

Arranging Barbershop Harmony

THIRD EDITION

Carole Prietto

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Introduction

The only thing more fun than singing four-part harmony, barbershop style is creating four-part harmony, barbershop style. This book is an introduction to arranging barbershop harmony, especially arranging for high voices (SSAA). The intended audience is beginners just starting out in arranging and intermediate arrangers looking to take their music to the next level. It grew out of my own experiences, including two years of scholarship study in the former Sweet Adelines International Music Arrangers Program, classes at BHS Harmony University, self-study, and coaching Sweet Adeline arrangers in the U.S., Canada, Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand.

In writing it I wanted to:

- Incorporate the best current teaching from both Sweet Adelines and the Barbershop Harmony Society, including new learning about the African American origins of the barbershop style, the arranger's role in furthering diversity and inclusion in our organizations, and the importance of inclusion in the songs we choose to arrange.
- Incorporate material on the judging systems from both Sweet Adelines and the Barbershop Harmony Society. The BHS is now open to singers of all genders so the BHS judging system and chord vocabulary are covered in the book.
- Discuss arranging current popular songs, in addition to arranging for the contest stage.
- Discuss the business of arranging, especially copyright. Now more than ever a knowledge of copyright basics is essential to managing a catalog.
- Tap into the power of the Internet. Online resources now exist for sheet music, for performances of virtually any song or artist, for ear training, music notation and music theory. The popularity of mobile devices has given us apps for any aspect of music learning. Social media allows arrangers all over the world to have ongoing discussions about the craft of arranging. Links to online resources will be found throughout the book, and in the Resources chapter at the end.

While the book is intended for those just starting out in arranging, it does assume that the arranger has note reading skills in both clefs and is familiar with solfège and chord symbols. In September 2019, Sweet Adelines launched a new Arranger Certification Program (ACP). The material in this book will help in preparing for the tests which make up Level 1, as well as the intermediate work of Level 2.

Third edition updates:

- All links have been checked. New ones have been added.
- Alt-text has been added to all the graphics, to make the text more accessible.
- A new arranging section, with more information on chord substitution.
- The copyright section includes new information about copyright outside the U.S. and information about Hal Leonard's ArrangeMe Pro program.

I hope these pages help you in your own journey as a barbershop arranger. Please let me know what works, what doesn't, and what you would like to see.

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Resources

Websites are current as of June 2025

- Lynn Abbott, [Play That Barber Shop Chord: A Case for the African-American Origin of Barbershop Harmony](#). *American Music* Vol. 10, No. 3 (Autumn, 1992), pp. 289-325. Can be purchased from JSTOR.
- Barbershop Harmony Society titles
 - Arranging Barbershop Harmony. 4 volumes. [Volume 1: Getting Started](#) | [Volume 2: The Arranging Journey](#) | [Volume 3: Visions of Excellence](#) | Volume 4 forthcoming as of December 2024
 - [Music Fundamentals for Barbershoppers](#)
 - Physics of Barbershop Sound – [print](#) / [download](#)
 - *Theory of Barbershop Harmony* – [print](#) / [download](#)
- Barbershop Harmony Society, articles from [The Harmonizer](#), complete back run is available from the BHS website members area
 - Matthew Beales, "Honoring the Grand Central Red Caps" *The Harmonizer*, November-December 2017, p.18-23
 - Jim Henry, "The Historical Roots of Barbershop Harmony". *The Harmonizer*, July/August 2001. Jim Henry summarizes the major findings of his doctoral dissertation on the African-American roots of barbershop harmony.
 - Kevin Keller, "The Hallmark 7th Chord". *The Harmonizer*, July-August 2009, p.24-25.
 - David Wright, "The African-American Roots of Barbershop (and Why It Matters)". *The Harmonizer*, January-February 2015, p.10-15.
- Barbershop Harmony Society, *Notating Barbershop Arrangements* (2015). Available from BHS website, members area.
- [Berklee Press Titles](#)
 - Allen Bargfrede, [Music Law in the Digital Age](#) (Berklee Press 2021)
 - Jonathan Feist, [Berklee Contemporary Music Notation](#) (Berklee Press, 2017).
 - David Kusek and Gerd Leonhard, [The Future of Music: Manifesto for the Digital Music Revolution](#) (Berklee Press, 2005).
 - Matthew Nicoll and Richard Grudzinski, [Music Notation: Preparing Scores and Parts](#). Edited by Jonathan Feist (Berklee Press, 2007)
 - Paul Schmeling, *Berklee Music Theory*, [Book 1](#) and [Book 2](#) (2nd edition, Berklee Press, 2011)
 - Andrea Stolpe, with Jan Stolpe: [Beginning Songwriting: Writing Your Own Lyrics, Melodies, and Chords](#) (Berklee Press, 2015)
- Jason Blume, *This Business of Songwriting* (Revised 2nd edition, VNU Business Media Inc., 2013)
- Diane Clark and Billy J. Biffle, *So You Want to Sing Barbershop: A Guide for Performers* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2017)
- Liz Garnett, [Helping You Harmonise](#) Informative blog from a barbershop arranger, coach, and scholar in Great Britain

