Arranging Barbershop Harmony

THIRD EDITION

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Arranging Barbershop Harmony / Carole Prietto —3rd ed. August 2025

Contents

For Paula Mauritzen, my first and best teacher.

What is crucial is getting them off to the right start when they know nothing.

—ANONYMOUS

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. For Sweet Adelines in the 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.
- Updated information on contestability, based on changes to the Sweet Adeline music category (July 2025).

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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August 2025

Foundations of Arranging

This chapter will discuss the building blocks for barbershop arranging: some basics of music theory, the chords which make up the vocabulary of barbershop harmony, and an introduction to voicing and voice leading. Let's begin by discussing the characteristics of the barbershop style.

Characteristics of Barbershop

*Barbershop is not a musical genre; it is a **style** of arranging and delivery that can be applied to multiple genres of music. Every musical style has aspects which are indigenous to, and expected within, the style. The Musicality category ensures performances are rooted in the **core elements of the barbershop style**: a) 4-part a cappella, b) featured consonant harmony via strongly-voiced chords in the barbershop vocabulary, c) melody primarily in an inside voice, d) harmonic variety and richness featuring characteristic chord progressions, and e) primarily lyrical, homorhythmic textures (although additional textures are used for contrast and development). (Barbershop Harmony Society, Contest and Judging Manual, Musicality Category, 2025, p.5-2)*

Let's look at these core elements. They are common to both Sweet Adelines International and the Barbershop Harmony Society.

- Four parts.
- Unaccompanied.
- Melody in an inner voice.
- Consonance.
- Overtones (or "lock and ring").
- Lyrics that feature homorhythmic (homophonic) texture.
- Chords that feature tri-tone energy.
- Harmonic movement around the Circle of Fifths.
- Distinct use of creative devices, influenced by African American music.

These things are the basis for everything we do in barbershop: why we sing certain chords and not others, how and why we voice chords in the way we do, the creative devices we use in our arrangements, how and why we balance our sound in the way we do, why certain songs work better than others as barbershop songs. Let's take a closer look at each one.

Four parts, unaccompanied

Barbershop is four-part harmony. More accurately, barbershop is a melody part, the lead, with three harmony parts, the tenor, baritone, and bass. It is sung without instruments.

The basic fact of four parts with no accompaniment means that the singers must provide all the forward motion as well as all the musical interest. The embellishments in our songs are there to provide that musical and rhythmic propellant.

Melody in an inner voice (lead)

In barbershop the highest voice doesn't sing the melody. Each part has a distinctive role.

- Tenor – A harmony part that sings above the melody.
- Lead – Sings the melody.
- Baritone – Completes the harmony, by singing either above or below the lead part.
- Bass – Sings the foundational tones of chords, often the root or the 5th.

Consonance

Put simply, consonance refers to sounds which are pleasing to the ear. Stronger barbershop chords are highly consonant. Weaker chords are not.

Overtones (or "lock and Ring")

Physics of barbershop harmony is an enormous topic. In simplest terms, any time you play or sing a tone you are in fact producing more than one sound. First, there is a fundamental tone, vibrating at a specific frequency. In addition to that fundamental sound, the pitch has a series of overtones, also known as the harmonic series. The tones of the harmonic series are mathematically related to the fundamental frequency. When overtones produced by the lowest tone (usually in the bass part) are reinforced by notes and overtones produced in the upper parts, the result is an audible overtone, also known as ring. The strongest chords in the barbershop chord vocabulary will have tones that reinforce these overtone patterns, making them more conducive to ringing chords.

Lyrics Featuring Homorhythmic (Homophonic) Texture

Homorhythmic texture refers to all four parts singing the same lyrics and complete four-part chords most of the time. The BHS uses the term homorhythmic; Sweet Adelines uses the term homophonic. Both refer to all parts singing the same words at the same time, in complete chords. An embellishment is any treatment that differs from all four parts singing together – pickups, echoes, swipes, or patter, for example. When the singers are singing embellishments, every chord is still a complete four-part chord.

Chords Featuring Tri-Tone Energy

We noted that consonance is a characteristic of the barbershop style. Does that mean dissonance has no place in barbershop? Not at all.

First, what is a tri-tone? The tri-tone is the interval between the perfect fourth and the perfect fifth. In the key of C, the interval of C to F makes a perfect fourth. The interval of C to G makes a perfect fifth. The interval between the two, C to F# (augmented 4th) or C to Gb (diminished 5th), is the tri-tone. It's called a tri-tone because it's made up of 3 whole-step intervals. Start on C and go up one whole step (D), then another one (E), then another one (F#/Gb). The interval C to F#/Gb is a tri-tone. By itself, the tri-tone does not and cannot ring. However, the tri-tone interval is found in several places within the barbershop chord vocabulary, especially in our strongest barbershop chords.

Chord	Spelling (tri-tone interval in bold)
Barbershop 7th	C7 = C, **E**, G, **Bb**
Barbershop 9th with omitted root	C7(9) = C (omitted), **E**, G, **Bb**, D
Barbershop 9th with omitted 5th	C7(9) = C, **E**, G (omitted), **Bb**, D
Half-Diminished 7th	C half-dim7 = **C**, Eb, **Gb**, Bb
Minor 6th	Cm6: C, **Eb**, G, **A**
(Fully) Diminished 7th	Cdim7 = **C**, Eb, **Gb**, Bbb Two tri-tones: • C and Gb = tri-tone • Bbb = A on the keyboard. Eb and A = tri-tone Two tri-tones make this chord very unstable, but that instability means the dim7th can be a very versatile chord because it can go in multiple directions.

Consider one of our classic vocal warmups.

The "may" chord has Eb in baritone and A in tenor. The "moh" chord has E in lead and Bb in tenor. Both chords are tri-tones. In both cases, the tri-tones lead to a major triad, which does not have tri-tones. That "pull", from the tension found in the tri-tone to the resolution in the chord that comes after is what makes the barbershop style. Tension and resolution are not unique to barbershop, but it's very much a part of the barbershop style. Watch Kirk Young, BHS Musicality Judge, demonstrate Tri-Tone Energy (Starts at 11:18 in the video). This demonstration comes from Harmony University in 2017.

The BHS Contest and Judging Manual notes:

Chord progressions in the barbershop style are based on the harmonic practice of dominant seventh (and ninth) chords resolving around the circle of fifths, while also making use of other resolutions. Musicality judges expect to hear harmonic richness, variety and strongly voiced chords including tritone tension (Contest and Judging Manual, Musicality Category, p.5-5)

Harmonic Movement Around the Circle of Fifths

Tri-tone energy combines with another characteristic of the barbershop sound, that of barbershop 7th chords moving around the Circle of Fifths. The Circle of Fifths is a tool for understanding how different keys relate to each other.
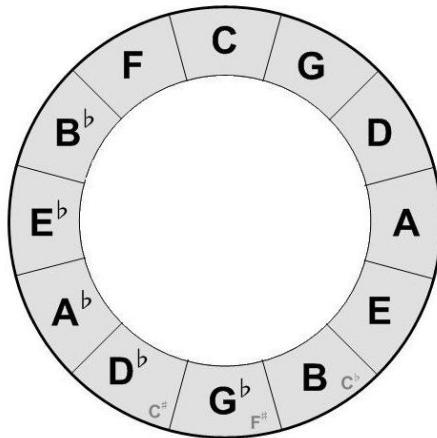
The video, [Dave Stevens: What Are We Trying to Preserve](), is an excellent discussion of barbershop 7ths moving around the Circle of Fifths. **Watch the video!** It's not enough to see the chord names on paper; you need to hear the relationships between the chords. Watch all the way to the end, including the section on Franz Liszt!

In the video the chords are
- Home Base, or **tonic**. Songs tend to start at the tonic, move away from it, and work their way back to the tonic. Dave plays **C major.**
- **After Dark chord** (1 chord away) - After dark, when **EV**-'ry thing is still. Dave plays **G7.**
- **Coney Island Baby chord** (2 chords away) - Goodbye, my Coney Island **BA**-by. Dave plays **D7.**
- **If I Had My Way chord** (3 chords away) - If I had my **WAY**. Dave plays **A7.**
- **Five Foot Two, Eyes of Blue** (4 chords away) – Five foot two, **EYES** of blue. Dave plays **E7.**
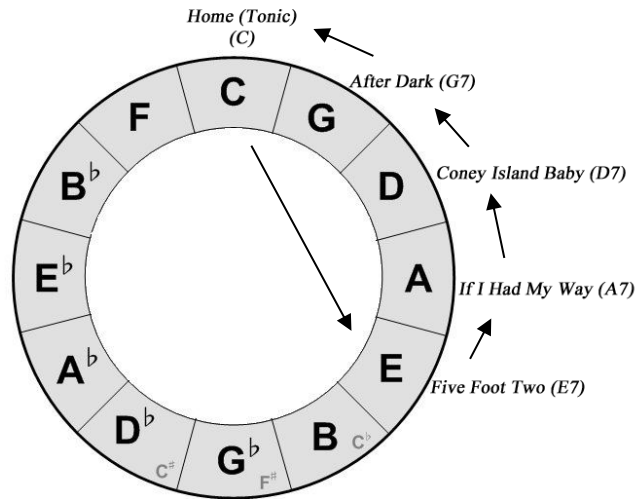
Creative Devices and African American Roots of the Barbershop Style

An early book on the barbershop style, *Barbershop Ballads and How to Sing Them* by Sigmund Spaeth, argued that barbershop originated with European musical styles. Recent research by Professor Lynn Abbott of Tulane University, Dr. Jim Henry, Dr. David Wright, and others has shown that barbershop harmony in fact began as an African American art form and that many of the embellishments we associate with barbershop such as backtime, call and response, echo, patter, and swipes, come from African American music. The BHS website and the BHS's publication, *The* Harmonizer, have excellent resources for more information about the African American roots of the style. See especially:

- Jim Henry, "The Historical Roots of Barbershop Harmony". *The Harmonizer*, July/August 2001
- Kevin Keller, "The Hallmark 7th Chord". *The Harmonizer*, July-August 2009
- David Wright, "The African American Roots of the Style (And Why It Matters)" *The Harmonizer* Jan-Feb 2015
- David Wright, Harmony University Online: History of Barbershop

All back issues of The Harmonizer are available in the BHS members area. See also: 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. Available online at JSTOR.

Earlier we noted that barbershop is primarily a homorhythmic style. However, when embellishments are sung – echo, swipe, patter, back-time, etc. -- the singers are still singing complete four-part chords in most cases. There are exceptions, such as a lead or bass pickup, or a blossom effect, where the music starts with one part, then goes to two, three, then four parts. But primarily, barbershop singers sing four-part chords, either all together (homorhythmic) or using embellishments to add interest and provide a rhythmic propellant.

