUE TO OBSERVANCES

Provisions can be made if class conflicts with an observance or other event. If you foresee any such conflicts, please notify me *immediately* so we can arrange reasonable accommodations.

ADDITIONAL CAMPUS RESOURCES

Center for Diversity and Inclusion: Mary Graydon Center, Room 201, x3651. The CDI is dedicated to enhancing LGBTQ, Multicultural, First Generation, and Women's experiences on campus and to enhance AU's commitment to respecting and valuing diversity by serving as a resource and liaison to students, staff, and faculty on issues of equity through education, outreach, and advocacy.

Counseling Center: Mary Graydon Center, Room 214, x3500. The Counseling Center helps students make the most of their university experience, both personally and academically.

The center offers counseling, self-help resources, referrals to private care, workshops, and discussion groups to help students gain the skills and insights they need to overcome adversity and thrive in their life and learning. Any student with a concern they would like to discuss is welcome. For example, students come to the Counseling Center with concerns about their relationships, health, happiness, motivation, behaviors, stress, trauma, or life decisions. Meeting with a clinician is a chance to explore one's hopes and fears, and determine possible courses of action or resolution in a respectful and confidential setting.

International Student and Scholar Services: Butler Pavilion, Room 410, x3550. ISSS has resources to support academic success and participation in campus life including academic counseling, support for second language learners, response to questions about visas, immigration status, employment and intercultural programs, clubs, and other helpful campus resources.

Office of Advocacy Services for Interpersonal and Sexual Violence: Wellness Center, McCabe Hall 123, x7070. OASIS provides free and confidential advocacy services for anyone in the campus community who experiences sexual assault, dating or domestic violence, or stalking.

Student Health Center: McCabe, First Floor, x3380. For a full description of services offered, link to Student Health Portal, and other resources, go to: <http://www.american.edu/ocl/healthcenter/>.