- Tom Gerou and Linda Lusk, *Alfred's Essentials of Music Notation: A Practical Dictionary* (Alfred Publishing Company 2009).
- Elaine Gould, [*Behind Bars: The Definitive Guide to Music Notation*](#) (Faber Music Limited, 2016)
- *Guidelines for Manuscript Preparation: for Composers, Arrangers, and Engravers*. Compiled and edited by Gayle Giese and Pick Edmondson (Warner Brothers Publications, 2002).
- Jim Henry, [*The Origins of Barbershop Harmony : A Study of Barbershop's Musical Link to Other African American Musics as Evidenced Through Recordings and Arrangements of Early Black And White Quartets*](#) (Ph.D. dissertation, Washington University in St. Louis, 2000). Purchase from ProQuest Dissertations (ProQuest dissertation number: 9972671). Purchase of the dissertation does not include the audio CD that was included with the original manuscript. The musical examples are transcribed and fully cited in the bibliography. Purchase will cost around \$40U.S. If you live near a university library or large public library, ask if they subscribe to ProQuest dissertations and whether you can get access through them.
- Thomas Forrest Kelly, [*Capturing Music: The Story of Notation*](#) (Norton, 2014). About early music and how music notation evolved during the Middle Ages. Written for a non-academic, nicely illustrated. Print book has a companion CD; Kindle edition includes audio.
- M. William Krasilovsky, Sydney Shemel, John Gross, and Jonathan Feinstein, [*This Business of Music: The Definitive Guide to the Business and Legal Issues of the Music Industry*](#) (10th edition, Random House, 2007).
- [Music Printing History](#) – Website about different technologies that have been used to get notes onto the page, from the Middle Ages to today.
- Willard Palmer, Morton Manus, and Amanda Vick Lethco, [*The Complete Book of Scales, Chords, Arpeggios, & Cadences*](#) (Alfred Publishing, 1994)
- [ScoringNotes](#) – Blog and podcast with breaking news, tips, and tutorials in the world of music notation programs and music notation practices; also a good source for developments in music apps for mobile devices. Operated by NYC Music Services, a music preparation company based in New York City.
- Deke Sharon and Dylan Bell, [*A Cappella Arranging*](#) (Hal Leonard, 2012) and [*A Cappella Arranging 2.0*](#) (Rowman & Littlefield, 2024)
- Sweet Adelines International, articles in *The Pitch Pipe*
 - Corinna Garriock, [*"Inclusive Music Selection"*](#). Pitch Pipe, October 2016
 - Elizabeth Davies, [*"Toward A More Inclusive Sweet Adelines: Harmonizing the World in the 21st Century"*](#). Pitch Pipe, July 2018
 - Carole Prietto, [*"The Song Assessment Tool: A Guide for Arrangers and Singers"*](#). Pitch Pipe, April 2025.
 - [*"Telling Our Story: A Historical Account"*](#). Pitch Pipe, July 2018
 - [*"Building A Diversity Garden"*](#). Pitch Pipe, January 2019

Software and Apps

There are many software packages and apps, for any aspect of music training. In putting this list together, I focused on applications which are available for a wide variety of platforms and a variety of price ranges.