Theory Basics

This section provides some basic theory that will help to understand how barbershop harmony works. For more, see Robert Hutchinson, Music Theory for the 21st Century Classroom (University of Puget Sound). See also Chapter 5 of *Arranging Barbershop, Vol. 1: Getting Started*, published by the Barbershop Harmony Society.

Note names - Some parts of the world use American terms for note and rest durations; others use British terms. This book will use the American terms.

American	British
16th note	Semiquaver
8th note	Quaver
Quarter note	Crotchet
Half note	Minim
Whole note	Semibreve

For note and rest terms in French, German, Italian, and Spanish, see the OnMusic Dictionary: Notes and Rests

Half step – Distance from any key on the keyboard to the very next key, up or down.
- On the keyboard, C to C# is a half-step; A to Bb is also a half-step.
- There are no black keys between B/C and E/F. These are also half-steps.

Whole step – Distance of 2 half-steps, such as C to D.
- Because there are no black keys between B/C, a whole step above B is C#.
- Because there are no black keys between E/F, a whole step above E is F#

Interval – The distance between two tones. In a chord, the distance between the lowest and highest notes in a chord. There are two parts to naming an interval.
- Number – the number of letter names taken up by the interval. Example: If you start at C, in order to have an interval of a 3rd, you must have some kind of E. C is 1, D is 2, and E is 3.
- Quality – major (M), minor (m), perfect (P), augmented (aug), or diminished (dim). Finding the correct quality involves counting half-steps.

Interval Qualities – Starting note of C

Interval	Note	# of 1/2 steps	Other name
Perfect Unison, or simply Unison (P1)	C	0	
Minor 2nd (m2)	Db	1	Half step
Major 2nd (M2)	D	2	Whole step
Minor 3rd (m3)	Eb	3	
Major 3rd (M3)	E	4	
Perfect 4th (P4)	F	5	
Augmented 4th (aug4) Diminished 5th (dim5)	F# Gb	6	Tri-tone
Perfect 5th (P5)	G	7	
Minor 6th (m6)	Ab	8	In some contexts, augmented 5th (G#)
Major 6th (M6)	A	9	In some contexts, diminished 7th (Bbb)
Minor 7th (m7)	Bb	10	
Major 7th (M7)	B	11	
Perfect Octave, or simply Octave (P8)	C	12	

Major scale – The tones of the major scale are made up of a pattern of whole (W) and half-steps (H) which looks like this:

| C-D whole step | D-E whole step | E-F *half* step | F-G whole step | G-A whole step | A-B whole step | B-C *half* step |
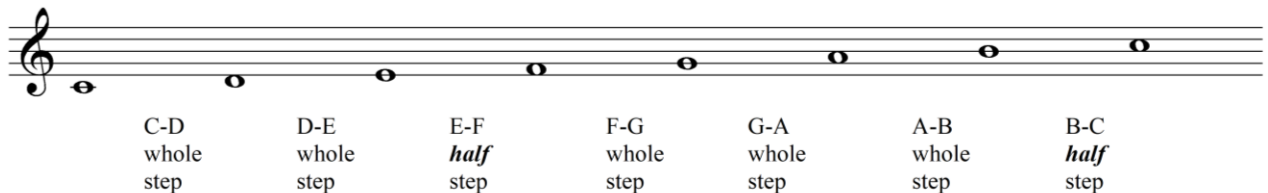
Major scales chart – from basicmusictheory.com.

Scale degrees and names - Each tone of the scale is given a number, known as a scale degree, and a name.

Scale tone	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
Scale degree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8 (1)
Name	Tonic	Supertonic	Mediant	Sub-Dominant	Dominant	Sub-Mediant	Leading Tone	Tonic

Triads can be built on each of these scale tones. Triads are made up of:
- Root - the lowest tone and the one which gives the chord its name.
- Some kind of 3rd -- major or minor
- Some kind of 5th – usually perfect; occasionally augmented or diminished.
    - Augmented – 5th raised by a half-step.
    - Diminished – 5th lowered by a half-step.

In a C major triad, for example, C is the root, E is a major 3rd, and G is a perfect 5th. Each triad is given a Roman numeral to indicate both its **degree** (which scale tone is the root) and its **quality** -- major, minor, or diminished.
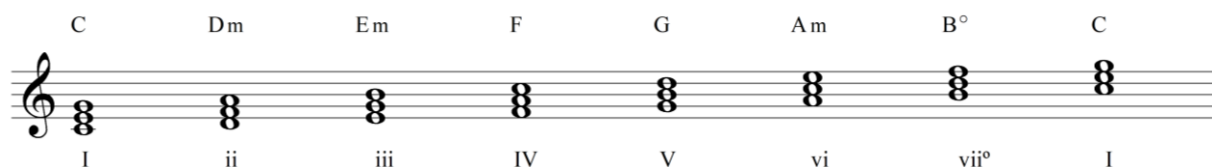
- Major triads based on scale tones 1, 4, and 5 are **major**. These are shown with an upper-case Roman numeral.
- Major triads based on scale tones 2, 3, and 6 are **minor**. These are shown with a lower-case Roman numeral.
- The major triad based on scale tone 7 is **diminished**. It is shown with a lower-case Roman numeral 7 followed by a small superscript circle.

The pattern of major, minor, and diminished chords is the same for all major scales. These are the **diatonic** triads, meaning they are the triads which use only the notes that belong to the key signature.

Minor scale – There are three different forms of the minor scale; I'll focus on one, the natural minor. When I use the term "minor" or "minor scale" I'm referring to the natural minor. Here is the key of A minor, which has no sharps or flats. Like the major scale, the minor scale has a characteristic pattern of whole and half-steps.

| A to B whole step | B to C *half step* | C to D whole step | D to E whole step | E to F *half step* | F to G whole step | G to A whole step |
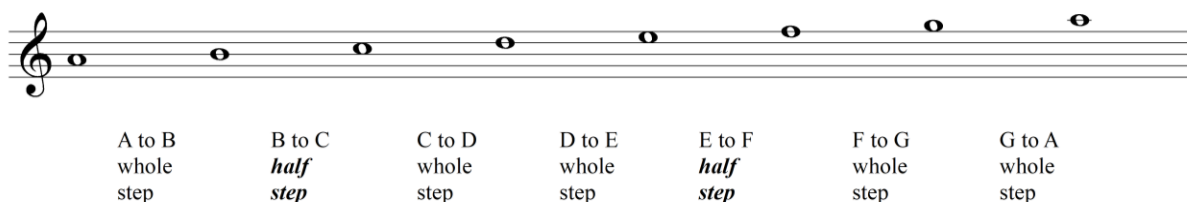
Minor scales chart – from basicmusictheory.com

As in the major scale, scale tones for the minor scale have a scale degree and a name.

Key of A minor	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	A
Scale Degree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8 (1)
Name	Tonic	Supertonic	Mediant	Subdominant	Dominant	Sub-Mediant	Leading Tone	Tonic

As with the major scale, triads can be built on each scale tone of the minor scale. Each minor triad has its own quality – major, minor, or diminished.

- Minor Triads based on scale tones 1, 4, and 5 are **minor.**
- Minor triads based on scale tones 3, 6, and 7 are **major**.
- The minor triad based on scale tone 2 is **diminished**.

Relative minor and major – Major keys have a corresponding minor key which has the same key signature, known as the **relative minor.** The relative minor corresponds to scale tone 6 of the major scale. Similarly, minor keys have a **relative major** which corresponds to scale tone 3 of the minor scale. Here are the key signatures for all the major keys, with their relative minor.

Relative Major and Minor – Flat Keys

C major	F major	Bb major	Eb major	Ab major
A minor	D minor	G minor	C minor	F minor
No sharps/ flats	1 flat: B	2 flats: B, E	3 flats: B, E, A	4 flats: B, E, A, D

Db major	Gb major	Cb major
Bb minor	Eb minor	Ab minor
5 flats: B, E, A, D, G	6 flats: B, E, A, D, G, C	7 flats: B, E, A, D, G, C, F

Relative Major and Minor – Sharp Keys

C major	G major	D major	A major
A minor	E minor	B minor	F# minor
No sharps/ flats	1 sharp: F	2 sharps: F, C	3 sharps: F, C, G

E major	B major	F# major
C# minor	G# minor	D# minor
4 sharps: F, C, G, D	5 sharps: F, C, G, D, A	6 sharps: F, C, G, D, A, E

C# major
A# minor
7 sharps: F, C, G, D, A, E, B

The Gilmore Music Library at Yale University has a [helpful page with names of key signatures in French, German, Italian, and Spanish](#).

Root Position and Inversions
Triads are made up of a root, some kind of 3rd, and some kind of 5th. Four-note chords such as the barbershop 7th are made up of a triad with a 4th tone added to it, either a 6th, 7th, or 9th.

- If the root is on the bottom, the chord is in **root position.**
- If the 3rd is on the bottom, the chord is in **1st inversion.**
- If the 5th is on the bottom, the chord is in **2nd inversion.**
- Four-note chords, such as the barbershop 7th, can have a 3rd inversion. If the 7th, or other added tone, is on the bottom, the chord is in **3rd inversion.**

Strong barbershop voicing usually involves root position or 2nd inversion, with bass singing the root or the 5th of the chord.

Inversion is not the same as voicing. If the root is at the bottom of the chord, the chord is in root position no matter how the notes above it are voiced. The same is true for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd inversion.

Both are in root position. The root (G) is at the bottom of the chord

Both are in 1st inversion. The 3rd (Bb) is at the bottom of the chord.

Both are in 2nd inversion. The 5th (G) is at the bottom of the chord.

Primary and secondary chords – In major keys, the primary chords are I, IV, and V. To find the primary triads in minor keys, the harmonic minor scale is used. The harmonic minor scale consists of the tones of the natural minor scale with the 7th raised one half-step. In minor keys, the primary chords are i, iv, and V. The others are considered secondary chords. (NOTE: The Sweet Adeline music category defines primary chords as major triad, barbershop 7th, and barbershop 9th).

Diatonic / Chromatic – Diatonic refers to notes contained within a key signature.
Chromatic can refer to:
- Notes which fall outside of a key signature
- A series of notes moving in half-steps.

Enharmonic – Two different names for the same tone or the same chord. For example, C# is enharmonic with Db; G# is enharmonic with Ab. The minor 6th, the dominant 9th, and the half-

diminished 7th chords are all enharmonic with each other, because all three chords have the same four tones.

