

SONGS



Catherine Zeta Jones and Queen Latifah sing the Oscar-nominated song “I Move On,” by John Kander and Fred Ebb, during the telecast of the 75th Academy Awards.

Songs in films, whether they are existing popular songs or composed specifically for a film, express or emphasize the thoughts and emotions of the characters or heighten the mood of the film in both musical and non-musical films. They may highlight a single dramatic moment or represent the theme of the entire movie. Movie theme songs often become so popular that people enjoy them long after the film has left theaters. Composers can employ well-known songs to set the film’s historical period or evoke the music of a foreign country.

Characters in musicals often break into song when they cannot express the strength of their feelings in any other way. Songwriters will search the script for places where the story lends itself to songs. Sometimes a line of dialogue provides the first words of the song.

While movie scores are usually written after the film has been completed, songs and song scores for musicals are written and recorded before filming begins. (Often a musical

existed as a live-theater production well before it became a movie musical.) The actors then lip-sync to the recorded songs during their performances. This ensures the songs will sound “perfect” and allow the actors to concentrate on their visual performances. Often actors who cannot sing well lip-sync to pre-recorded singing by another performer.

Listen to the song from a movie or musical that your teacher has chosen to play. What is the title of the song? What does the title tell you about the song?

How does the song use rhythm, instrumentation, lyrics and melody to develop the character or situation?

Does the song mirror the visuals or does it contradict them?

Now listen to more of the score. Note where you hear the song or parts of the song recur.

Why do you think the composer chose to use the song again in these places?

SONG TERMS

MELODY: A linear sequence of notes that make up the most recognizable part of a piece of music. Melody is usually pleasing to the ear.

PITCH: The relative highness or lowness of a musical note. In general, bigger objects make deeper noises and smaller objects make higher-pitched sounds. Low-pitched sounds and music can sound threatening or sad, while high-pitched sounds tend to be perceived as happy or carefree.

RHYTHM: A regular, repeated pattern formed by a series of notes of differing duration and stress which give music its character.