- [Auralia](#) Ear Training - Windows, Mac, iPhone, iPad
- [Dorico](#) Notation – Windows, Mac, and iPad
- [EarMaster](#) Theory – Windows, Mac, and iPad
- [IGrandPiano and IGrandPiano Free](#) Lots of apps will put a keyboard on your mobile device. This is one I especially like, available for iPhone, iPad, and Android. IGrandPiano Free gives a few basic piano sounds, including a grand piano. Paid version gives access to lots of additional piano sounds. Both the free version and the paid version are available in the app stores. The app is designed for IK Multimedia's family of MIDI keyboards, but will work without them.
- [Musition](#) Theory – Windows, Mac, and iOS devices
- [MuseScore Studio \(formerly Musescore\)](#) Notation – Windows, Mac, and Linux. Free and open source
- [Politonus](#) - Ear Training apps for iOS. 3 levels; all are paid apps, no free versions.
- [Practica Musica](#) - Theory and ear training – Windows, Mac, and iOS
- [Sibelius](#) - Notation – Windows, Mac, iOS, Android, and Chromebook
- Suggester - Theory app for iOS devices. Lay out many different chord options for a given key, play them by selecting. Especially good for learning about secondary dominants. Basic level is free; small charge to fully unlock the app. Download from the App Store.

Theory, Music History, and Ear Training

- [BasicMusicTheory.com](#)
- Jeffrey Evans, *Exploring Theory with Practica Musica* (Ars Nova Software 2013). Online textbook; available as a free download from iBooks for iOS devices or [read on the Ars Nova website](#). Can be used as a companion to the [Practica Musica software](#) or by itself. An excellent introduction to music theory and history, with or without the software.
- Jim Fleser, *The Chord Wheel: The Ultimate Tool for All Musicians* (Hal Leonard Publishing). Print version is distributed by Hal Leonard, [available from SheetMusicPlus.com](#) Also available as an iPhone app (iPhone only, not iPad or Android)
- [Happy Birthday, Well-Tempered Clavier](#) – from JSTOR Daily November 9, 2022. Has an interesting and concise discussion of tuning systems.
- [MusicTheory.net](#) - has free online content and two companion apps for iOS devices, Tenuto and Theory Lessons
- [Teoria](#) - Tutorials for note reading, intervals, scales, chords, and harmony.
- [Theta Music Trainer](#) Music Theory – Web based courses.

Copyright

- [ASCAP](#)
- [Basics of Copyright for Music Educators](#) – National Association for Music Education (NAfME)
- [BMI](#)
- [U.S. Copyright Office](#) – Part of the Library of Congress
- [Copyright Law of the United States \(Title 17\)](#) – Complete text of the U.S. Copyright Law, from the Library of Congress Copyright Office
- [Common Questions About Copyrighted Arrangements](#) – ArrangeMe Blog, February 23, 2024
- [Copyright Circulars from the Library of Congress](#) – US Copyright information geared to a general audience.
- [Cornell University, Copyright Information Center](#)
- [Dear Rich: An Intellectual Property Blog](#) - Excellent blog on copyright, patent, and trademark law, with questions from users answered by a practicing attorney
- [Evolution of Copyright in Music](#) – Podcast from Northwestern University, Pritzker School of Law. An interesting discussion of how new technologies have shaped the copyright law, starting with piano rolls and ending with today's digital distribution.
- Fair Dealing sites
 - United Kingdom
 - University of Edinburgh, Information Services – [Copyright Exceptions and Fair Dealing](#)
 - GOV.UK, Intellectual Property Office – [Exceptions to Copyright: Fair Dealing](#)
 - University of Nottingham – [Exceptions to UK Copyright Law](#)
 - Canada
 - Government of Canada, Justice Laws Website: [Fair Dealing](#)
 - [Fair Dealing in Canada: Myths and Facts](#)
 - [Six Factor Test](#) – University of Victoria Libraries
 - [Fair Dealing Flowchart](#) – University of Waterloo
 - [Fair Dealing Week 2023](#) – Collection of Fair Dealing resources from Centennial College
 - Australia
 - Australian Government, Australian Law Reform Commission: [Fair Dealing Exceptions](#)
 - Australian Copyright Council – [Introduction to Copyright in Australia](#) and [Fair Dealing: What Can I Use Without Permission](#). See also: [Music and Copyright](#)
 - Nicholas Suzer, Queensland University of Technology - [Explainer: What is Fair Dealing and What Can You Copy Without Permission?](#)
 - [Fair Dealing and Fair Use: How Australian Copyright Differs from the USA](#) – From lawpath.com.au

