MUSIC THEATRE REPERTOIRE LAB

Free Resource

Songs I Wish Were Mine

A Cross-Voice Cabaret

When to go for it. When to let it go. And how to build a whole show from it.

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A PERSONAL NOTE

Why this guide exists

I am a soprano. I have wanted to sing Stars from Les Miserables for most of my career. I have also wanted to sing Anthem and Pity the Child from Chess, Sandy from Grease, Corner of the Sky from Pippin, Run Away With Me from The Mad Ones, and virtually everything the men sing in City of Angels.

Some of these I have sung. Some I have had the sense to leave alone. The difference between those two categories is the subject of this guide.

The most sophisticated question in repertoire is not "what can I sing" - it is "what is mine." And sometimes the answer is: a song written for a different voice type. Sometimes a piece is so good, so universal in its emotional world, so free in its tessitura when thoughtfully transposed, that the voice-type boundary simply does not apply. Run Away With Me from The Mad Ones was written for a tenor. I have performed it. It works. The song is too good to belong to one register.

But Stars belongs to baritones. And some pieces - the darkly comic ones, the obsession songs, the gloriously unhinged breakup pieces - belong to whoever has the nerve to perform them. This guide tells you which is which.

There is also something here beyond a reference guide. The four sections of this document are themselves a cabaret programme. The songs that got away. The turnabout pieces. The obsession cluster. The ones that genuinely belong to anyone. That is a show. The closing page tells you how to build it.

- Nicole Thomson

HOW TO READ THIS GUIDE

The four verdicts

VERDICT: YES	The piece crosses cleanly. Tessitura works, emotional world transfers, dramatic context does not depend on the original voice or gender. Bring it.
VERDICT: WITH CAVEATS	The crossing requires genuine justification. Read the guidance. The question is not whether you can perform it technically - it is whether your connection is strong enough to make it defensible.
VERDICT: FOR MOST: NO	The piece belongs to its original voice for real reasons - tessitura, dramatic context, or both. This does not mean no one can ever cross it. It means most performers who try will be working against the song.
VERDICT: ANY VOICE - BY DESIGN	The piece was written without voice-type restriction. There is no crossing required - it already belongs to you.

The Songs That Got Away

These are the pieces female performers have always wanted to sing - and in some cases have sung. The verdict is different for each one.

"Stars"

Les Miserables - Schonberg & Boublil - 1980

Original voice: Baritone (Javert)

WHY EVERYONE WANTS IT

One of the most magnificent pieces of character writing in the MT canon. Javert's absolute moral certainty declared to the night sky - the stars as fixed points against which all human chaos is measured. The soaring melody, the philosophical lyric, the dramatic stakes. Irresistible to any serious singer regardless of voice type.

VERDICT: For most non-baritones: no.

The tessitura sits decisively in a mid-to-low baritone range. Tenors who attempt it fight the key throughout. Sopranos and mezzos who attempt it push into uncomfortable chest register. The honest test: not "can I reach the notes" but "does my voice live freely in the space where this song breathes." For most non-baritones, it does not.

> *"I have wanted to sing this my entire career. I have not. This is the most important distinction in this guide - the difference between wanting a song and the song being yours." - Nicole Thomson*

"Anthem"

Chess - Andersson & Ulvaeus / Tim Rice - 1984

Original voice: Tenor (Anatoly)

WHY EVERYONE WANTS IT

A declaration of love for one's homeland that transcends national identity entirely. The ascending melody is among the most beautiful in the entire MT tenor canon and the emotional commitment required is completely universal.

VERDICT: Mezzos and sopranos: yes, with genuine self-examination.

The tessitura sits comfortably in a mezzo and lower soprano range when transposed thoughtfully. The dramatic question is different: Anatoly is a specific person in a specific political situation. A female voice bringing it must know exactly why she is singing this - not just that she loves the melody. When that answer is genuine, it can be completely beautiful.

> *"I have sung this. The key works, the emotional world is genuinely mine, and I knew exactly why I was singing it. Knowing why is everything." - Nicole Thomson*

"Pity the Child"

Chess - Andersson & Ulvaeus / Tim Rice - 1984

Original voice: Tenor (Freddie)

WHY EVERYONE WANTS IT

Freddie's account of his abandoned childhood - a boy who decided to need no one. The combination of psychological specificity, dramatic arc, and the extraordinary final belt makes it one of the great dramatic tenor pieces in the repertoire.

VERDICT: Mezzos and belt sopranos: yes, with full character commitment.	The dramatic world - a person who built walls against needing anyone - is not gender-specific. A mezzo or belt soprano who inhabits the specific psychology can do extraordinary things with this piece. The critical requirement: know Freddie, know the show, understand why this specific person is saying these specific things.

