

## *How to Make Songs Come Alive!*

By Dr. Rob Campbell  
BHS Music Judge, Past Category Specialist  
Coach, Arranger, Director

Understand the first three “coaches” you have: songwriter, lyricist, arranger. Determine these things:

1. What is the energy of the melody? Where are the highs and lows in the contour, the direction and forward motion? Where are the pulse and arrival points?
2. What is the theme of the lyrics, the main idea?
  - A. At the local level
  - B. Overall
  - C. By section
3. What has the arranger done to support the song? What is the purpose of each and every embellishment? Look at the ranges of the voices, the voicings of the chords.

Now you have most of the information you need for a successful performance. You still need to add all the things we work on in rehearsal: singing, presentation, vocal and musical techniques etc., but the core of the performance is there in your initial analysis.

Performance factors: to make a song exciting, it is important to sing really well in tune, with good quality and synchronization, with your vowels matched and your volume levels balanced. Ringing chords are a real hallmark of a good ensemble performance, and we spend quite a bit of time in rehearsals working on all of these technical elements.

The theme is the principal musical statement of the song. It may be based on the song's lyrics, rhythm, melody, or harmony, or a combination of these elements. Always determine what the theme is at any given time. There may be more than one theme, and the theme may change as the song develops.

Delivery and heartfelt presentation are about making an emotional story which communicates to the listener. Good delivery reflects the singers' understanding of melody, lyrics, harmony, rhythm and meter, tempos, construction and form, vocal color, dynamics, forward motion, and their relative importance. The Music judge evaluates the musical artistry with which the performer integrates the song elements and employs embellishments and other appropriate means to allow the song to come to life. In ballads the emotion is often based on the lyrics and the images the lyrics contain. Uptunes can also have a lyrical theme, but are more often based on a musical element such as rhythm and melodic contour. How we deliver songs can have an important effect on how alive and real the performance is.

Timing and tempo - Dynamics and contour - Use of embellishments – Believe it!!!