Dominant

- Scale tone 5 of the major or minor scale
- A particular chord voicing, made up of the major triad with a minor 7th tone above it (C-E-G-Bb). This voicing is known as Dominant **7th**. In barbershop we also call it the Barbershop 7th. In chord symbols, it's shown by the number 7 with no prefix (C7)

Secondary Dominant

The Sweet Adelines Judging Category Description Book notes:

> *The most interesting barbershop songs are those whose melodies imply a wide variety of chord progressions utilizing the dominant-to-tonic resolution. Application of the dominant-to-tonic resolution is a particularly significant characteristic of barbershop harmony, including frequent use of secondary dominant 7ths (SAI Judging Category Description Book – Music Category)*

The BHS Contest and Judging Manual notes:

> *Chord progressions in the barbershop style are based on the harmonic practice of dominant seventh (and ninth) chords resolving around the circle of fifths, while also making use of other resolutions. Musicality judges expect to hear harmonic richness, variety and strongly voiced chords including tritone tension. (BHS Contest and Judging Manual, Musicality, p.5-5)*

Because secondary dominants are key to defining the barbershop style, understanding them is important. **Secondary dominants are dominant 7th chords which are not diatonic to the home key.**

We saw earlier how you can build triads on all the degrees of the major scale. If you add one more note on top of those triads, you will get a 7th chord. In any major key there will be only one dominant 7th chord that is diatonic to that key. It's V7 the dominant 7th chord, based on scale tone 5.

Diatonic 7th Chords

Cmaj7	Dm7	Em7	Fmaj7	G7	Am7	Bm7(♭5)	Cmaj7
IM7	ii7	iii7	IVM7	V7	vi7	vii7(♭5)	

We can make dominant 7ths out of other scale tones, but to do that we must add accidentals to them.

- The ii7 chord (Dm7) can be made into a dominant 7th chord (II7) if we add an accidental, F#. That II7 chord is a dominant of some other chord. In this case, D7 is the dominant G (V). In Roman numerals that's expressed as "V7/V", the dominant 7th of a chord based on V.
- The Em7 (iii7) becomes an E7 (III7) chord by adding the G#. That III7 chord is also a secondary dominant. It's the dominant of A (vi). In Roman numerals, its V7/vi, the dominant of the chord based on vi.

- Similarly, Am7 (vi7) becomes an A7 chord (VI7) if we add the accidental, C#. It's the dominant 7th (V7) of D (ii). In Roman numerals, it's V7/ii.

Diatonic 7th Chords

Secondary Dominants

The same principles apply in all the major keys.

Look again at the Dave Stevens example. When he plays *Five Foot Two Eyes of Blue*, the chords are: C | **E7** | **A7** | **D7** | G7 | C. The E7, A7, and D7 chords are secondary dominants.
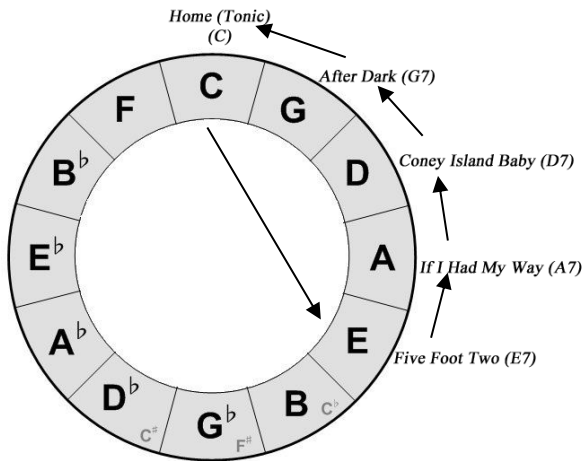
Another way to think of secondary dominants: They are chords from *outside* the key whose function is to bring the music to a chord *inside* the key.

Why is the IV7 chord not a secondary dominant? Here's the explanation, from Jeffrey Evans' book, *Exploring Theory With Practica Musica*, p.135

> *You can convert any of the triads in a key into secondary dominants, except the IV chord in a major scale or the VI chord in a minor scale. Why can't those chords function as secondary dominants? Because there's no scale note a perfect fourth above them. For example, the IV chord in C is built on F, and a perfect fourth above F is Bb, which is not in the C scale. So there's no note in the C scale that could use F as its dominant.*

If we apply Roman numerals to the Stevens example, we get this:
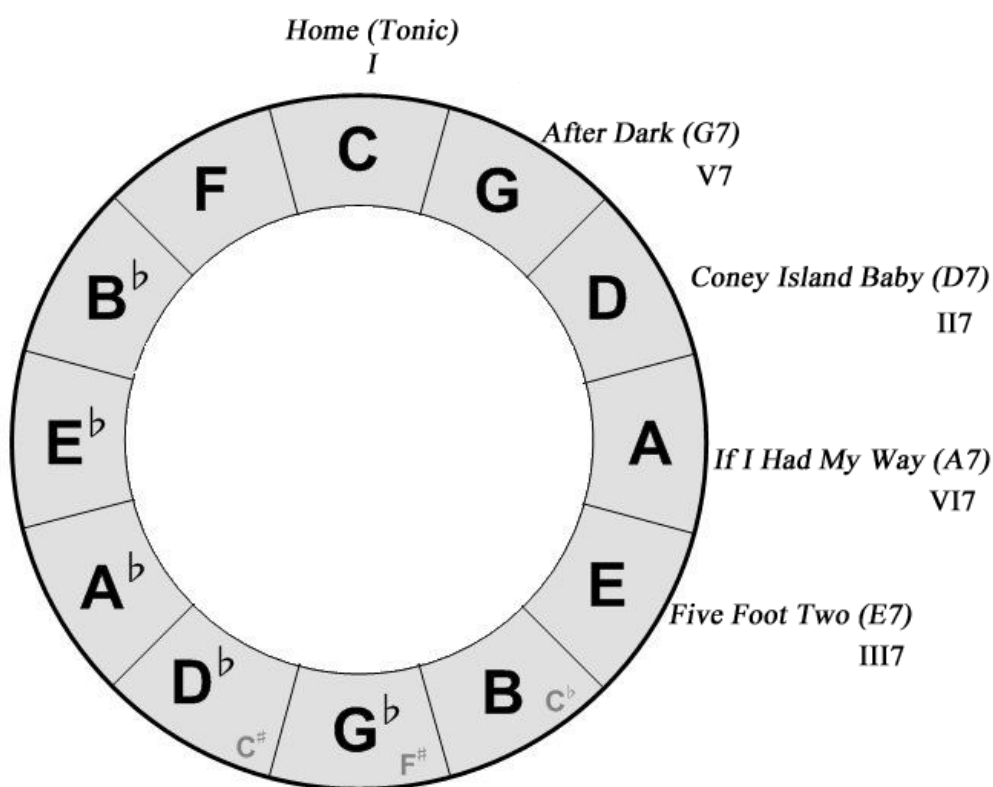
Note the sequence: III7 → VI7 → II7 → V7 → I   The best barbershop songs move around the Circle in this way. They don't necessarily go all the way out to III7 as Five Foot Two does. But the more secondary dominants, the better the barbershop.

If we apply Roman numerals to the entire Circle we get this:
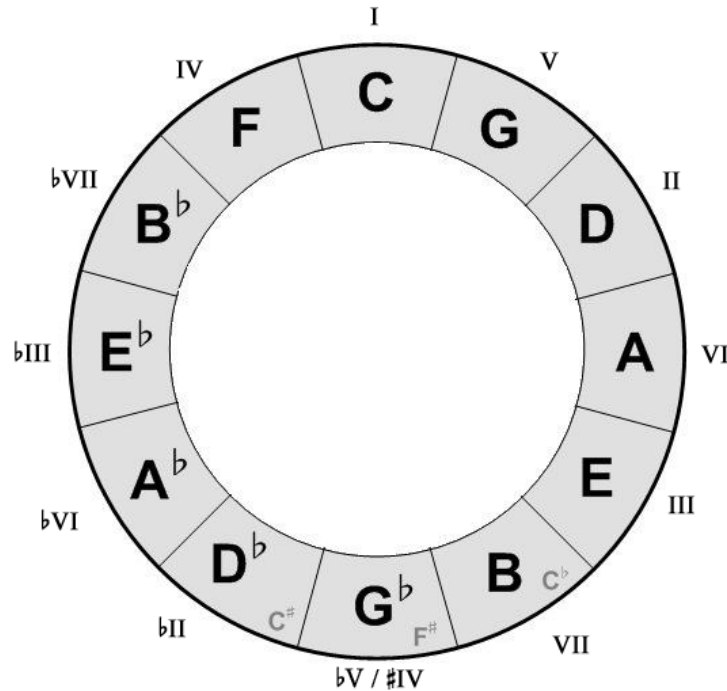
These relationships apply in *any key,* not just C. Jim Fleser's book, [The Chord Wheel](#) has a cover with a plastic disk that lets you rotate the home key to any spot. It's a very handy tool.

See BHS, *Arranging Barbershop, v.1: Getting Started,* Chapter 2, p.29-33, for a discussion of other ways that chord movement can work in barbershop songs, and chapter 5 for more discussion on theory of barbershop harmony.

Implied harmony -- The harmonies and chord progressions suggested by the composer's melody.

Harmonic pillars (pillar chords) -- Some harmonic changes are required; they are the ones which underly the melody of the song. These required harmonies, the places where the underlying chord must change, are known as **harmonic pillars** or **pillar chords**, and they are places where the chord root changes. Understanding these root changes is the foundation for a barbershop arrangement. Primary harmonic changes usually occur on strong beats of measures. In 2/4 and 3/4 time they generally happen on the downbeat. In 4/4 time, changes usually occur on beats 1 and 3.

Harmonic rhythm -- Frequency of harmonic changes over time. If you play guitar or piano by ear, or have done woodshedding of barbershop harmony, you've probably had the experience of hearing that a chord you've been playing / singing has to change at a certain spot. That's harmonic rhythm. You might add chords or embellish the melody, but your ear and your fingers know that there are some changes that **must** happen at certain places in the song. The **required** changes make up the harmonic rhythm. If the required chord changes happen more frequently, the song is said to have a

fast harmonic rhythm. If the required chord changes happen less frequently, the song is said to have a slow harmonic rhythm.

How to Determine the Harmonic Rhythm
- Your ears – the most important factor in determining harmonic pillars.
- The chord symbols in a piano-vocal sheet
- The piano part in a piano-vocal sheet
- The melody notes that often imply certain pillar chords from measure to measure
- The Circle of Fifths

Barbershop Chord Vocabulary

These chords make up the Sweet Adelines chord vocabulary
- **Triads**
    - Major Triad
    - Minor Triad
    - Augmented Triad
    - Diminished Triad (new, as of July 2025)

- **Seventh Chords**
    - Dominant (Barbershop) 7th
    - Major 7th
    - Minor 7th
    - Diminished 7th
    - Half-Diminished 7th (new, as of July 2025)
- **Ninth Chords**
    - Dominant (Barbershop) 9th with omitted root
    - Dominant 9th with omitted 5th
    - Major Triad with added 9th
- **Sixth Chords**
    - Major 6th
    - Minor 6th

The Barbershop Harmony Society recognizes these chords and includes others.
- Augmented 7th
- Dominant 7th with flatted 5th

Doubling
Because we sing four parts, three-note chords such as triads must have a doubled tone.
- Major triad - Double the root. Double the 5th when needed for voice leading (rare)
- Minor triad - Any tone can be doubled. Root and 3rd are strongest, but 5th is also acceptable.
- Augmented / Diminished triad – Any tone can be doubled. Strongest is to double the lowest tone.

