

BUFFALO FALL MUSIC SCHOOL -TABLE TOP DISCUSSIONS Oct. 3-5, 2014

STATION 17 - ELAINE GAIN Faculty-What Makes a Good Arrangement for My Chorus or Quartet Level?

There are many points to consider when choosing an arrangement for your chorus or quartet. Here are some questions to consider:

1. What type of music do you like to sing and what purpose is this song going to serve? e.g. contest, show, jazz, pop, ballad, rhythm, religious, inspirational, love song, leaving song. The song should fit your personality, experience, skill level, and be an appropriate message, lyrically for your group. Listen to many recordings of songs.
2. Know your ranges for each part. Do you have a low bass? Can your tenors sing really high? How good is your baritone at jumps and tuning? Is the lead lower or higher? Where is the lead's 'sweet spot'? Take a look at the highest and lowest note for each part. Would your group be comfortable singing these notes?
3. Take a good look at the arrangement to determine how many accidentals (sharps, flats, naturals) there are. Are there key changes? How many? Do you see chromatic runs, i.e. several notes running up or down by half steps? Does the page look busy, or clear?
4. Is the rhythm straight forward, or does it have a multitude of 8ths, 16ths, many ties, slurs, and ties over the barlines. Is there syncopation, i.e. emphasis on the 'off-beat'? The more of these there are, the more difficult it is. How well does your group handle these rhythmic challenges?
5. Are the lyrics clear in meaning and message? Do they have patterns that are easily memorized? How many verses or repeats are there? They should be appropriate for your chorus. The message should be easily understood by all.
6. As you listen to it, or play it over, are the harmonies major, ringing, uncomplicated with lots of BBS 7ths? These would be easier to tune. Are they minor, cool, slightly bluesy, with different modulations to unexpected keys? You may like the differences, but they're not always easy to tune.
7. The number of parts is important. There should be at least 4 parts most of the time. Are there extra layers making 6 or 8 parts? This would make it more challenging, especially for smaller groups. Is there a solo part for basses, tenor or bari? How would your group deal with this.
8. How quickly does your group learn music, from start to performance? How hard do you work at it? Do you have time, energy and talent to learn material, 12, 15, 18 pages long? It could take 6 months to a year if your arrangement too long. This can be frustrating, even if the arrangement is easy.
9. Are the chords spread over 10 to 12 notes? How often? Is the bari over the lead a lot? Is it over arranged? Many mens arrangement have these characteristics making it harder to tune and learn.