> *"This is one I have performed. When the emotional world is genuinely yours - when you understand that specific kind of self-protective toughness - it does not matter what the original voice type was." - Nicole Thomson*

"Sandy"

Grease - Louis St Louis / Scott Simon - 1971

Original voice: Baritone (Danny Zuko)

WHY EVERYONE WANTS IT

Danny's private confession that he made a terrible mistake. Beneath the leather jacket is a genuinely vulnerable young man and the lyric captures that with complete honesty. Every performer who has ever prioritised image over connection recognises this moment.

VERDICT: Sopranos and mezzos: yes, with a clear dramatic reframing.	The tessitura is accessible for most soprano and mezzo voices. The reframing is simple: you are singing about the universal experience of realising too late what you had - not playing Danny specifically. In a concert or cabaret context, that is completely defensible. In a show-specific audition, know which room you are in.

"Corner of the Sky"

Pippin - Stephen Schwartz - 1972

Original voice: Tenor (Pippin)

WHY EVERYONE WANTS IT

The aspirational declaration that every young person makes - that there must be something more, somewhere where everything makes sense. Schwartz captures genuine youthful urgency with complete melodic and emotional clarity.

VERDICT: Sopranos and mezzos: yes.	The tessitura is genuinely comfortable for most soprano and mezzo voices and the emotional world is completely transferable. The interesting note: this piece is now overdone for tenors - a soprano or mezzo bringing it with genuine freshness may actually have an advantage over the expected tenor choice. Know you are crossing voice type and bring something specific.

"Being Alive"

Company - Stephen Sondheim - 1970

Original voice: Baritone (Bobby, age 35)

WHY EVERYONE WANTS IT

The emotional statement at the heart of one of the greatest MT scores ever written. Bobby's decision to finally want connection, even knowing what it costs. The universality of that moment makes every voice type feel they have earned it.

VERDICT: Tenors: yes. Mezzos: sometimes. Sopranos: usually no.	Tenors often inhabit this beautifully - the tessitura is comfortable and the emotional world transfers. Mezzos have performed it with genuine success when the connection to Bobby's specific journey is real. Sopranos tend to push uncomfortably in the lower phrases. First question: does your voice live freely here? Second: have you genuinely lived your way into what Bobby is saying? Bobby is explicitly 35. That is not an accident.

"City of Angels - Male Repertoire"

City of Angels - Cy Coleman / David Zippel - 1989

Original voice: Various male voices (Stone, Stine, Munoz, Buddy)

WHY EVERYONE WANTS IT

The City of Angels score is among the most sophisticated in the MT canon - film noir, jazz, and theatrical pastiche in a brilliant double-layered narrative. The male characters are drawn with extraordinary complexity and the songs have a wit and edge that makes them irresistible to any serious singer.

VERDICT: Female voices: some pieces yes, case by case.	Some pieces have a more universal emotional core that crosses cleanly. Others are so specifically tied to the male noir world that crossing undermines the dramatic context. Approach piece by piece. Know the show deeply - the sophistication of the score rewards it.

> *"I have wanted to perform so much of this score. Some of it I have. The show rewards genuine research and genuine connection." - Nicole Thomson*

Turnabout

The crossing works both ways. These pieces were written for female voices and work beautifully - in most cases - for tenors and baritones who bring the right quality.

"The Miller's Son"

A Little Night Music - Stephen Sondheim - 1973

Original voice: Mezzo-soprano (Petra)

WHY EVERYONE WANTS IT

Petra's pragmatic, good-humoured philosophy of life and love - a working-class woman surveying her romantic prospects with clear-eyed intelligence and genuine wit. The melody is bright and forward and the lyric has a directness that feels contemporary regardless of era.

VERDICT: Baritones and lower tenors: yes, with genuine wit.

The tessitura sits in a comfortable range for most baritones and lower tenors when transposed down a step or two. The pragmatic worldview - surveying your options with clear-eyed realism rather than romantic idealism - is completely transferable. A male voice bringing genuine comic intelligence to this piece can be outstanding.

"Much More"

The Fantasticks - Harvey Schmidt / Tom Jones - 1960

Original voice: Soprano (Luisa)

WHY EVERYONE WANTS IT

Luisa's declaration that she wants more from life than the small world she has been given - adventures, romance, danger, beauty, everything. The aspirational longing of any young person who knows the world is larger than what they can currently see.

VERDICT: Tenors: yes. Baritones: yes with transposition.

The emotional world is entirely gender-neutral. Young aspiration and the longing for a larger life belong to any voice, any gender. Transpose to suit your range - the piece is not dramatically dependent on its original key. A tenor or baritone bringing genuine hunger to this material will find it works beautifully.

