

## Write about someone who has always done something as part of a group, and is now starting to set out solo, or vice versa.

‘Tony, pick up the music,’ said George with an exasperated sigh, ‘Stop behaving like a two year old, and get over yourself. Sheesh! Anyone would think the world revolved around you.’

Luciano, Pietro and Simon ushered George from the rehearsal space knocking stands and chairs over in their rush to remove him from Tony’s line of sight. There had been more than one incident recently when George had pushed Tony’s buttons and the response had become physical.

‘I don’t understand you two,’ said Pietro, ‘You’re both wonderful tenors, but you fight all the time like a married couple. Stop competing with each other. Please, for all our sakes.’

‘Sorry guys,’ said George, ‘I know we need Tony’s name as a draw card to get our group known, but he’s never sung in a group before. I don’t think he even understands what blending in means. He’s so centre-stage all the time.’

The four men stood outside the studio and listened to Tony’s tirade continuing, even through the soundproof door.

‘Wonderful voice projection,’ quipped Simon, breaking the tension of a fraught morning’s rehearsal. His three amigos began chuckling, then laughing outright.

‘Absolute perfection,’ agreed George, ‘Thanks Simon for bringing us back to earth. Me in particular.’ He turned to the others, reaching to touch each on the arm.

‘I’m sorry,’ said George looking at each man in turn, ‘I’ll try not to set him off again. But we have to do something about his tantrums, and trying to sing lead where there is no lead in a group.’

Luciano had been quiet to this point, but now offered a solution.

‘Let me go and talk to him alone,’ he said, ‘I’ll listen for a short while, then talk about singing as one, group dynamic and contributing without standing out. In a way that’s more difficult than singing solo like he has for years.’

‘I don’t think you’ll get anywhere, but go ahead and try,’ said George, ‘I need a break. I’ll take the guys for coffee. We’ll be back in about fifteen minutes.’

Luciano watched his friends walk towards the coffee wagon, steeled himself, turned and walked back inside. Ahead he could see Tony still yelling obscenities and flapping the musical score to punctuate his words. In the sound booth to the left, the technician, their manager and promotions person were all leaning in towards microphones, turning up the volume to speak over Tony. Luciano waved to get their attention then ran a finger across his throat. Those in the sound booth released the mics, sat back throwing their arms in the air, and turned off the speakers.

After a few seconds Tony stopped yelling. There was no-one responding and he looked towards the booth to see the three men with folded arms and closed mouths.

Luciano approached Tony who turned at the sound of his footsteps. Tony's face was bright red, palms obviously sweaty from the limp paper dangling there.

'Right Tony,' said Luciano calmly, taking a seat, 'What's going on?'

Tony started yelling and Luciano raised his hands, shaking his head and pointing to the chair opposite.

'Sit with me,' he indicated, 'And take a breath. What was it that has caused such a long, loud reaction?'

Tony dropped into the chair, breathing hard.

'That George, he doesn't understand,' said Tony, 'I've been singing on my own for twenty years and making a good living. Now I agree to sing with you four, and George is telling me what to do. How dare he! What does he know? Where's his platinum record?'

Luciano placed a hand on Tony's knee.

'Calm my friend,' he said, 'We all know you have a brilliant history and have charmed crowds around the world. There's no doubting your voice.'

Tony nodded, accepting the praise and acknowledgements.

'But we also know that in the last couple of years things haven't been so easy,' said Luciano carefully, 'The nodules on your vocal cords put a big hole in your performing calendar as you recovered. Yes?'

'Yes, but I can still sing,' retorted Tony.

'Of course you can, but singing at your previous volume could bring back the problem,' guided Luciano, 'Isn't that so? And to keep your voice in form but not strained, you have agreed to collaborate with us. Good for us, good for you.'

Tony didn't respond, but watched Luciano closely wondering where this was going.

'For the moment we need each other, and that means being able to work together,' he said, 'And as a group we must sing with one voice, yes?'

Tony nodded, 'Yes, to achieve perfection it must be one voice.'

'So when you sing over others, we don't achieve that Tony,' said Luciano, 'We know you have the most experienced voice, but we must sound as one. No leads.'

Tony looked at the team in the sound booth. All were nodding their heads in agreement.

'You will demonstrate just how brilliant you are if you can show you can blend with other voices,' said Luciano, 'Imagine the new fans you will get from singing beautifully with a less experienced group. Your old fans will see you mentoring the next generation, the new fans will discover a voice they've never heard before. You could be seen as the best tenor ever, but only if you can let go of being a soloist in here.'

‘But they won’t hear me in the group,’ said Tony, ‘How will they know it’s me?’

Luciano smiled, ‘Tony, you know that being good within a group means your individual voice is not heard, but you contribute to the joint voice we create together. In a way, that could be seen as even more difficult than singing solo where you can use your creativity and personal nuances to guide your performance.’

Tony appeared to be listening so he continued.

‘Your pitch, timing, intonations and phrasing must be accurate. The blending must be flawless,’ said Luciano, ‘In other words, you have to be perfect every time you sing it. And we know you strive for perfection, and often achieve it.’

Just then the studio door opened and the other three returned, holding out coffees for Luciano and Tony. George himself offered the cup to Tony.

‘I’m sorry Tony,’ said George quietly, ‘I didn’t mean to upset you. I got frustrated because you are such an accomplished performer, and I felt you were letting yourself down. There’s so much we can learn from you if you’ll come down from heaven occasionally and help us. Could you? Please?’

Their manager in the booth rolled his eyes at this blatant flattery, but his mouth dropped open with Tony’s next words.

‘You are all good singers,’ said Tony, ‘I will help you improve, and we will record this masterpiece together.’

The four younger singers applauded, patted Tony on the back and Luciano gave a thumbs up to the sound booth, then pointed to the door.

‘Can you leave us for an hour please?’ asked Luciano, ‘We have some work to do before we can record again.’

The bemused management team could only agree as they watched the unexpected bonhomie, rampant in the studio before them.

Pietro took the initiative. The quietest of the singers, he broke into their camaraderie with a single note, softly at first, then gathering a little more volume. All the men recognised it as the first note of a baroque piece.

Tony bowed his head to Pietro, and waved the others in to join the singing. Each man took up their note and stood in a circle, watching for cues and listening hard to ensure the purity of their voices. Tony was last to begin, and carefully matched his tone to the others. The song meandered through the verses, swelling to the climax and ending with a sharp cut off that seemed to leave the last note lingering in the air after the music had stopped.

All five men looked at each other in amazement.

Pietro smiled, lifting his phone to the middle of the group and pressed playback. From the small device before them came voices like angels, each one working in harmony with the other.

‘I see now Luciano,’ said Tony, ‘That is one voice. That is perfection.’