Four-note chords have no double. All four tones must always be present.

Spellings for chords in the barbershop vocabulary are on the following pages. Double flat is indicated by bb. Double sharp is indicated by x. Chord spellings sometimes use double sharps and double flats

in order to have the correct intervals. It is permissible to use enharmonic spellings (A instead of Bbb, for example) to reduce confusion for the singer.

Triads

Key	Major Triad Root, Major 3rd, Perfect 5th (1,3,5)	Minor Triad Root, minor 3rd, Perfect 5th (1, b3, 5)	Augmented Triad Root, Major 3rd, Augmented 5th (Augmented 5th: Perfect 5th raised one half-step) (1,3, #5)	Diminished Triad Root, minor 3rd, diminished 5th. Diminished 5th: Perfect 5th lowered one half-step) (1, b3, b5)
C	C, E, G	C, Eb, G	C, E, G#	C, Eb, Gb
C#	C#, E#, G#	C#, E, G#	C#, E#, Gx	C#, E, G
Db	Db, F, Ab	Db, Fb, Ab	Db, F, A	Db, Fb, Abb
D	D, F#, A	D, F, A	D, F#, A#	D, F, Ab
Eb	Eb, G, Bb	Eb, Gb, Bb	Eb, G, B	Eb, Gb, Bbb
E	E, G#, B	E, G, B	E, G#, B#	E, G, Bb
F	F, A, C	F, Ab, C	F, A, C#	F, Ab, Cb
F#	F#, A#, C#	F#, A, C#	F#, A#, Cx	F#, A, C
Gb	Gb, Bb, Db	Gb, Bbb, Db	Gb, Bb, D	Gb, Bbb, Dbb
G	G, B, D	G, Bb, D	G, B, D#	G, Bb, Db
Ab	Ab, C, Eb	Ab, Cb, Eb	Ab, C, E	Ab, Cb, Ebb
A	A, C#, E	A, C, E	A, C#, E#	A, C, Eb
Bb	Bb, D, F	Bb, Db, F	Bb, D, F#	Bb, Db, Fb
B	B, D#, F#	B, D, F#	B, D#, Fx	B, D, F

- Major triad - Double the root. Double the 5th when needed for voice leading (rare)
- Minor triad - Any tone can be doubled. Root and 3rd are strongest, but 5th is also acceptable.
- Augmented triad – Any tone can be doubled. Strongest is to double the lowest tone.

Seventh Chords

Key	Dominant 7th Root, Major 3rd, Perfect 5th, Minor 7th (1, 3, 5, b7)	Minor 7th Root, minor 3rd, Perfect 5th, minor 7th (1, b3, 5, b7)	Major 7th Root, major 3rd, Perfect 5th, Major 7th (1, 3, 5, 7)	Diminished 7th Root, minor 3rd, diminished 5th, diminished 7th (1, b3, b5, bb7)
C	C, E, G, Bb	C, Eb, G, Bb	C, E, G, B	C, Eb, Gb, Bbb
C# Db	C#, E#, G#, B Db, F, Ab, Cb	C#, E, G#, B Db, Fb, Ab, Cb	C#, E#, G#, B# Db, F, A, C	C#, E, G, Bb Db, Fb, Abb, Cbb
D	D, F#, A, C	D, F, A, C	D, F#, A, C#	D, F, Ab, Cb
Eb	Eb, G, Bb, Db	Eb, Gb, Bb, Db	Eb, G, Bb, D	Eb, Gb, Bbb, Dbb
E	E, G#, B, D	E, G, B, D	E, G#, B, D#	E, G, Bb, Db
F	F, A, C, Eb	F, Ab, C, Eb	F, A, C, E	F, Ab, Cb, Ebb
F# Gb	F#, A#, C#, E Gb, Bb, Db, Fb	F#, A, C#, E Gb, Bbb, Db, Fb	F#, A#, C#, E# Gb, Bb, Db, F	F#, A, C, Eb Gb, Bbb, Dbb, Fbb
G	G, B, D, F	G, Bb, D, F	G, B, D, F#	G, Bb, Db, Fb
Ab	Ab, C, Eb, Gb	Ab, Cb, Eb, Gb	Ab, C, Eb, G	Ab, Cb, Ebb, Gbb
A	A, C#, E, G	A, C, E, G	A, C#, E, G#	A, C, Eb, Gb
Bb	Bb, D, F, Ab	Bb, Db, F, Ab	Bb, D, F, A	Bb, Db, Fb, Abb
B	B, D#, F#, A	B, D, F#, A	B, D#, F#, A#	B, D, F, Ab

Notes about the diminished 7th:
- The diminished 7th is a symmetrical chord, meaning that all the intervals which make up the chord are the same -- all minor 3rd intervals. Because the chord is symmetrical, the bass can be on any tone and any tone can be considered the root. However, the tones are not interchangeable. When using the diminished 7th in chord progressions there will be a correct note for the bass. Context and your ear will tell you where the bass should go.
- To spell the correct interval for the 7th, we must sometimes use double flats. It's permissible to use the enharmonic spelling (A for Bbb) in order to reduce confusion for the singer.

Seventh Chords

Key	Half-Diminished 7th (BHS/SAI) (also known as minor 7 flat 5) Root, minor 3rd, diminished 5th, minor 7th (1, b3, b5, b7)	Augmented 7th (BHS only) Root, Major 3rd, Augmented 5th, minor 7th (1, 3, #5, b7)	Dominant 7th with flatted 5th (BHS only) Root, Major 3rd, Diminished 5th, minor 7th (1, 3, b5, b7)
C	C, Eb, G, Bb	C, E, G# Bb	C, E, Gb, Bb
C# Db	C#, E, G#, B Db, Fb, Abb, Cb	C#, E#, Gx, B Db, F, A, Cb	C#, E#, G, B Db, F, Ab, Cb
D	D, F, Ab, C	D, F#, A#, C	D, F#, Ab, C
Eb	Eb, Gb, Bbb, Db	Eb, G, B, Db	Eb, G, Bbb, Db
E	E, G, Bb, D	E, G#, B#, D	E, G#, Bb, D
F	F, Ab, Cb, Eb	F, A, C#, Eb	F, A, Cb, Eb
F# Gb	F#, A, C#, E Gb, Bbb, Dbb, Fb	F#, A#, Cx, E Gb, Bb, D, Fb	F#, A#, C, E Gb, Bb, Dbb, Fb
G	G, Bb, Db, F	G, B, D#, F	G, B, Db, F
Ab	Ab, Cb, Ebb, Gb	Ab, C, E, Gb	Ab, C, Ebb, Gb
A	A, C, Eb, G	A, C#, E#, G	A, C#, Eb, G
Bb	Bb, Db, Fb, Ab	Bb, D, F#, Ab	Bb, D, Fb, Ab
B	B, D, F, A	B, D#, Fx, A	B, D#, F, A

Ninth Chords

Key	Dominant 9th with omitted root Root, Major 3rd, Perfect 5th, Minor 7th (1, 3, 5, b7, 9; omit the root. Omitted root is shown in brackets.	Dominant 9th with omitted 5th Root, Major 3rd, Perfect 5th, Minor 7th (1, 3, 5, b7, 9; omit the 5th. Omitted 5th is shown in brackets.	Major Triad with added 9th Root, Major 3rd, Perfect 5th, Major 9th (1, 3, 5, 9)
C	[C], E, G, Bb, D	C, E, [G], Bb, D	C, E, G, D
C# Db	[C#], E#, G#, B, D# [Db], F, Ab, Cb, Eb	C#, E#, [G#], B, D# Db, F, [Ab], Cb, Eb	C#, E#, G#, D# Db, F, Ab, Eb
D	[D], F#, A, C, E	D, F#, [A], C, E	D, F#, A, E
Eb	[Eb], G, Bb, Db, F	Eb, G, [Bb], Db, F	Eb, G, Bb, F
E	[E], G#, B, D, F#	E, G#, [B], D, F#	E, G#, B, F#
F	[F], A, C, Eb, G	F, A, C, [Eb], G	F, A, C, G
F# Gb	[F#], A#, C#, E, G# [Gb], Bb, Db, Fb, Ab	F#, A#, [C#], E, G# Gb, Bb, [Db], Fb, Ab	F#, A#, C#, G# Gb, Bb, Db, Ab
G	[G], B, D, F, A	G, B, [D], F, A	G, B, D, A
Ab	[Ab], C, Eb, Gb, Bb	Ab, C, [Eb], Gb, Bb	Ab, C, Eb, Bb
A	[A], C#, E, G, B	A, C#, [E], G, B	A, C#, E, B
Bb	[Bb], D, F, Ab, C	Bb, D, [F], Ab, C	Bb, D, F, C
B	[B], D#, F#, A, C#	B, D#, [F#], A, C#	B, D#, F#, C#

Notes re: the dominant (barbershop) 9th:
- The 3rd, 5th, and 7th but be present. The fourth tone can be either 5th (no root) or root (no 5th)
- The rootless dominant 9th is enharmonic with the minor 6th and the half-diminished 7th.

Sixth Chords

Key	Minor 6th Root, minor 3rd, Perfect 5th, Major 6th (1, b3, 5, 6)	Major 6th Root, Major 3rd, Perfect 5th, Major 6th (1,3, 5, 6)
C	C, Eb, G, A	C, E, G, A
C# Db	C#, E, G#, A# Db, Fb, Ab, Bb	C#, E#, G#, A# Db, F, Ab, Bb
D	D, F, A, B	D, F#, A, B
Eb	Eb, Gb, Bb, C	Eb, G, Bb, C
E	E, G, B, C#	E, G#, B, C#
F	F, Ab, C, D	F, A, C, D
F# Gb	F#, A, C#, D# Gb, Bbb, Db, Eb	F#, A#, C#, D# Gb, Bb, Db, Eb
G	G, Bb, D, E	G, B, D, E
Ab	Ab, Cb, Eb, F	Ab, C, Eb, F
A	A, C, E, F#	A, C#, E, F#
Bb	Bb, Db, F, G	Bb, D, F, G
B	B, D, F#, G#	B, D#, F#, G#

Notes re: 6th chords
- The minor 6th has the same four tones as the rootless dominant 9th and the half-diminished 7th.
- The complete major 6th chord is somewhat rare in barbershop because it has a very "modern" flavor. Much more common is to use the 6th without the 5th, sometimes known as the "substitute 6th chord". This construction has the same tones as the minor triad in first inversion.

Voicing and Voice Leading

What is Voicing?

Voicing refers to the way a chord stacks up **vertically** from bottom to top. Voicings can either be:

- Closed – all parts are within an octave.
- Spread to the 10th – Interval of a tenth between the lowest and highest tone (bass and tenor in measure 2 of the example below)
- Open – Chord is spread more than a 10th.

