

# Singing for performance

**16/07/20**

**Natalie Duncan**

Hi! I hope you're well.

Today I want to take a look at one of the most recorded Jazz standards of all time, 'Summertime'

This song was written by George Gershwin in 1934 for the Porgy and Bess Opera.

I believe it is a useful exercise as a musician to evaluate some of the most iconic songs that have now become part of our musical history and dissect what makes them so unique.

Songs like 'Summertime', 'Amazing Grace' and 'Imagine' are examples of songs that are intrinsic to the tapestry of western culture. These are the types of songs that most people can hum, almost absent mindedly.

Something about the simplicity of the lyrics.

'Summertime and the livin' is easy, fish are jumpin' and the cotton is high'...

Coupled with the minor pentatonic melody which is steeped in the blues, then the repetitive rhythmic pattern, make this traditional song extremely memorable.

I found this brief analogy of the lyrics very interesting:

*'That "and" is worth a great deal of attention. I would write "Summertime when" but that "and" sets up a tone, a whole poetic tone, not to mention a whole kind of diction that is going to be used in the play; an informal, uneducated diction and a stream of consciousness, as in many of the songs like "My Man's Gone Now". It's the exact right word, and that word is worth its weight in gold. "Summertime when the livin' is easy" is a boring line compared to "Summertime and". The choices of "ands" [and] "buts" become almost traumatic as you*

*are writing a lyric – or should, anyway – because each one weighs so much.'*

- This is such a beautiful observation.

Summertime is a 'go to' song for most singers as a standard cover so it is a really great song to learn. As a starting point, find a version of the song that feels good to you and then see if you can put your own unique spin on it.

Play with different rhythms and different vocal melodies within the song.

Summertime, and the livin' is easy  
Fish are jumpin' and the cotton is high  
Oh, your daddy's rich and your ma is good-lookin'  
So hush little baby, Don't you cry

One of these mornings you're gonna rise up singing  
And you'll spread your wings and you'll take to the sky  
But 'til that morning, there ain't nothin' can harm you  
With Daddy and Mammy standin' by

Summertime, and the livin' is easy  
Fish are jumpin' and the cotton is high

Oh, your daddy's rich and your ma is good-lookin'  
So hush little baby, Don't you cry