

*** LEVEL IV NYSSMA NOTES ***

LEVEL IV SONGS

- * have a wide range of difficulty
- * demand low, diaphragmatic breathing
- * often have very long phrases (“Sally Gardens”) or a gradual increase in dynamics/intensity (“On my Own”) that are demanding in terms of breath support
- * are expected to be sung with expression. You do not have to necessarily “act out” the song as you would in musical theater, but you are expected to use your eyes and face to show that you understand the song. Also, if a singer is visually expressive, you can usually hear it in their tone quality. Practice while looking in the mirror—a simple opening of the eyes or lift of the eyebrows can do a lot.

LEVEL IV SIGHTREADING

- * can be in the key of C, F, G, D, or E flat
- * can be in 4/4, 3/4, or 2/4 meter
- * has a range of an octave (lower Do – upper Do)
- * contains stepwise motion as well as
 - Do – Mi – Sol (ascending)
 - Do – Sol (ascending)
- * uses half notes, quarter notes, quarter rests, and eighth notes
- * can be mezzoforte, piano, or forte (or any combination of those dynamics)

SONG NOTES

***** Whatever song you choose, please take a few minutes to research the song. Every one of these songs should be available on youtube—and there should definitely be good videos available of all of songs that come from shows or operettas. *****

Alma del core

A smooth, legato line sung in head voice is absolutely essential to all of the Italian arias, but it is particularly crucial to “Alma del Core” because of all of the melismas (long lines on notes on the same syllable).

Tall but flexible (not rigid) posture and low, diaphragmatic breathing are crucial in order to negotiate the dramatic changes in dynamics. The song goes from a very soft pianissimo (*pp*) to forte. It contains quite a few crescendos (<) and sudden changes from loud to soft. Please review the “dynamics guide” that we studied earlier in the year, but keep in mind that those dynamic changes are carried out through breath support rather than pressure on the voice.

Remember that, in Italian, you want to focus on tall vowels. Consonants should be clear and crisp, but the beauty of the voice is all in the vowels. “Alma” should be sung as “AH –lm AHH.” Don’t let the L “swallow up” the tone. Think “AH”—the consonant goes on at the very last second.

Flipped/rolled r's are crucial, because there is nothing our R sound in Italian. American Rs also swallow up the tone. If you cannot roll your Rs, do a very light "D" instead. As always in Italian, please make sure to stress the correct syllables (see the translation/pronunciation guide).

Caro mio ben

What the judges will be listening to in this song are: phrasing/proper breath support, dynamics, and accurate Italian diction.

Using the English translation, decide what is a phrase or complete thought. Then mark your breaths. If you can get through that whole phrase in one breath, fine. If you cannot sing a complete thought in one breath, then you need to take a breath in such a way that it doesn't "break up" the phrase too much. Look for dynamic changes throughout the phrase. If a change in dynamics (probably a crescendo) is marked in the music, think about how that crescendo indicates an increase in the emotional intensity.

Think of the vowels as being very tall and pure. "A" is a very pure "ah" sound—there is no "a" (as in the word "cat") or "uh" (as in "cut") in the Italian language. The vowel is the focus on any sustained note—go to the consonant at the very last second. This is especially important for m, n, l, and r in English, they tend to sort of "absorb" the vowel. In Italian, they should be clear but short. If you can't roll your R, do a very light "d." Use the tip of the tongue only to pronounce Ls rather than the middle of the tongue. It should be distinct but not overly long in duration.

One other VERY IMPORTANT note about singing in Italian: Usually, the second-to-last syllable is emphasized/stressed, and the last syllable is de-emphasized.

Then, of course, there is "that part" (at the bottom of the second page) of the song. You do not have to perform that in the way that I taught it, but you should take your time and make it "clean." A *portamento* or *glissando* (slide) is not really appropriate to the time period in which this song was written.

This song is very typical of old Italian love songs: the character singing it talks about their love and how much they need to be near them (that's the A section), and then they beg their boyfriend/girlfriend not to be so cruel to them (that's the B section). It sounds weird, but I think it's just highlighting how vulnerable you are to getting hurt when you're in love, and how much power the person has when your feelings for them are strong.