Closed voicings ring well. Spread-to-the-10th voicings ring well. Open voicings can be harder to ring for SSAA, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't ever use them. In fact, good arrangements will use all three types of voicing. Melody lines are constantly moving up and down, and voicings have to change to accommodate that.

Closed - voicing within an octave

Spread to the 10th. The tenor note is a 10th away from the bass note.

Open voicing - more than a 10th between lowest tone and highest. There should be no more than an octave between the bass and the rest of the chord.

When voicing chords, it's important that the bass be on the correct tone – root or 5th in most cases. For the other parts, there is some flexibility in how chords are voiced. For example, all of these are acceptable voicings for a Bb7 chord.

T-7	T-7	T-3	T-1
L-1	L-3	L-5	L-7
Br-3	Br-5	Br-7	Br-3
Bs-5	Bs-1	Bs-1	Bs-5

What note the lead is singing, along with requirements of strong voicing and good voice leading, affect how the chord is voiced. Baritone can be above or below the lead. Bari below the lead is generally easier for treble singers to lock and so it's considered preferable in SSAA voicing. However, baritone above is acceptable if the music demands it. Remember: in barbershop, the baritone completes the chord by harmonizing either above or below the lead. Note that in the 3rd chord the interval between baritone and bass is a 7th (Bb in bass, Ab in baritone). For strong SSAA voicing you don't want more than an octave between the bass and the rest of the chord.

Why Does Voicing Matter?

In a word: Overtones

Overtones happen because of properties connected with physics of sound. Physics of sound is a huge subject. We will touch on the basics here. Sound is produced when air is made to vibrate, whether by vibration of a reed, as in a clarinet or saxophone, by plucking a string as on a guitar, or by singing a tone. Any time you play or sing a tone you are in fact producing more than one sound. First, there's a fundamental tone, vibrating at a specific frequency. That fundamental frequency gives us the basic sense of a note sounding a specific pitch. In addition to that fundamental tone, the sound contains additional frequencies corresponding to harmonics (overtones).

The harmonic series for a single pitch is: 1-1-5-1-3-5-b7-1-2.
(Starting from a single pitch of C, the tones are C-C-G-C-E-G-Bb-C-D)

When overtones produced by the lowest tone (usually in the bass part) are reinforced by notes and overtones produced in the upper parts, the result is an audible additional tone, also known as ring.

When chords line up so that the overtones reinforce each other, we hear overtones, and we say that the chord is in tune. In the history of Western music, there have been many tuning systems. There is much debate among barbershoppers about how to tune chords, and which system (Pythagorean or Just Intonation or a combination of the two) works the best. For the arranger, the important points are:

- Basses sing a lot of roots and 5ths because those are the foundational tones on which overtones are built.
- The physics of stacked overtones means that the classic "spread to 10th" voicing, 1-5-1-3, is especially conducive to overtones.
- Typical SSAA voice ranges are such that in general, closer voicings are easier to lock and ring.

Voicing is more than just lining up the chord vertically because chords do not happen in isolation. Chords go together to make up measures, phrases, and ultimately, songs. Here is where we must take into account a related factor: voice **leading**.

What is Voice Leading?

Voice leading refers to the **horizontal movement of each individual part line**.
Voicing is a **vertical** concept: "How does this particular chord stack up bottom to top?"
Voice leading is a **horizontal** concept: "How does the baritone part (or tenor part or bass part) go?".
The lead, of course, has to go where the melody line goes. For the harmony parts, basic considerations include:

- Flow of the melody line
- Choice of bass on root or 5th
- Choice of baritone above or below the lead. SSAA voicings are more solid with baritone below lead. However, it's important not to apply that principle too rigidly. Baritone above lead is acceptable if the melody line and good voice leading require it. In barbershop, the baritone harmonizes **above and below the lead** so baritone above lead is fine, if the music demands it.
- Choice of closed, spread to 10th, or open voicing – because melodies are constantly moving up and down, voicings have to change in order to accommodate what the music is doing. We sometimes speak of voicing as where to put the bass part, but in reality:
  - **Voicing affects all parts, not just the bass.**
  - **Voicing and voice leading are inter-related.** It's not a question of which is more important. Each is equally important and each affects the other.

Faced with several possibilities for voicing a chord, which one do you use? It depends!
- What chord type are you harmonizing (major triad, minor 7th, etc.)
- Where is the lead note? The lead melody note usually can't be changed, so that's a critical piece of the puzzle. Go back to the example of the Bb7. If you are voicing a Bb7 chord and the lead is on Bb, then you can't put the bass there – it's already taken! The next strong option is bass on the 5th.
- What is happening around that chord? – what's being sung before and after? Where is the musical line heading?

Good voice leading comes down to a few basic principles.
- Keep parts within singable ranges.
- Don't move parts any more than necessary.
- Avoid awkward intervals and large jumps.
- Voice leading must work for **all parts, including the baritone.**

Baritone is sometimes known as the "garbage part", but arrangers would do well to follow the advice of Dr. Liz Garnett, who says:

> *However, I'm increasingly of the view that this stereotype … has the effect of letting arrangers off the hook. There is no cultural expectation on us to produce singable, musically coherent lines for baritones to sing, and so we stop short of solving all the technical problems that arranging presents. Classical harmony and counterpoint demand control over both vertical and horizontal parameters of the music, so barbershop's obsession with harmony to the exclusion of voice-leading is arguably just a cop-out. Just because some of our geekier friends pride themselves on being able to sing whatever illogical nonsense we throw at them doesn't mean we shouldn't look for musical elegance in all four parts. (Liz Garnett, "Soapbox: The Baritone Part" – Helping You Harmonise, May 9, 2009)*

In arranging there are always tradeoffs.
- What's the most appropriate chord? Most appropriate does not always mean strongest.
- What voicing (vertical) will also produce good voice leading (horizontal) so that the harmony parts (including the baritone) are singable and the chords flow smoothly from one to the next?

Arranging is about choices and compromises – finding the solution that works for both the horizontal (voice leading) and the vertical (solid voicing) and for the expressiveness of the music.

Music Preparation: Getting Your Manuscript Ready for Singers

Steve Tramack, an arranger and music judge in the BHS, defines the three roles of an arranger as:
- Creator
- Editor
- Critic

There's a 4th role that happens when you get music ready for singers: Music Preparer. The care you've put into your arrangement should be reflected in a clean, clear, professional-looking manuscript. First, your manuscript is your calling card and your resume; it's what presents you and your ideas to the world. Second and more importantly, singers, directors, and coaches look to your manuscript to understand the musical intent behind the arrangement. Ideas presented clearly on the page make for more efficient rehearsal and ultimately better music. Communicating clearly requires that the arranger be aware of good notation practices that apply to any style of music, as well as conventions that apply specifically to barbershop. The arranger then must know how to achieve the best results using notation software.

The member section of the BHS website contains a notation guide which illustrates all the conventions of notating barbershop music. If you are a BHS member, download this excellent resource. Sweet Adelines is currently updating its Arrangers Guide; the updated Guide will have a newly revised section on manuscript preparation which will be helpful as well.

On my website is a link to a Google Drive site with a [cheat sheet that summarizes the basics of font and layout choices.](#) It's based on the BHS' formatting guidelines.

Music Notation Software

It's essential that arrangers learn to use music notation software. There are many choices; the major ones are:

- Dorico – Windows, Mac, iPad
- Sibelius – Windows, Mac, iPad, iPhone, Android, Chromebook
- Musescore Studio (formerly Musescore) – Windows, Mac, Linux

Finale was discontinued in August of 2024. It's no longer possible to purchase Finale. For existing Finale users, it's important to migrate files. The further away we get from August of 2024, the more likely it is that an operating system update will crash the program or cause it not to run. The Finale page of my website has information on converting Finale files to MusicXML, so that they can be transferred to other notation programs.

Check the websites for each program to get current information and pricing. The Scoring Notes blog maintains a product guide where you can learn about current versions of Sibelius, Dorico, and Musescore Studio, see which operating systems are compatible with a product, and get links to tips and tutorials.

Dorico, Sibelius, and Musescore Studio are all good; the tips in this section will apply no matter which package you use. But do find a notation package that works for you and learn to use it. Notation software allows you to change your music much more freely, without scratching out or re-copying. It makes transposition easier and faster. Your finished music will be correctly spaced and formatted, and easier to read for the singer. How to choose? The best way is to try them. All the major programs offer a free trial; all of them have YouTube channels, Facebook sites, and other sources for online help. Download the free trial, check out the tutorials available online, and try the programs out. That's the best way to find the one that's the best fit for you. A full-fledged tutorial in notation software is outside the scope of this book, but here are some links to online resources.

- Sibelius tutorials – from Avid
- Dorico blog and YouTube channel. These, and other Dorico resources can be found on the Dorico page of my website.
- The Scoring Notes blog and podcast include tips and tutorials for Sibelius, Dorico, and Musescore.

My recommendation is, always own the pro version if you can, because that way you'll have access to all the features and the program won't limit you in any way. However, the pro levels of the program are expensive. There are ways to address the costs.

- Try Musescore Studio. Musescore Studio is a full-featured program that is completely free to download. Recent updates feature many notation and engraving improvements.
- Look at the intermediate-level programs. They are cheaper than the pro level programs and have a corresponding lower level of functionality. However, they can handle many demands of barbershop arranging. With an intermediate version you can learn the program and move

up to the pro level later if you wish. You'd then pay the upgrade price, not full retail. Examples of intermediate programs are:

- o Dorico SE and Dorico Elements (Dorico).
- o Sibelius First and Sibelius Artist (Sibelius)
- Watch for sales, especially during the holiday season. Beginning on Black Friday (the day after Thanksgiving in the US), you'll often find excellent deals on both new purchases and upgrades. Another time for sales is when a new major release comes out. Check the websites for details.

If working on a mobile device is important for you, then your options are Sibelius and Dorico.

- Sibelius: iPad, iPhone, Android, and Chromebook. Of the major programs, Sibelius is the only one available for Android.
- Dorico: iPad only.

Check the websites and app stores for more details.

Musescore Studio does not have an app that does music notation. The Musescore app, for iOS and Android, is a score reader not a notation application. You can look at files created by Musescore users, but not create scores.

Full disclosure: I started arranging in 1999 using Finale. In 2022, I switched to Dorico. When Finale went away, I converted all my Finale files to Dorico. I chose Dorico because I wanted a program with an iPad app and I preferred the Dorico interface. I now have Dorico both on the desktop and iPad, and Dorico for iPad has turned my commute into productive arranging time. I'm not a spokesperson for any company or any software product, just a satisfied user of one of them. I keep up with developments in music notation software by regularly following the [Scoring Notes blog and podcast.](#)

No matter what program you use, you still need to know the conventions for music notation and barbershop. Read on!

Manuscript Templates for Barbershop Harmony

Templates are helpful because they take care of many settings needed for barbershop arranging.

