



Composer as Actor: Part Two

Activity by Daniel Felsenfeld, New York Philharmonic Teaching Artist

Welcome to lesson two of the acting lesson!

In part one, we talked a little about how adding a stress to a word can change not only the meaning of the word but the whole sentence,

So let's apply this to a poem titled
"The Sick Rose" by William Blake:

O Rose thou art sick.
The invisible worm,
That flies in the night
In the howling storm:

Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy:
And his dark secret love
Does thy life destroy.



This is the fun part! We get to take a poem and make it ours, as we prepare to set it.

First let's make a few decisions, nNot necessarily about the music, but about how we will perform the words.

Beginning at the beginning:

O Rose thou art sick.

The period at the end of this first line indicates that this is of course a full sentence, a complete thought. So we can try to sort out how we might attach some meaning to the sentence through emphasis of an individual word.

O Rose thou art sick.

- Emphasizing the first word sounds like a bang of an opening, like yelling “listen:”
- Emphasizing the second word: Rose, and not another flower?
- Emphasizing the third word: thou (you) are sick, maybe sicker than others
- Emphasizing the fourth word: @ow, Rose, you really ARE sick.
- Emphasizing the fifth word: You were well, Rose, but now you are not.

Now we can do this for the entire text: finding the hidden meanings in the stressing of certain words, even certain syllables..

Perform this poem!

Ask yourself a lot of questions: is there a certain word that is most important, that needs special attention in the music. “Sick”? “Worm”?

“Joy”? “Love”? All of this is up to you — you are the composer, and the actor. Is there a word that you think is the second most important? Third?

Take a glimpse at the number of syllables. The *first sentence is all one-syllable words*. In fact, the only words in the whole poem that have more than one syllable are: *invisible, howling, crimson, secret, and destroy*. There might be something to that...!

You are now ready to begin composing and packing meaning into your text to make it sing!

