Beginning Tips for Recreating Songs with the Voice

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Learning How to Recreate

- Learning by Listening
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Learning by Listening

We recreate songs that have already been written, and probably have already been performed.

We need to begin by listening to original recordings. By finding original composers and original singers, we can locate the original songs.
Learning by Listening

Get a true sense of the style! Listen to what is going on with the song in terms of rhythm, vocal tone, melody, harmony, or other music characteristics that are most important to the song’s style. A therapist can better recreate songs by listening to a broad range of styles and genres. “Opening our ears generates emotional space and attention, providing awareness through being subject to indefinite sounds,” (Uhlig, 2006, p. 50).
Learning by Listening

It is recommended that one NOT initially learn a song from a friend who learned it from a friend, or from a youtube cover video. While covers or YouTube versions of songs might be useful and creative secondary sources, they do not give us an understanding of the original song. Your new version will likely not be accurate. You will wind up having to relearn it down the road because your professor or your client does not recognize that version of the song.
Listening: Song Form and Progressions

• Understanding song form is important not only to be able to improvise within a structure (such as when improvising songs), but also to authentically replicate song styles. This is why music theory and ear training are truly helpful!

• Blues is a song form easily accessible to the music therapist and the client. An example of this A-A-B form is:
  o “Woke up this morning feeling so tired” (A)
  o “Woke up this morning feeling so tired” (A)
  o “But now that I’m singing, I don’t feel tired no more” (B)
Listening: Song Form and Progressions

• By listening to a broad range of song styles and genres, a song’s style can better be replicated.

• “Opening our ears generates emotional space and attention, providing awareness through being subject to indefinite sounds,” (Uhlig, 2006, p. 50)

• For example, being able to hear the I – vi – IV – V chord progression in a major key allows us to learn a broad range of pop songs, each with a new vocal line to be re-created.
Along by understanding harmonic progressions in songs, we can listen carefully to:

- Melodic contour
- Rhythmic qualities of the music: focusing on downbeats or highly syncopated, played straightforward or with a “swinging” rhythm that can translate in how to vocalize or replicate singing
- Rhythmic qualities of the singing itself
Listening: Song Form and Progressions

- We can also listen carefully to:
  - Emotional expression of the song, including but not limited to:
    - Use of and changes in vocal timbre
    - Use of and changes in volume, such as dynamic contrast.
    - Bending of pitches
    - Filling in space
Learning by Reading

• It is also beneficial to use original notation of songs. Original notation helps us to learn accurate rhythms, entrances, and melodies.

• If notated music is not available, try determining the chord structure of song by listening to original recording and then listen repeatedly to learn the song.

• Being able to listen and pick up songs in that fashion is also an essential skill for music therapists.
Learning by Reading

• In addition, sight singing is an important skill!

• Imagine being in a session and a client requests an important song in their life that you do not already know. Being able to open a Fakebook or pull up music and sing/play the song authentically can be an important aspect of your relationship with the client.

• Being able to sight sing well also allows for quicker learning of new repertoire as needed in most clinical settings.
Repertoire, Resources, and Context

- Some music therapy programs require specific repertoire to be learned as part of proficiency/competency examinations. These are meant to provide students with foundational common songs for use within a range of settings. None of these repertoire lists are meant to be exhaustive or all-inclusive, so it is important to understand that developing repertoire is just a daily part of the work as a music therapist.

- Start developing the habit of repertoire development NOW and enjoy exploring new genres and song styles!
To start developing a basic repertoire of songs, it helps to categorize songs by genres within decades. For example, Elvis Presley’s “Jailhouse Rock” might be listed under 1950’s Rock-and-Roll. Take time to learn historical context of songs. For example, if you learn “Hound Dog”, you should know that Big Mama Thornton recorded it before Elvis Presley.

Explore the meaning and context of each song, including cultural implications. For example, Big Mama Thornton’s “Hound Dog” was within the Rhythm and Blues genre and the meaning of the song is different from the version recorded by Elvis.
Resources and Repertoire

- One recommendation is to type up your repertoire lists using genre or song style/era categories to assist you in keeping track of what you have learned, and in many cases eventually memorized.

- All music therapists have had that moment where they suddenly cannot think of a single song, when in fact they know hundreds of songs! Having a visual reminder can be helpful for students and newer professionals.
Resources and Repertoire

- Fake books and online lead sheets help us to both prepare for sessions and be prepared to sight read music for on-the-spot requests.

- It might also be helpful to obtain a list of resources for finding music or using an app like Ultimate Guitar or OnSong to keep track of music.
References