- Sibelius comes with a template for TTBB, not SSAA. The member section of the BHS website includes Sibelius templates (older but they should still open in current version of Sibelius)
- As of version 6.02, Dorico comes with a TTBB template developed in consultation with the Barbershop Harmony Society; no SSAA template. In addition, the transposing bass clef used in SSAA barbershop is not available in Dorico SE and Dorico Elements. Elements and SE can read the transposing bass clef but cannot create scores that have it. For that you need Dorico Pro. I've developed [Dorico templates for all the voicings (SSAA, TTBB, SATB)](#) and made them

available for free download. They will work in any version of Dorico (Pro, Elements, SE, iPad). Templates are available for versions 5 and 6.
- Musescore includes barbershop templates for both SSAA and TTBB.

If your program doesn't come with a template, check the documentation for instructions on how to create one. Templates that come with the program can be modified to fit your needs, as well.

Staves, Systems, and Bar Lines

Barbershop uses two staves, joined by a bracket (not the brace used in piano music) The top staff uses the treble clef. The bottom staff uses the bass clef. Bar lines divide the music into measures. Double bar lines are used to indicate key or time changes, and to mark sections of music (verse, chorus, tag, etc.). A final bar line appears on the last measure. Bar lines do not extend into the area between the staves. A system is all staves joined by a systemic bar line. The systemic bar line is the line at the far left that links the two staves. The example below shows a single system.
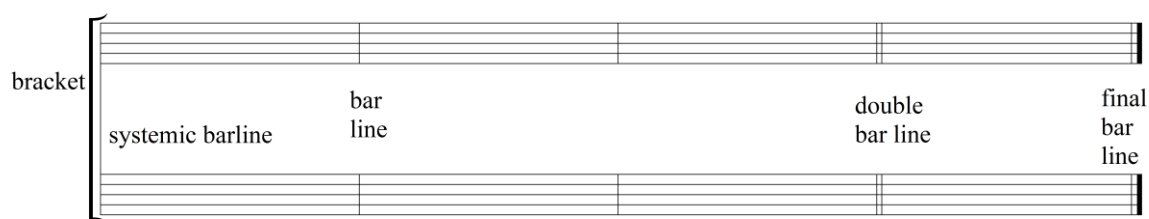
The first system is indented, and part names are written next to the staves. Tenor and Lead are written next to the treble clef; bari and bass are written next to the bass clef, as shown. Succeeding systems are flush with the left margin; the part names do not show.

Clefs and Stem Directions

Barbershop uses treble clef for lead and tenor parts. Tenor notes have stems up; lead notes have stems down. Bass clef is used for baritone and bass parts. Baritone has stems up; bass has stems down. Barbershop for high voice (SSAA) and low voice (TTBB) uses a transposing clef, to make parts easier to read.

SSAA (high voice) barbershop uses regular treble clef and transposing bass clef – a bass clef symbol with the number 8 above it. The 8 above the clef signifies that the baritone and bass parts are sung an octave higher than where they are written.

Clefs and stem direction -SSAA (high voice)

Tenor
Lead

Bari
Bass

Regular treble clef - Tenor stems up, lead stems down
Transposing bass clef - parts sung one octave higher.
Baritone stems up, bass stems down.

TTBB (low voice) barbershop uses regular bass clef and a transposing treble clef – treble clef symbol with an 8 below it. The 8 below the clef signifies lead and tenor parts are sung an octave lower than where they are written.

Clefs and stem direction -TTBB (low voice)

Tenor
Lead

Bari
Bass

Transposing treble clef - parts sung one octave lower.
Tenor stems up, lead stems down
Regular bass clef - Baritone stems up, bass stems down.

SATB (mixed voice) barbershop uses regular treble and bass clefs, with no transposition in either.

Clefs and stem direction - SATB (mixed voice)

Tenor
Lead

Bari
Bass

Regular treble and bass clefs, with
no transposition.

This book focuses on arranging for SSAA (high voice), and all the examples are in SSAA format.

Beams, Flags, and Triplets

Beams, flags, and triplets -- Beams, flags, and triplet symbols go above the note for stems-up notes; below the note for stems-down notes.

Beams   Flags   Triplets
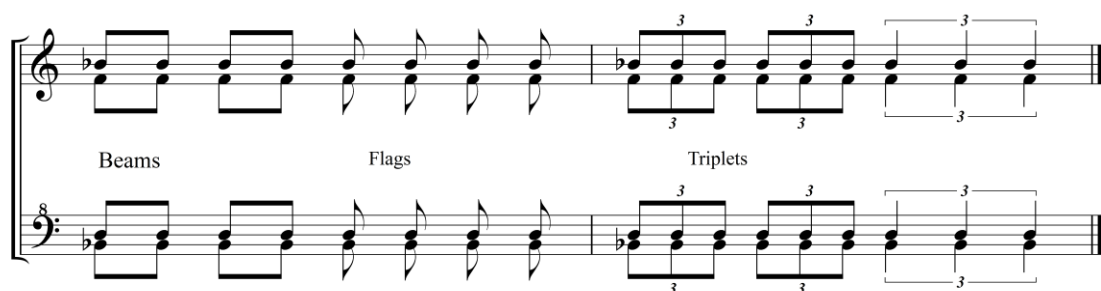
Slurs and Ties

Slurs connect notes of **different pitches** and indicate which notes have the same word sound. Slurs connect to notes at the stem. Ties connect notes of the **same pitch** and indicate that a single pitch is held. Ties connect to notes at the notehead. Both slurs and ties appear above the note for stems-up notes, below the note for stems-down notes. The commands for slurs and ties will be different in notation software. Check the software's documentation for instruction on how to create both symbols.

Slurs - connect
notes of different
pitches

Ties - connect
notes of the
same pitch
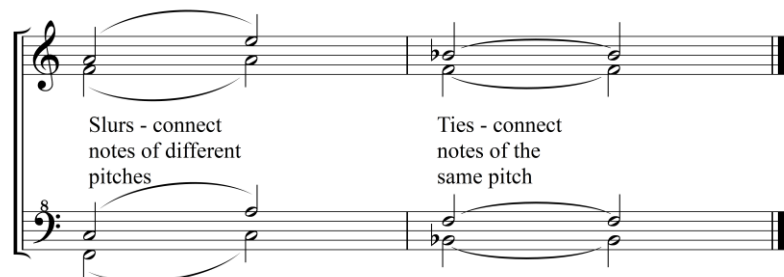
In beamed 8th notes, slurs are placed above the beam for up-stem notes and below the beam for down-stem notes. Use a single slur line to connect multiple slurred notes.
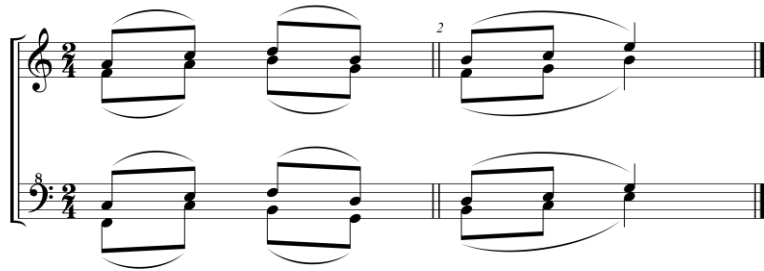
Place slurs above or below the beam as shown.

When more than two notes are slurred, use a single slur to connect them.

Meter (Time Signature) and Key

Time and key signature appear on the first measure, immediately following the clef symbol. They always appear in the order shown: clef, key signature, time signature. For 4/4 time it is acceptable to use either numbers or the common time symbol

Numbers
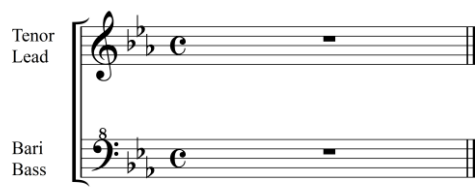
Common time symbol

For cut time, use the cut time symbol.
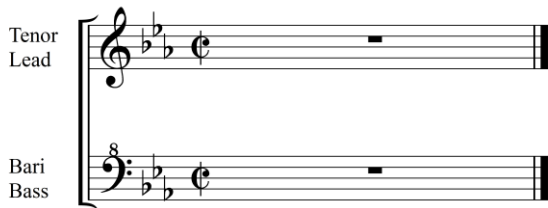
Key signature appears at the start of every system. Key changes appear at the spot where the new key starts and at the start of every system after that. Changes of meter appear only at the measure where the meter changes.

When changing key, do not use natural signs to cancel out sharp and flats unless changing to the key of C Major or A minor.

When a key change occurs at the start of a system or at a page turn, use a cautionary key signature to tell the singer that a key change is coming. Use a double bar before a cautionary key signature. Notation software will often do this automatically, or it will have settings to accomplish this.
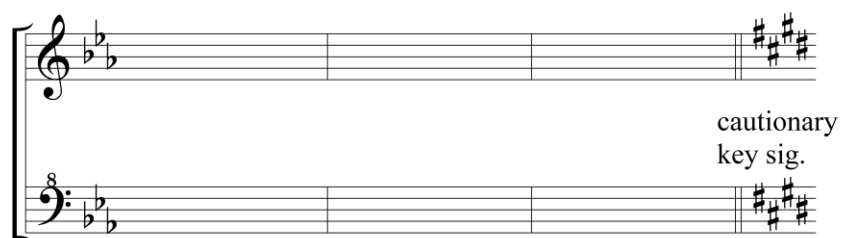
When a time signature change occurs at the start of a system or at a page turn, use a cautionary time signature. Use a double bar before a cautionary time signature.
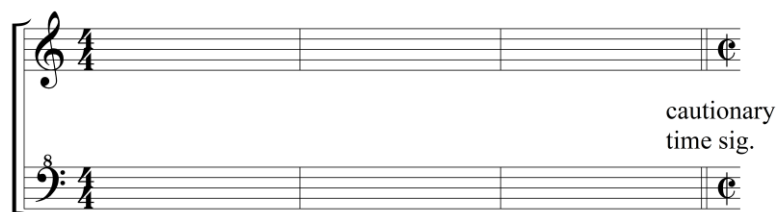
Rhythm and Pitch

Complete measures

Every measure must have a combination of notes and rests equal to the number of beats indicated by the meter. For example, in 4/4 time, there are 4 beats to a measure. All notes and rests in all parts must add up to exactly 4, no more and no less. The only exception is a pickup measure at the start of the music.

Chord Alignment and Rhythm Spacing

All chords should line up vertically.

In passages with embellishments, chords should still be vertically aligned. Software will provide appropriate spacing.

Accidentals

An accidental is a change to a note's pitch (sharp, flat, or natural) that occurs outside of the key signature. Accidentals appear to the left of the note, on the corresponding line or space.

