Composing Vocal Songs: An Introduction

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Composing: Genres

Specific qualities of vocal style

- What makes the vocals of Michael Jackson sound different from a Twenty-One Pilots song aside from the unique vocal timbres of each artist? Does one articulate words more than the other? Does one make other vocal sounds aside from the melodic line? How does one rapper sound different from another? These qualities can be considered when composing songs and then singing them with, or for, clients.
Composing: Genres

Specific qualities of vocal style

✦ Melodic qualities
✦ Rhythmic qualities
✦ Timbre/tonal qualities
✦ Word choice/lyrics
✦ Monophonic or Polyphonic vocals
Composing: Genres and Song Styles

✧ Know the accompaniment qualities of the genre/song style being emulated.

✧ Harmonic elements and chord choices
  ✧ Perfect intervals (4ths, 5ths), dom. 7ths, other chord extensions can open up melodic choices in vocal line
  ✧ Rhythmic qualities of harmonic accompaniment also drive the melody

✧ Common chord progressions for the genre

✧ Common song forms:
  ✧ ABA (verse, chorus, verse)
  ✧ AAB (common in blues progressions)
Composing: Lyrics

✧ Writing songs with clients in sessions may require the music therapist to assist in creating lyrical content, as well as accompaniment or melodic support.

✧ Writing songs outside of sessions for a specific clinical purpose to bring to a client may require a music therapist having skills in not only instrumental accompaniment development, but also vocal line development (Brunk, 2003).
Composing: Lyrics

Make sure to consider some of the following:

- Can you actually sing the song you wrote?
- Is the vocal line within an appropriate vocal range for the client if the client is going to sing it?
- Is the chosen key appropriate for either you or the client(s) to sing?
- Is the melodic line too complicated rhythmically for a client to sing?
- Does there need to be a rhyme scheme or not?
- Does a certain song style and song form lend itself to certain phrasing or lyrical lines?

Remember: Repetition is your friend!
Brunk, B. (2003). *Songwriting for music therapists: Methods, techniques, and applications*. Grapevine, TX: Prelude Music Therapy