"Losing My Mind"

Follies - Stephen Sondheim - 1971

Original voice: Soprano / mezzo (Sally Durant)

WHY EVERYONE WANTS IT

One of Sondheim's most perfectly restrained pieces - obsessive love expressed through complete emotional stillness. The melody is hypnotic, the lyric is devastating in its simplicity, and the emotional world - the specific madness of loving someone who does not love you back - is entirely universal.

VERDICT: Baritones and tenors: yes, with genuine restraint.	The tessitura adapts comfortably for male voices with transposition. The emotional world - obsessive, circular, sleepless love - does not belong to one gender. The technical requirement is the same for any voice: the piece must be underplayed, not performed. A male voice bringing genuine stillness and restraint can do something extraordinary with this material.

"Not a Day Goes By"

Merrily We Roll Along - Stephen Sondheim - 1981

Original voice: Soprano (Beth)

WHY EVERYONE WANTS IT

The devastation of a love that ended badly, expressed with complete emotional honesty. The ascending phrases and the lyric's accumulation of loss make it one of the most quietly overwhelming pieces Sondheim ever wrote. Anyone who has loved and lost understands it immediately.

VERDICT: Tenors and baritones: yes.	The piece has been performed by male voices to extraordinary effect since the show's original production included a male reprise. The emotional world is entirely transferable. Transpose to suit - the harmonic language matters more than the key. A male voice bringing genuine grief and restraint to this will find it is one of the most powerful crossings in this guide.

"Rose's Turn"

Gypsy - Jule Styne / Stephen Sondheim - 1959

Original voice: Dramatic mezzo / soprano (Mama Rose)

WHY EVERYONE WANTS IT

The greatest character piece in the MT canon. The full, uncontrolled release of a lifetime of suppressed ambition and consuming need. Every serious performer of any voice type feels the pull of this material.

VERDICT: Only when it is genuinely yours. No exceptions.	Not age-restricted. Experience-restricted. Rose's Turn requires a performer who has lived with complicated, consuming ambition and arrived at the specific self-awareness of realising they wanted something for themselves that they told themselves they wanted for someone else. Male voices have performed this. It can be done. But the bar is the same: earn it first.

The Obsession Cluster

Some songs belong to a very specific emotional world: the comedy of obsessive love, the dark satisfaction of imagined revenge, the theatrical pleasure of completely unjustified self-justification. These pieces work for any voice - because unhinged feelings do not discriminate.

"I Really, Really Love You (The Stalker Song)"

(Sorta) Love Songs - Paul Loesel / Scott Burkell - 1997

Original voice: Male voice - comedic tenor/baritone

WHY EVERYONE WANTS IT

A perfect comic character piece about obsessive love delivered with complete, unself-conscious conviction. The character's absolute certainty that their behaviour is entirely reasonable is the entire joke - and it lands every time with the right performer. One of the most reliably funny standalone MT comedy pieces available.

VERDICT: Any voice: yes.

Originally written for a male voice but performed with equal success by any voice type. The comedy is entirely in the character's conviction, not in the voice performing it. The range adapts easily with transposition. Available through Easy Song Publishing. Note: this is a standalone piece, not from a produced show - ideal for cabarets and showcases where no show context is needed.

"In Short"

Edges: A Song Cycle - Benj Pasek & Justin Paul - 2005

Original voice: Any voice - designed for cross-voice performance

WHY EVERYONE WANTS IT

A breakup song in which the speaker delivers a calm, considered farewell - then reveals a gloriously escalating list of imagined ways they would like their ex to meet their end. "I wanna punch you in the face... Choke on a Now and Later... In short, I hope you die." Pasek and Paul write the comedy with complete deadpan precision and the piece is a masterclass in comic understatement.

VERDICT: Any voice: yes - by design.

Edges was explicitly written to be performed by any combination of voices and genders. "In Short" works for any voice type and the comedy is entirely in the delivery - the calm before and during the list, the complete conviction throughout. Available through MTI Australasia (mtishows.com.au). Content note: the language is strong in some versions - check the licensed version for the exact text before performing in a formal audition context.

"Cell Block Tango"

Chicago - John Kander / Fred Ebb - 1975

Original voice: Six female voices (Velma and the Cell Block Six)

WHY EVERYONE WANTS IT

Six women explaining, with complete comic self-justification, why they killed their husbands or lovers. The combination of jazz, dark comedy, theatrical precision, and the absolute conviction of each character makes it one of

the most theatrically complete pieces in the MT canon.

VERDICT: Male voices on solo sections: yes, with full commitment.

As a full ensemble piece it belongs to its original casting. As a solo extraction - particularly "He Had It Coming" as a general statement of justified grievance - male voices can bring something genuinely interesting. The key is complete commitment to the character's absolute self-justification. Play the conviction, not the comedy.

