The Musical Scene – A Definition

A musical scene is a sequence who dramatic action is too large to be contained solely by the fully-structured song at its core. A musical scene, therefore, contains additional musical material before or after the song, is likely to include underscored dialogue, and might include variations or reprises of the song.

Musical scenes are useful when there are multiple conflicting forces on stage at the same time (Think *Tonight* from *West Side Story*), but they're not merely crowd scenes. The focus of a musical scene is generally on one character who is working through a problem or confronting a conflict, though there could be multiple characters in action.

A musical scene typically is comprised of wall-to-wall music, without break for dialogue...or just a lift for a line or two. If there are breaks, they're punctuation, rather than entire beats of a story or whole scenes.

Ballads, rhythm/uptempo songs and comedy songs can all serve as the basis for musical scenes. “Tonight” from *West Side Story* is an extended musical scene arising from a ballad.

A caution: don't create a musical scene simply by adding underscoring or vamps to a scene in a book. You want your music to have a dramatic function, and not simply mark time in order to make a scene feel as though it's a whole musical sequence.

Examples of The Musical Scene

Classic:
- Tonight (*West Side Story*)
- Do I Love You (*Fiddler on the Roof*)
- You Must Meet My Wife (*A Little Night Music*)
- I'm Going Back (*Bells Are Ringing*)
- A Weekend in the Country (*A Little Night Music*)

Contemporary
- The Money Song (*Avenue Q*)
- That Horrible Woman (* Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder*)
- Gay or European (*Legally Blonde*)
- Schuler Defeated (*Hamilton*)