"Far from the Home I Love" from *Fiddler on the Roof*

Fiddler on the Roof takes place in a small village in Russia right around 1900. Hodel, one of five daughters of the main character Tevye, sings this song. She is in love with Perchik, who has been arrested exiled to Siberia. This song is Hodel explaining to her father why she is going away with Perchik.

Hodel's sorrow at leaving her family and her happiness at marrying her true love are expressed through the alternation between major and minor keys. Intonation is extremely important, especially on the last page as it quickly flips back and forth (between E flat and E natural). There are a few spots where the accompaniment directly clashes with the vocal line (for example, "Once I was happily content to be...")—we will have to address this individually at lessons or after-school NYSSMA rehearsal.

It is easy to perform this song in a slow and heavy manner, but it's not all sad. Let your face brighten and open up in the "happier" parts of the song—Hodel is happy to be marrying Perchik.

“Many a New Day” from Oklahoma

Oklahoma was written in the 1940s, and it takes place in 1906 (when Oklahoma was still just a territory). However, this particular song holds up very well for the modern girl. The lead girl, Laurey, sings this when her would-be boyfriend is seen attending a party with another girl. The message of the song is “if a boy rejects me or breaks up with me, I’m going to brush it off, because I know there will always be someone else to love.”

Laurey is definitely a soprano, although the song doesn’t go above E (top space). Talk to me if you’d like to sing it in a lower key.

“Much More” from *The Fantasticks*

The *Fantasticks* is the world’s longest running musical—it was off-Broadway for 42 years. It’s sort of a happy, even silly version of *Romeo & Juliet*: Matt and Luisa live next door to each other. Their fathers are feuding, they forbid them to talk to each other, and they put a tall fence in between their yards. Matt and Luisa talk to each other over and through the fence, and they fall in love.

The song is pretty self-explanatory: Luisa is 16 years old, and there are a million things she wants to do with her life before she’s old. She is innocent, happy, and full of energy.

Pirate Song / Oh, far better to live...

This is from the Gilbert & Sullivan operetta, *The Pirates of Penzance*. It’s very opera-ish and old-fashioned, but it’s a fun song. I highly recommend watching a few videos on youtube. If you want to do this song, talk to me and I’ll play with it to find the right key for your voice.

Sebben, crudele

Please read the notes for “Caro mio ben,” as a lot of the same challenges (particularly with regards to diction and dynamics) are presented in both songs. Make sure you pay attention to what syllables are stressed in each word (see the pronunciation guide to this song).

“Sebben crudele” is in what is called ABA form (this is typical of Baroque-era arias). In other words, the beginning section (A) of the song is repeated in the end, with new material (B) in the middle. The A and B sections should have at least a couple noticeable differences. One of them is in the accompaniment: at the beginning of the B section (“con la lunghezza del mio servir...”), the song switches from a minor key to a major one. You need to find a way to make the B section “feel” different as well. It feels like the song kind of “relaxes” for the B section—the beginning and end of the song are very “intense,” and the B section feels and sounds less intense. Keep that in mind, and your tone color and facial expression will help to shape this change in mood.

Like “Caro mio ben” (and the Level V song “Per la gloria”), this song is basically a character singing about how cruel (“crudele”) their boyfriend/girlfriend can be. The character thinks that he/she will wear down his/her lover’s pride by being ever faithful. This is obviously not a very modern sentiment, but it makes for a good, dramatic opera aria.

“Someone to Watch Over Me” from *Oh! Kay!* by George Gershwin

Oh! Kay! was a hit on Broadway in 1926. This song was originally written to be a lively, uptempo, piece, but one day Gershwin was playing around on the piano, and he realized how effective it was in a slower, wistful style. The song was a huge hit, and it has been recorded many times by both popular and jazz singers.

There are many different ways to approach this song, but for a NYSSMA competition, it's probably best to sing it fairly straightforward (as written, mostly in head voice, without a lot of scoops or embellishments). You need to plan your breath so you'll be able to get to the second note on at the end of the very long “me”s.