- New Zealand
 - Copyright Licensing New Zealand – [Fair Dealing in New Zealand](#)
 - Copyright Licensing New Zealand – [What's Fair Use and Does It Apply in NZ?](#)
 - Parliamentary Counsel Office, New Zealand Legislation, New Zealand Copyright Act – [Acts Permitted in Relation to Copyright Works](#)
- [Guide to Public Domain Works](#) – ArrangeMe blog, February 17, 2024
- [Legal Encyclopedia – Patent, Copyright, and Trademark](#) – from Nolo Press
- Glenda Lloyd, ["The Particulars of Purchasing Sheet Music"](#). Pitch Pipe, July 2024
- [List of Copyright Duration by Country](#) – from Wikipedia
- [MTNA Copyright Guidelines for Music Teachers](#) - Music Teachers National Association (U.S.)
- [Music Licensing: What is Considered Fair Use?](#) – Copyright Clearance Center
- [Nolo Press Titles](#) – Nolo is a publisher of law books geared toward the consumer market, focused on U.S. law.
 - Stephen Fishman, *The Copyright Handbook: What Every Writer Needs to Know* (Nolo Press 2017)
 - Stephen Fishman, *The Public Domain: Find and Use Free Content for Your Website, Book, App, Music, Video, Art, and More* (Nolo Press 2017)
 - Richard Stim, *Getting Permission: Using & Licensing Copyright-Protected Materials Online & Off* (Nolo Press 2016).
 - Richard Stim, *Music Law: How to Run Your Band's Business* (Nolo Press 2018). The chapter on copyright is an excellent basic discussion of copyright matters.
 - Richard Stim, *Patent, Copyright & Trademark: An Intellectual Property Desk Reference* (Nolo Press, 2018)
- [Public Domain Information Project](#)
- [Public Domain Sherpa](#) – Online guide to public domain, written by an attorney
- [The Rights Stuff](#) – Podcast from Scoring Notes. The hosts discuss copyright with a practicing attorney. Has an excellent discussion of Fair Use.
- [SESAC](#)
- [Stanford University Library, Copyright and Fair Use](#)
- [What Musicians Should Know About Copyright](#) – From the Library of Congress
- Sweden, Intellectual Property Office - Copyright – [English / Swedish](#)
- [What Is the European Union Copyright Law?](#) – from songtrust.org

Historic Recordings

- [Cylinder Audio Archive](#) From Davidson Library, University of California, Santa Barbara.
- [The Great 78 Project](#) Community project for preservation, research, and discovery of 78rpm records. Part of the Internet Archive.
- Many old recordings are available on YouTube as well as the online streaming services (Apple Music, Google Play, Spotify, etc.).