Genuinely Yours - Whoever You Are

These pieces were either designed for cross-voice performance, have been performed so widely across voice types that the original context barely registers, or carry an emotional world so universal that the voice-type question is simply irrelevant.

"Run Away With Me"

The Mad Ones - Kait Kerrigan / Bree Lowdermilk - 2019

Original voice: Tenor (Trevor to Samantha)

WHY EVERYONE WANTS IT

Urgent, unguarded romantic drive with a melody too irresistible to leave to one voice type. The show is obscure enough in Australia that most panels have no fixed idea of what it sounds like - freeing the performer completely.

VERDICT: Any voice: yes.	Originally sung by a tenor but performed by sopranos and mezzos with equal success - including by experienced professional performers who connected with the material too strongly to leave it to tenors. The dramatic drive and urgency are completely transferable. Know the show, know the original character, be prepared to discuss your decision.

"Trevor sings it. I have sung it. The song is simply too good to belong to one register." - Nicole Thomson

"Not While I'm Around"

Sweeney Todd - Stephen Sondheim - 1979

Original voice: Lyric tenor (Tobias)

WHY EVERYONE WANTS IT

Simple, devoted protection expressed with complete emotional honesty. One of Sondheim's most beautiful and accessible lyric pieces and the innocence of the character makes it emotionally accessible for any voice at almost any age.

VERDICT: Any voice: yes.	The emotional quality - devoted, simple, genuine care - belongs to any voice and any gender. The tessitura adapts comfortably with transposition. The one consistent caveat: know the show. The dramatic irony of Tobias's promise is profound within the context of Sweeney Todd and a performance that understands that subtext will always be more interesting than one that treats it as simply a pretty song.

"Edges - the cycle as a whole"

Edges: A Song Cycle - Benj Pasek & Justin Paul - 2005

Original voice: Written for four performers - any voices, any genders

WHY EVERYONE WANTS IT

Pasek and Paul's first major work was specifically designed for any combination of voices and genders. Every song in the cycle was written to be performed by whoever connects with it most - making the entire score a cross-voice resource by design. The themes - coming of age, love, identity, anxiety, the pressure to be perfect - belong to

everyone.

VERDICT: The whole cycle: any voice, by design.

This is the rare case where the original intent was cross-voice. There is no wrong casting in Edges. Pick the pieces that resonate most with your specific experience and your specific voice. Available through MTI Australasia (mtishows.com.au). A concert or cabaret using only Edges material is itself a viable and coherent programme - the cycle was designed for exactly that kind of presentation.

"On My Own"

Les Miserables - Schonberg & Boublil - 1980

Original voice: Mezzo-soprano (Eponine)

WHY EVERYONE WANTS IT

The landscape of unrequited love - watching the person you love choose someone else - is universal. Every voice type has been in Eponine's world.

VERDICT: Sopranos: technically yes, strategically careful. Others: with real thought.

The tessitura is comfortable for most sopranos. The strategic problem: this is now the most over-auditioned piece in the soprano/mezzo canon. Adding to that list is not technically wrong - just strategically risky. Male voices have a larger hurdle: Eponine's situation is specifically female in its social and dramatic context. It can be done thoughtfully. It is rarely done thoughtfully enough.

THE CABARET

How to build a show from this guide

The four sections of this guide are a show. Here is a sample running order for a 50-minute cabaret - "Songs I Wish Were Mine" - that any MT performer could pitch to a venue tomorrow.

#	SONG	SECTION	NOTE
1	Corner of the Sky	The Songs That Got Away	Opening - "this one is mine, whatever anyone says"
2	Much More	Turnabout	Contrast - male voice, same aspirational energy
3	Anthem	The Songs That Got Away	First serious piece - with introduction
4	I Really, Really Love You	Obsession Cluster	Comedy pivot - the audience needs the release
5	Not a Day Goes By	Turnabout	Emotional depth - male or female
6	In Short	Obsession Cluster	Back to comedy - the breakup counterpart
7	Pity the Child	The Songs That Got Away	Second serious act - belt showcase
8	Not While I'm Around	Genuinely Yours	Quiet - let the audience breathe
9	Sandy / The Miller's Son	Cross-voice pair	The "we're doing this deliberately" moment
10	Run Away With Me	Genuinely Yours	Penultimate - full commitment
11	Being Alive / Rose's Turn	Earned finale	Only if it is genuinely yours - see guide

The principle of the show is stated in the title and the opening number: these are songs I wish were mine - and here is my argument for why they are. The audience's pleasure is watching a performer claim territory, make a case, succeed sometimes, and acknowledge limits with grace.

For more on repertoire selection, cross-voice performance, and building an audition book that works - visit musictheatrerepertoire.com.au

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