While I think you should take a conservative approach to singing this song, don't feel like you can't “get into” the song. In fact, the song demands expression in your face and eyes, and a NYSSMA judge will expect it at this level.

This is, in my opinion, one of the most perfectly written songs ever.

What's the Use of Wond'rin' from *Carousel* (by Richard Rodgers)

This song demands good breath support and a floating, legato line that just spins out as you sing through each phrase. The song should be sung entirely in head voice. Plan out and mark where you will breathe. Low, expansive, relaxing breaths are the absolute foundation of this song.

The judges will be listening to how you shape each phrase. Shaping is a combination of breath control, support, dynamics, and tone. Each of the ascending lines (i.e. “or if you like the way he wears his hat / Oh, what's the use of wondr'in'”) needs to gradually grow and crescendo.

This song is sung by the main character, Julie. This song sounds very “matter-of-fact” in mood, but it's actually incredibly sad. The meaning of the song is: “No guy is perfect, but once you fall in love, there's nothing you can do about it.” However, Julie is married to an abusive man...so Julie is really saying “I know he hurts me, but I'm in love with him, and I can't do anything about it, so why bother trying?” You can choose how deeply you want to incorporate this into your acting/expression, but in case the judge asks you what the song is about, you should be prepared to explain it.

“Where'er You Walk” by G. F. Handel

The character that sings this song is Jupiter (a man), but the singer would have been a castrato - a male singer who never went through puberty, and therefore retained a high (soprano or mezzosoprano) voice. Because it would have been sung in a soprano range, it's acceptable for women to sing it nowadays.

This is a very challenging song. It is a “da capo” (back to the beginning) aria and in “ABA” form: You sing through the first part (A section) and second part (B section—where it takes on a darker sound), and then return to the A section. Usually, opera singers would add ornaments (runs, trills, etc.) to “decorate” the vocal line when repeating the A section. I've written out an ornamented version of the A section. You may do all of the ornaments, some of the ornaments, or you can repeat the A section exactly as it appears in the book.

Translation/pronunciation for “Alma del core”

Alma del core,
Soul of my heart,

ALL-mah del CAW-reh

Spirto dell'alma,
Spirit of my soul,

SPEER-toh del ALL-mah

Sempre costante
Ever constant

SEH-mpreh koh-STAHn-teh

t'adorero.
I will adore you.

tah-doh-reh-RAW

Saro contento
I will be happy

sah-RAW kohn-TEN-toh

nel mio tormento
in my torment

nel MEE-aw tor-MEN-to

se quel bel labbro.
if I can kiss that.

seh qwel bell LAH-bro

baciar potro
beautiful lip

bah-CHYAR poh-TRAW

Translation/pronunciation for “Caro mio ben”

Caro mio ben <i>My dear beloved,</i>	CAH-raw MEE-aw ben
credimi almen <i>at least believe this:</i>	creh-DEE-mee ahl-MEN
senza di te <i>without you,</i>	SEHN-zah dee teh
languisce il cor <i>my heart languishes.</i>	lahn-GWEE-sheh eel cor
Il tuo fedel <i>Your faithful one</i>	eel TOO-aw feh-DEL
sospira ognor <i>always sighs.</i>	saw-SPEE-rah oh-NYOR
cessa crudel <i>Cease, cruel one,</i>	CHEH-sah croo-DEL
tanto rigor <i>your severity!</i>	TAH-ntoh ree-GOR

Translation/pronunciation for “Sebben, crudele”

Sebben crudele <i>Although, cruel one,</i>	SEH-ben croo-DEH-leh
mi fai languir <i>you make me languish</i>	mee fah-ee lahn-GWEER
sempre fedele <i>always faithful</i>	SEH-mpreh fe-DEH-leh
ti voglio amar. <i>I want to love you.</i>	tee VAWL-yoh ah-MAR
Con la lunghezza <i>With the length</i>	cawn lah loon-GEH-tzah
del mio servir <i>of my servitude</i>	del MEE-aw ser-VEER
la tua fierezza <i>your pride</i>	lah TOO-ah fyeh-REH-tzah
sapro stancar. <i>I will wear down.</i>	sah-PRO stahn-CAR