Selected Sheet Music Collections

- [Sheet Music Consortium](#) - Hosted by the UCLA Library; provides access to sheet music collections at more than 30 libraries all over the world
- Duke University, Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library – [Historic American Sheet Music](#)
- [IN Harmony: Sheet Music from Indiana](#) – Created by Indiana University; includes collections from Indiana University Lilly Library, Indiana State Library, Indiana State Museum, and Indiana Historical Society
- Johns Hopkins University Library – [Lester Levy Sheet Music Collection](#)
- Library of Congress Online Sheet Music Collections
 - [Early American Sheet Music](#)
 - [Music for the Nation: American Sheet Music, ca. 1820 to 1860](#)
 - [Civil War Sheet Music](#)
 - [Music for the Nation: American Sheet Music, ca.1870 to 1885](#)
 - [World War I Sheet Music](#)
 - [Library of Congress Celebrates the Songs of America](#) – includes [biographies](#) of many American composers and songwriters
- University of Maine, Digital Commons, [Vocal Popular Sheet Music Collection](#)
- Barbershop Harmony Society, Old Songs Library – not available online; BHS members can contact BHS and request a title search.

Song Research

- [African American Roots of Barbershop](#) - from the Barbershop Harmony Society
- [American Civil War Museum](#) – Educational resources concerning African Americans
- Joe Bebco, [Reconsidering Dixieland Jazz](#) – Syncopated Times, July 2021
- [Brief history of Tin Pan Alley](#) – From acousticmusic.org
- [Brief history of Vaudeville](#) – From acousticmusic.org
- [Cafe Songbook](#) – Songs, songwriters, and performers of the Great American Songbook. Not comprehensive, but a good source for the songs it covers. Includes information on composers and lyricists, origins of songs (i.e., written for a particular show, etc.), song background, and links to performances.
- Rebecca Hersher, [Why You Probably Shouldn't Say Eskimo](#) – from National Public Radio, April 24, 2016
- [History of Blackface](#) – Covers the history of Blackface and racist Black stereotypes in minstrel shows, Vaudeville, Broadway, radio, film, and television.
- History of Tin Pan Alley - from
- [How the term “Dixie” came to define the South](#) – Story from CNN, June 27, 2020
- [Internet Broadway Database](#) – Excellent resource for Broadway shows and people connected with them, including songwriters.
- [Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia](#) – Ferris State University

- [Mason and Dixon Draw a Line](#) – From the History Channel. So many songs about the South mention the Mason-Dixon Line. But where was it and who were Mason and Dixon? This is a good, short summary of the history behind the Mason-Dixon Line.
- [Musicals 101.com](#) – “Cyber-Encyclopedia of Musical Theater, Film, and Television”
- Carla M. Ponti, [The Musical Representation of Asian Characters in the Musicals of Richard Rodgers](#). Ph.D. dissertation in Music from UC San Diego. From ProQuest, published as open access.
- [RadicalCopyEditor.com](#) – Thought-provoking blog about using language to break down stereotypes and bias.
- Alyssa Taubin, [The American Musical in Black and White: How Race Relations in the United States Directly Affected the Development of Musical Theater](#) – from Howlround Theatre Commons
- Sabina Thalheim, [A Hundred Million Messages: Reflections on Representation in Rodgers and Hammerstein’s Flower Drum Song](#). M.A. thesis, Ohio State University, 2013
- [Three Documentaries You Should Watch About the Tulsa Race Massacre](#) – Story from National Public Radio, May 30, 2021
- [Thirty Everyday Phrases That Perpetuate the Oppression of Indigenous Peoples](#) – From radicalcopyeditor.com
- John W. Work, [American Negro Songs and Spirituals](#) – Digital copy from the New York Public Library. Helpful book for researching Black spirituals.
- [What is the Great American Songbook?](#) – From the Great American Songbook Foundation.

Songwriters

- [Irving Berlin](#) – official site
- [Cole Wide Web](#) – Cole Porter official site
- [George and Ira Gershwin](#) – Official site
- Great American Songbook Foundation, [Hall of Fame Honorees](#)
- [Songwriters Hall of Fame](#)