THESPIAN MUSICALWORKS - WRITE A NEW MUSICAL
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Things to Keep in Mind:
1. See as many musicals as you can, on stage or screen.
2. Study the musicals you like and figure out what makes them tick.
3. Study the musicals you don't like and figure out what prevents them from ticking. You can sometimes learn more from a flop than a hit. At the very least you learn what not to do.
4. Since musicals are a collaborative art form, find collaborators you can work with comfortably.
5. Find or invent a story idea that gets you so excited you can spend five or more years of your life working on it with no promise (or even a reasonable hope) of it earning you a penny.
   a. Early on – let us know why we should care about the lead character. What is at stake?
6. Structure your life in such a way that it leaves you daily time to write and/or compose.
   a. Be sure this life structure provides a way for you to keep the bills paid.
7. Work only on projects you are passionate about – never take on a musical based solely on its commercial possibilities. This year's "hot" idea may fade quickly.
8. Make sure your work has a genuine sense of humor. Many new writers and composers tend to concoct "serious" musicals that bore audiences.
9. Don't waste time fearing mistakes. The most successful writers fail from time to time. Treat every project you work on as a learning experience, and you will find that failure can be a very creative place.
10. See every scene in your head. A good director will make it different and better, but you as the writer should have a rough idea of what every character is doing on stage. Never write a song and say, “I’ll let the director worry about that.”

About writing theater music – I have often left readings and workshops saying that the music was “functional but forgettable,” or that it was “appropriate but not inspired.” What I often hear can best be described as generic music – or worse, a poor imitation of Jason Robert Brown, Stephen Sondheim, Andrew Lloyd Webber…

What you need to do is to find and express your own voice.

1. "The art of writing music cannot really be taught, but it can be learned – by writing."
   -Maury Yeston
2. "Writing music is not something you do, it's something you are…You think in music."
   – Maury Yeston
3. "Study – if you only know three chords, you will write a three chord musical."
   – Stephen Sondheim
4. "Sing your melodies independent of accompaniment. The best ones carry within them their own harmonic structure. Examples, 'Always, 'Yesterday,' 'Oh What A Beautiful Mornin,' and 'Happy Birthday.'"
   – Maury Yeston
5. "Listen to everything!" –Sheldon Harnick (who in his 80s, spoke about learning about Rap & Hip Hop)
6. Always write with a digital recorder running. Many times, we come up with an idea and cannot recall it immediately afterward because our subconscious works faster than our brain’s ability to remember. (Jimmy Webb’s book—Tunesmith)
7. If you lift a song out of a scene and the scene still makes sense – something is wrong. A song should advance the plot.
8. Mr. Sondheim also makes a point to compose in every key. Putting your hands in different places on the piano helps you think of different progressions you normally wouldn’t go to.
9. Try not to start a song in the same key as the previous one. Transpose up or down a half-step if you need to, but never the same key.
10. Don’t be married to anything! Maurice Ravel once said, “The best work I did was with an eraser.” Lerner and Loewe wrote almost 200 songs for My Fair Lady.

About writing lyrics and dialogue: (these are not rules, but principals)
1. Lyrics exist in time (as opposed to poetry, which you read at your own speed). "The music is a relentless engine that keeps the lyrics going." –Stephen Sondheim
2. "Lyric writing is more a craft than an art." – Stephen Sondheim
3. "The first lyric the audience hears, the first song, is really what makes or breaks a show."
   – Oscar Hammerstein
4. "Give the actor something to act. If I had to sell secrets about lyric writing I would sell this secret about
   subtext. Otherwise it's shallow." – Arthur Laurents
5. "If you don't want that word to be the most important in the line, don't rhyme it." – Stephen Sondheim
6. Unlike pop and rock music, scansion is extremely important in a musical theatre score. Words must
   always be stressed on the correct syllable in order to achieve the correct dramatic intent.
7. Sondheim says that words that are spelled differently rhyme better. Mainly because the audience’s brain
   is trained to expect a rhyme that is spelled the same because we “see” the words in our head.
   Tougher/Suffer is a better rhyme than Tougher/Rougher.
8. Don’t be afraid of dialogue. If a scene works better with spoken word, don’t force a song in because you
   think it needs one.

Resources that you should have:
- A Thesaurus (http://thesaurus.com/)
- The Dictionary of American Slang (http://onlineslangdictionary.com/)
- Rhyming Dictionary (www.rhymezone.com – they also have an app)

Guidelines for Submitting Musicals:
1. One complete script (soft bound) of a full length musical, with all songs, lyrics, and dialogue completed.
   Script must be in “proper stage play format.” (Many examples can be found online.)
2. Do not enclose sheet music.
3. A separate page with a list of main characters and a general synopsis, not too detailed.
4. A CD of up to eight songs. Send what you consider to be the most important songs. Songs should be
   chronological. If you wish, you may also enclose a separate CD of the entire score or additional songs.
5. A separate page with the eight song titles and corresponding page numbers in the script.
6. If it exists, include a production history and any reviews.
7. A SASE (self-addressed stamped envelope) if you want it returned.

Finally, consider these key questions posed by Stuart Ostrow, the original producer of 1776 and Pippin:
1. The greatest question musical dramatists must answer is: does the story I am telling sing?
2. Is the subject sufficiently off the ground to compel the heightened emotion of bursting into song?
3. Will a song add a deeper understanding of character or situation?

If all songwriters and librettists answered those questions thoughtfully, audiences would be spared innumerable
hours of boredom. Dissect the worst musical you have ever seen, and odds are you will find that the story does not
really "sing."

Song Types: The most memorable show songs tend to gel around three kinds of character experiences –
1. Transition - a moment of change or conversion.
2. Realization - reaching an insight or new level of understanding.
3. Decision - after long wrangling, a character finally makes up his or her mind.

Finally, a brilliant resource: “Finishing the Hat,” the new book on songwriting by Stephen Sondheim.

Formatting a Script: http://www.playwrightsmuse.com/standardformat/

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