- Accidentals are in effect for one measure. The only exception to this is when notes are tied over a bar line.
- If an accidental is on a note tied over a bar line, the accidental from the start of the tie still applies.
- If the same accidental appears in the following measure, it must be applied again.
- An accidental affects all notes in a given part. When the same accidental appears in both treble and bass clef, use the accidental in both places.
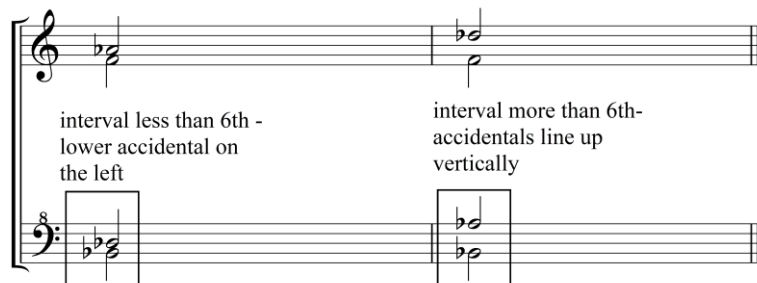
Accidental-
affects all notes
in this measure
unless changed
with sharp/flat/
natural

Previous accidental still
applies. Tied over a bar
line so the natural is
still in effect.

If applying the
accidental in a new
measure, it must be
applied again.

- In chords with multiple accidentals, the accidentals should not collide with each other. For intervals of a 6th or less, the lower accidental goes to the left. For intervals greater than a 6th, accidentals line up vertically.

interval less than 6th -
lower accidental on
the left

interval more than 6th-
accidentals line up
vertically

Courtesy Accidentals

A courtesy accidental is a sharp, flat, or natural sign with parentheses around it. It is a reminder to the singer that an accidental from the previous measure no longer applies.

Accidental

use courtesy accidental
to show that the
note is returning to
the unaltered pitch.

Chord Spelling

Spell chords correctly, using appropriate sharp, flat, or natural signs. In spelling chords, the arranger must consider both the spelling of the chord and the key signature.

Lead-3rd of D7 is F#, not Gb. Bass-natural sign because of the key

Tenor-3rd of a B7 is D#, not Eb. Bari-5th of a B7 is F#, not Gb. Bass/lead-natural signs because of the key

Bari-3rd of C#7 is E#, not F Lead-5th of C#7 is G# not Ab

Tenor-3rd of F#7 is A#, not Bb. Bass-5th of an F#7 is C#, not Db. Bari-natural sign because of the key.

For diminished 7ths and other chord which use double-flats, it is acceptable to use the enharmonic equivalent – for example, A for Bbb in a Cdim7 chord.

Enharmonic Spelling

- Enharmonic means two different names for the same note on the keyboard, such as C# and Db, or F# and Gb.
- When adjacent chords use enharmonic spellings, use a dashed bracket to show that the two notes are the same. Dashed brackets go above stems-up notes and below stems-down notes.

Enharmonic spelling in tenor. Bb is root of a Bb chord. A# is 3rd of an F#7 chord. Dashed bracket above the tenor notes.

Enharmonic spelling in bass. Dashed bracket below the bass notes.

If space permits, it is acceptable to write the words "same note" or write the actual note equivalent. Be careful that these words do not get in the way of actual lyrics, and don't use them if they make the music too crowded. The bracket by itself is sufficient.

Consolidate Rests

When adjacent parts share a rest of the same length, consolidate the two rests. Notation software will have settings or commands to do this. Don't manually move rests, hide them, or leave them out.

Use the Fewest Notes to Show a Duration

This guideline will sometimes conflict with other guidelines about clarity of beats. When in doubt, make the down beats easier to see for the singer.

8th Note Beaming

Eighth notes should be beamed in groups. A convention seen in older sheet music is putting flags on every note. This practice is now obsolete.

8th notes not beamed - incorrect   8th notes beamed - correct

Beaming is closely related to meter. There are many rules concerning eighth note beaming and its relationship to the meter. Here are a few general guidelines. Software may have settings to control how notes are beamed. Check the documentation.

Simple meters are meters that subdivide a beat into 2. Examples of simple meters are 2/4, 3/4, 4/4, and cut time. In 2/4, 4/4, and cut time, 8th notes can be beamed in groups of 2 or groups of 4.

8th notes beamed   8th notes beamed
in groups of 4   in groups of 2.

In 3/4-time, beam in groups of 2.

6/8 is an example of a compound meter. Compound meters subdivide the beat into 3. In 6/8, beam eighth notes in groups of 3.

Clarity in notation is especially important when writing syncopated rhythms. Here are some guidelines.

Preserve the perception of the meter.

Incorrect -- 3 8ths beamed together   Correct. Beaming reflects
makes 4/4 look too much like 6/8.   4/4 meter and beat 3 is
Beat 3 is difficult to spot.   easily visible.

Down beats should be clearly visible.

In 4/4 time, think of the measure as being divided into two units of two beats. Each half of the measure should have 2 beats in it. This is sometimes known as the "Invisible Bar Line" or the "Half Bar" and it helps to determine where to put in tied notes. Check the settings in your software for options on how to handle the half-bar.

The invisible bar line rule is relaxed for very simple rhythms. Any of these is acceptable.

Swing 8ths – Swing 8th feel should be notated using regular 8th notes and the swing symbol.

Do not use triplets. If your software does not include the swing symbol (As of version 6, Dorico does not include it), use text: with swing.
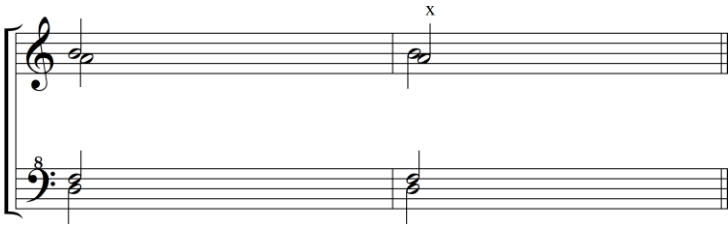
There are specialized text fonts that work with notation software to produce the swing symbol. Two of them are Metrico and MusGlyphs.

Major 2nd Intervals – Higher Note on the Left

When notating intervals of a Major 2nd, **the higher note always goes on the left**.

Getting lead to the right of tenor was tricky in Finale. In Dorico Pro/Elements there is a setting for always putting the higher note on the left (Notation Options / Voices / Multiple Voices) and it can be made the default. I don't know how it's done in Sibelius; check the documentation.

Use X to Show Tenor Below Lead

Put a lower-case letter "x" (no quotes) above the tenor note. Because the "x" is not a standard musical symbol, the arranger will have to create it in the software. Don't use free text to create it because it will not be attached to the note. In the example below, note:
- X goes above the tenor notehead.
- Higher note always goes on the left.
- Placement of the accidental in the second measure – to the left of the two notes, on the line or space corresponding to the note that has the accidental. It's on the "B" line so it affects the "B" note.

Check the software's documentation for how to create the x symbol.

Tempo Markings

For songs sung in tempo, use metronome markings to tell the singer the intended tempo. Place metronome markings above the top staff, at the spot where you want the indicated tempo to start.
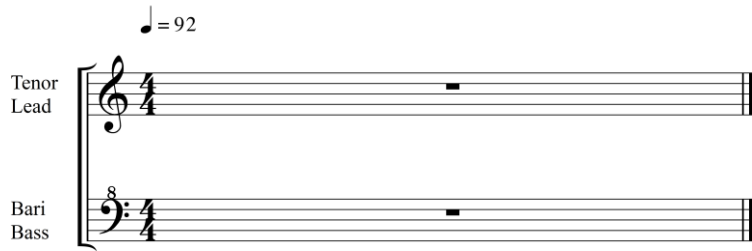
When doing metronome markings be aware of the meter. In 2/4, 3/4, or 4/4 time, the quarter note gets the beat, so the metronome mark should reference a quarter note. In cut time, the half note gets the beat, so the mark should reference a half note.

A few additional guidelines about tempo marks.

- Tempo text goes above the top staff.
- Barbershop tends to prefer English terms to the traditional Italian ones. It's acceptable to use the word freely instead of rubato. Rit. and ritard are generally understood. It's acceptable to use the word slower instead of rit. or ritard.
- Rubato vs. ad lib. In Rubato, there is still an implied meter – notes may be sped up or slowed down but there is still the sense of a meter. Ad lib is complete absence of meter. Barbershop ballads are done in a more rubato style.
- If a song changes tempo, use appropriate text and tempo markings at the point where the tempo changes.
- Use your software's music fonts to create tempo marks; don't use free text. Each program will have its own way of creating tempo marks and other expressive markings. Check the software's documentation.

Musical Pauses – Breath Mark, Fermata, Caesura

- Breaths – Singers need places to breathe! Breathing spots can be indicated either with rests, or with a breath mark. The breath mark looks like a comma and goes above the staff, at the spot where the breath is needed. Don't use the typewritten comma. The breath mark is a musical symbol, and it will be part of the software's music font.
- Fermata (also known as "Bird's Eye") – Used to indicate an indefinite hold.
- Caesura (also known as "Railroad Tracks") – Used to indicate an indefinite pause.

breath mark   *caesura*   *fermata*

Dashed line for melody transfer

When the melody moves from the lead to another part, use a dashed line to show the transfer of melody. Use another line to show the melody going back to the lead. Check the software's documentation for instructions on how to create the dashed line.

Tenor Lead

just what it is___ but it's great_____ oh

Bari Bass

They sim - ply ru - in it.

yeah!   Come on___ don't hes - i - tate___ now.

Look at 'em do - in' it.

Optionally, add text to indicate which part has the melody above the top staff (Bass melody, Lead melody)

Roadmaps

Measure numbers and pickups

Pickup measures are not numbered; measure numbering begins with the first full measure of music. When creating pickup measures in notation software, don't use an incomplete blank measure. Use the software's pickup measure command, so that the spacing of the pickup is correct and measures get numbered correctly.

Repeats

There are many ways to indicate repeated passages. First and second endings, D.C. and D.S. signs, and Coda signs lead to complicated flipping of pages back and forth, making the music harder for singers to navigate. For this reason, they are not used in barbershop. It's easier for singers if the arrangement starts at the beginning and goes to the end without complicated repeats.

The basic repeat symbol can be used for short vamp sections. Check your software's documentation for how to create a forward repeat.

Musical Form

It's important to communicate the form of the arrangement to the singer. This can be done either with text symbols (Intro, Verse, Chorus, Interlude, Tag, etc.) or with rehearsal letters (Boxed letter A, B, C, etc. at major points in the music). Use a double bar to show a new section of the music.

Text Symbols

Intro

Tenor
Lead

Bari
Bass

Verse

Chorus

Rehearsal Letters

Tenor
Lead

Bari
Bass

A

B

Lyrics

Lyric placement for each part

- Lyrics shared by all parts -- below the lead notes.
- Lead - below the lead notes.
- Tenor-specific lyrics (lead and tenor singing different words or rhythms) -- above the tenor notes.
- Baritone-specific lyrics -- above the baritone notes
- Baritone and bass shared lyrics (bari and bass singing the same words and the same rhythms) – above the baritone notes.
- Bass-specific lyrics (bass words or rhythms different from bari) -- below the bass notes.

