Humorous Interpretation- Stock Characters

Humorous Interpretation performers have a list of go-to characters, complete with stance and voice. There is The Matriarch, Sassy Teen, Emo Kid, The Jock, English Gentleman/woman, Geek, Old Man, and so on. For those one-liner characters, or the ones who are strictly there for outrageous comedic relief, a stock character might make an appearance for a quick laugh. It's a cheap laugh, but one that usually works nonetheless. These stock characters, or stereotypes (yes, these are stereotypes as they are based on a generalization of a group), are familiar. And there is comfort in the familiar. Audiences know that character. People can instantly relate, see the joke, and thus make it easier for a performer to turn a character with minimal exposure into a laugh.

Though, in this politically correct world stock characters can become frowned upon rather quickly if pushed too far. There is risk in having a gay character be flamboyant and very Jack from *Will & Grace*. To avoid turning a laugh into a grimace there are a few general stock character rules:

1. **Don't overstock.** A Humorous Interpretation with nothing *but* stereotypes is dull. Audiences know these characters; they see them every day on television and in movies. Not only does this over stereotype use bore your audience, it also displays how unoriginal you are with interpretation. In an event entitled Humorous Interpretation it might be wise to prominently market your interpretation skills by, perhaps, actually doing some?

2. **Know the limits.** A stock character can swiftly transform into a harsh stereotype if the joke is taken too far. Exaggeration works in comedy and is one of the prominent features, but using a stereotype's gesture/vocalization to an extreme is non-funny. How California-bubbly of a voice are you going to add to that Cheerleader who flips her hair WAY to much and spells out words? Seriously. It is like watching a guy tell a joke he

thinks is HILARIOUS, and laugh wildly about it in an annoying way, when it really is not. Just stop. The joke is dead.

3. **SUBSTANCE!!!** A stock character for a minor role is okay and can be a riot if done tactfully. A lead role as a blatant stereotype, unless the script deems so, might not work. Comedy is funny because of the crazy shenanigans characters get into and the over-the-top performances. HOWEVER, there needs to be some reflection of reality, otherwise there is no merit to your work. Comedy is meant to teach life lessons in an embellished manner. How can audiences connect and learn from a Humorous Interpretation when the characters are so distant and unreal?

4. **Familiarity.** Stock characters/stereotypes are images and voices and caricatures the audience has seen before. Ergo, your Humorous Interpretation can easily become boring if the character has no real flair. To properly use a stock character you need to give all your energy and sell it. Try adding different quirks as stated/interpreted from the script as well to add *some* originality. HI performers must be creative and energetic to win the audience.

Creating categories and labeling groups is unavoidable. Stock characters have been in existence since the Ancient Greeks created theatre (who can forget Theophrastus' character of The Unpleasant Man?). Back then, easily recognizable characters--through dress, mask, and stance--were necessary so the audience knew the persona and could learn the moral to the Drama without complication. Thousands of years later and humans *still* need to generalize and create an image of a group. People relate to the generalization yet can distance themselves just enough to give comfort that they are "not that person." This fine balance is what helps allow for some connection and catharsis to ensue. Break the bubble of comfort and people find the generalization tasteless. Knowing that, stereotypes/stock characters can become mean and mindless when

lacking heart and if pushed beyond boundaries. Always be mindful of the stock character you use and ask "is this too far?"