

# Writing for Voice



THE **VOICE** PREDATES ANY OTHER INSTRUMENT...  
**EARLY HUMANS** WERE **SINGING** EVEN  
BEFORE THEY DEVELOPED **LANGUAGE!**

FROM **MOTETS** TO **OPERAS** TO **POP MUSIC**,  
MUCH OF THE MOST **IMPORTANT** MUSIC  
IN ALL OF HISTORY USES THE **VOICE**.

AND WHILE SOMETIMES JUST **SPEAKING TEXT OUT LOUD** IS ENOUGH TO COME UP WITH A **FITTING MELODY**,  
SETTING WORDS TO MUSIC CAN OFTEN BE A MUCH  
MORE **DIFFICULT PROCESS!**

HAVEN'T COME UP WITH THE  
**WORDS** YET? IF YOU'RE  
WRITING THE MUSIC AND THE  
LYRICS, THERE'S MORE WORK...  
BUT ALSO MORE **FREEDOM!**

IT'S USUALLY EASIEST TO COME UP  
WITH THE WORDS **FIRST** AND THEN  
SET THEM TO **MUSIC**... THAT WAY,  
THE **MELODY** AND **RHYTHM** WILL BE  
MORE LIKELY TO **FIT THE TEXT**.

BUT THERE ARE SOME **GREAT SONGS**  
WHERE THE **MUSIC** AND **LYRICS** CAME  
ABOUT **SIMULTANEOUSLY**, OR EVEN  
WHERE THE MUSIC WAS WRITTEN **FIRST**...  
SO IT NEVER HURTS TO **EXPERIMENT!**

THE FIRST STEP IN SETTING TEXT IS **SCANSION**: THE PROCESS  
OF IDENTIFYING ACCENTED AND UNACCENTED SYLLABLES.

ACCENTED  
SYLLABLE

UNACCENTED  
SYLLABLE

The Gilded Palace of Flying Burritos

THIS RHYTHM MATCHES  
THE TEXT'S **SCANSION**,  
BUT IT'S A BIT **DULL**...

LONG NOTES AND DOWNBEATS  
ARE PERFECT FOR ACCENTS!



The Gild - ed Pal - ace of Fly - ing Bur - ri - tos

AN UNACCENTED SYLLABLE  
ON A LONG NOTE? WILD!

OOH, A **REST!**  
SINGERS LOVE TO **BREATHE!**



The Gild - ed Pal - ace of Fly - ing Bur - ri - tos

ADDING **RHYTHMIC VARIETY**  
AND **TWEAKING THE**  
**SCANSION** A BIT HELPS!

THEN IT'S TIME  
TO ADD **MELODY!**



GOOD MELODIES ARE PREDOMINANTLY **STEPWISE**,  
BUT OCCASIONAL **LEAPS** ARE **GOOD**... ESPECIALLY  
LEADING INTO AN **ACCENTED SYLLABLE!**

OF COURSE, THE **RANGE**  
AND **SHAPE** OF THE MELODY  
SHOULD REFLECT THE **TONE**  
OF THE **TEXT!**

AS FOR **NOTATION**, THERE ARE A FEW THINGS SPECIFIC TO **VOCAL MUSIC** TO BE AWARE OF:

MUSICAL DIRECTIONS LIKE  
**DYNAMICS** GO **ABOVE** THE  
STAFF TO AVOID LYRICS!

*mf*



SEPARATE **SYLLABLES** IN  
A WORD WITH A **SINGLE**  
**CENTERED HYPHEN!**

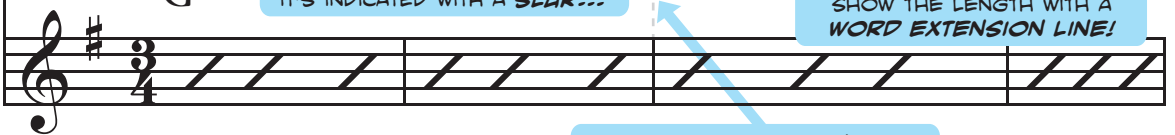
Ex - cel-lent Nou - veau

Mex - i - can Cui - sine

A **SINGLE SYLLABLE** SUNG  
OVER **MORE THAN ONE NOTE**  
IS CALLED A **MELISMA**, AND  
IT'S INDICATED WITH A **SLUR**...

...AND IF THAT SYLLABLE IS AT  
THE **END OF A WORD**,  
SHOW THE LENGTH WITH A  
**WORD EXTENSION LINE!**

Guitar



DON'T DRAW **BARLINES**  
**BETWEEN STAVES** ON VOCAL  
PARTS... IT MAKES THE LYRICS  
**HARDER TO READ!**

LASTLY, WHEN WRITING  
AN **ACCOMPANIMENT**,  
THE **GENERAL GUIDELINE**  
IS TO GIVE THE VOCAL PART  
**ROOM TO BREATHE!**

LOOK FOR WAYS  
TO BALANCE THE  
VOICE PART'S **RANGE**:  
IF IT GOES **HIGH**,  
TRY GOING **LOW!**

AVOID **DOUBLING**  
THE VOICE PART IN  
THE ACCOMPANIMENT:  
MOVE IN **PARALLEL THIRDS**,  
OR IN **SIXTHS**, OR IN  
**COUNTERPOINT!**

ADD MOTION DURING  
THE VOICE'S **LONG**  
**NOTES** OR **RESTS**...  
AND WHEN THE VOICE IS  
**MOVING**, HOLD BACK  
AND **LET IT SHINE!**