When using notation software, use the software's lyric function, not free text, so that lyrics will be attached to notes. The specifics of how that is done will vary greatly among notation programs. Check your program's documentation for instructions.

Spelling, Hyphenation, and Word Extensions

- Spelling and hyphenation always follow the dictionary. When writing English lyrics, use whatever English dictionary is standard in your home country.
- Word extensions are solid horizontal lines, level with the bottom of the letters in the word, which extend from the end of the word or syllable (or any punctuation that follows the word or syllable) to the end of the next note head.
- When notes are tied use word extensions to indicate that the word or syllable is sustained.

Baselines for lyrics

In typography, the baseline is the invisible line upon which most letters "sit". All lyrics in a given part should be on the same baseline.

Lyric example:

Page Formatting and Fonts

Page Size and Scaling

- North America -- U.S. letter size (8.5" x 11") is common. Concert size (9" x 12") also works very well, as it gives notation software more options for laying out systems. When printing from PDF, files created in Concert Size will be automatically scaled to fit on 8.5"x11" paper.
- For countries outside of North America that use metric paper sizes, A4 comes close to the dimensions of U.S. letter. Arrangers outside of North America should use whatever paper size is standard in their home country.
- Use portrait (vertical) orientation.
- Software allows for the page size to be scaled up and down. Make sure the page is scaled to 100%, so that the music is a readable size. This is especially important as more singers read their music on mobile devices.

Music Fonts

Use traditional engraver-style music fonts for the greatest clarity. The default music fonts used by the major notation programs vary; all are acceptable.

- Dorico: Bravura
- Sibelius: Opus
- Musescore Studio: Leland

The music examples in this book were done with Finale (using Finale's Maestro Wide) or Dorico (using Bravura).

Text Fonts

The text font recommendations below are based on the BHS Notation Guidelines.

Title – Arial, 24pt, Bold, fixed size. Use all capital letters. The title is centered at the top of the page.

TITLE

If the song title includes parentheses, use Arial, 12pt, Bold, fixed size for the parenthetical part of the title.

(HERE AM I)
BROKEN HEARTED

Or

CHRISTMAS SONG
(CHESTNUTS ROASTING ON AN OPEN FIRE)

as sung by / from the movie (optional) – Times New Roman, Italic, 10pt, fixed size.
Barbershop harmony, SSAA voicing - Times New Roman, Italic, 10pt, fixed size.
Both of these lines are centered, below the title.

as sung by / from the movie
Barbershop harmony, SSAA voicing

It's helpful to say "Barbershop harmony" so that singers know this is a barbershop arrangement when viewing on platforms like Sheet Music Plus, which sells music in many genres and styles. Use the term "SSAA voicing" instead of "women's voices" or "female voices". SSAA is more inclusive of gender diverse members.

Composer and arranger credits -- Times New Roman, 12 pt., fixed size.
Use "Words by" and "Music by" to indicate lyricist and composer.
Use "Arrangement by" to indicate the arranger. Use ALL CAPS for names. They are placed flush with the left and right margins, as shown in the examples.

Words by NAME   Music by NAME
                                                          Arrangement by NAME

Words and Music by NAME   Arrangement by NAME

Words, Music and Arrangement
by NAME

Copyright notice - Times New Roman, 10pt, fixed size, centered at the bottom of the page. Check your software for the method to insert a copyright symbol. The copyright notice should always appear on page 1 of the music, not on a separate page, or on any succeeding pages. Use the exact wording provided by the copyright holder. Copyright notices can be long. Leave room for whatever text is needed.

Copyright © xxxx

If the arranger has arranged a song in the public domain, the copyright statement should read:

Arrangement Copyright © YYYY Arranger Name

If the arranger has written and arranged an original song, the copyright statement should read:

Copyright © YYYY Arranger Name

Lyrics – Times New Roman, 12 pt. **not fixed size**. Using proportional spacing for the lyrics will greatly improve the page layout. For more on the difference between fixed and non-fixed text size and why it matters, see this post from the Scoring Notes blog.

Example – Page 1 Formatting

Page 2 and following pages - Page Header and Page Numbers

Page 2 and subsequent pages have a header consisting of the song title and the page number. The title is centered at the top of the page. Use Times New Roman, Italic, 12 pt., fixed size.

For even numbered pages, place the number on the top left corner.

For odd numbered pages, place the number on the top right corner.

Rhythm and System Spacing

Notation software uses rhythm spacing formulas that assign horizontal space to notes based on their duration. Spacing is proportional, which means that longer notes get more horizontal space than shorter notes. The software also accounts for space needed by other musical elements -- clefs, key and time signature, rests, lyrics, symbols, accidentals, etc. While the software will do a good job with spacing in most cases, the arranger's eye and judgement are needed as well. Here are a few basic tips.

- Number of measures in a system: The songs we sing in barbershop tend to use 4 bar phrases, but don't force 4 bars onto a system. The goal is to have enough room that lyrics can be read easily but not so much that notes and lyrics are unnaturally spread out.

- Number of systems on a page: It's typical to have 3 systems on page 1 and 4 systems on other pages. It's acceptable to put more systems on a page if they fit. However, avoid overcrowding. White space makes the page readable for the singer.
- The last page does not need to have systems all the way to the bottom. Two or three systems instead of four are OK. Avoid having a single system on the last page.
- Leave enough space between the treble and bass clef that lead and baritone lyrics do not collide with each other.
- Leave enough space between systems so that there is room for tenor and bass lyrics and white space between the systems. The singer should be able to easily see which notes and words belong to which system.
- As much as the music will allow, spacing between treble and bass clef, as well as spacing between systems, should be consistent. Software will have settings to help automate this process.

Putting It Together: The Arranging Process

Up to this point, the focus has been on theory, chord vocabulary, and notation. It's now time to apply this knowledge to a real song. If you've never arranged a song you might be wondering: how do I get started? Here I'll outline the steps -- what to do when you're ready to make the leap from theory into real arranging.

Ready? Let's go!

Step 1: Pick the right song!

I'm a firm believer that there's nothing better for staying motivated than arranging songs you love. That said, you have to walk before you can run. Songs with very modern chords will either not be good candidates for a barbershop arrangement or will be difficult to execute for a beginner because they will require extensive chord substitution. Look for chord symbols that are similar to chords in our vocabulary. The simpler the chords and chord symbols, the better for a beginning arranger. Songs with a very wide range for the melody will also be much more difficult. Keep the range of the melody line with about an octave to start.

Step 2: Find the sheet music

Work from publisher's sheet music whenever you can. Arranging solely by ear is much harder; don't make it harder than it needs to be! The piano accompaniment and chord symbols are the best guideposts, especially for arrangers in the beginning stages. Save the "ear" method for when you're more experienced. There are plenty of Internet sites that have guitar tabs and chords to popular songs. Don't rely on them, however. They are not always accurate. Use sheet music that comes from the publisher.

For current songs, SheetMusicPlus.com and SheetMusicDirect.com are the main sources for sheet music. MusicNotes.com is another one. Pro Tip: Music publishers will often create both a "Piano/Vocal/Guitar" version which will be more complex, and a simpler "Easy Piano" version. If the chords for the song you want to arrange are more complex, try using the "Easy Piano" version of the sheet music instead. It will have a simpler accompaniment, with simpler chord symbols. In effect, a professional arranger has done the work of simplifying the song for you. If you try an "Easy" version and the chords are still very modern and outside our chord vocabulary, you've picked a song that's too difficult. Try another song!

For older songs, the Internet has made vast amounts of music available to purchase, listen to, and download. Many academic and public libraries have sheet music collections which have been digitized and made available online. Links to a few of them are in the Resources section. When searching online sheet music sites, how much information you will see about a given song will vary. If a song is public domain you are more likely to see cover art and downloadable music. If a song is still under copyright you might see basic bibliographical information such as author, title, and publication date but won't be able to view or download the actual music. In that case, your next step is to contact the library directly. Depending on the library's policies, you may be able to get a copy sent to you or you may have to visit the library in person. If you plan to visit a library in person, contact the library ahead of time to find out about access to their sheet music collection.

When working with an older song it's important to find the original sheet music if you can. Songs written in earlier eras sometimes contain racist language that would be unacceptable today; publishers changed lyrics over time as public tastes changed so that the sheet music would remain marketable. Both Hal Leonard and Alfred Music publish compilations of songs from various decades. These are helpful but be aware that the lyrics you find in those compilations might not be what the composer wrote. Knowing what the composer wrote is an important piece of research both for deciding whether a song is appropriate to arrange and for the Sweet Adelines song assessment process.

YouTube is a great source for historic performances, all available for free listening. The streaming services -- Apple Music, Google Play, Pandora, Spotify, etc. -- have older songs in their catalog as well.

Step 3: Get familiar with the song.

Once you have the sheet music, get thoroughly familiar with the song. Listen to the original. Get familiar with the melody, the lyrics, the chord movement, and what attracted you to the song in the first place. Listen to the hooks. It's OK to listen to covers of the song, and the Internet makes them easy to find. What I do not recommend is looking at other arrangements, especially other barbershop arrangements. You want to arrange the song, not someone else's arrangement. Play through the sheet music a bunch of times and listen to the harmonic movement. Once you're thoroughly familiar with the song, move on to Step 4.

For an excellent discussion of this step, see Chapter 9 of *A Cappella Arranging* by Deke Sharon and Dylan Bell (Hal Leonard Books, 2012)

Step 4: Create a lead sheet

A lead sheet consists of the melody line and any chord symbols from the sheet music. Write down or input the melody line and chord symbols from the sheet music, in the original key. Don't put chords to anything just yet! There's still another important step.

Step 5: Select the key

The most important factor in deciding on a key is the range of the melody line. As a rule, the lead range for SSAA is Bb below middle C to C an octave above middle C (C4 to C5).

Transpose the key so that as much of the lead line as possible falls within the lead range. When inputting chord symbols into your notation software, be sure you are using your software's chord function, so that any chord symbols you've assigned will transpose if you have to raise or lower the key. Some sheet music download sites allow the user to choose a key when selecting sheet music. If you're getting your sheet music from a download site that has this functionality, experiment with playing the sheet music in different keys before you download and print it. Remember: the goal is to get the melody line into the range of the average lead singer as much as possible. Not all sites offer this functionality, but it's very helpful when you can find it.

For more experienced arrangers, very high or low spots in a melody line can be dealt with in a variety of ways:
- Choice of key, including the use of different keys for different sections of the song.
- Moving melody up/down. Be selective when doing this so as not to render the melody unrecognizable.
- Melody transfer. If the song is to be contestable, remember that too much melody in parts other than the lead will make for a weak contest vehicle.

Step 6: Begin to Arrange

Once you've studied the sheet music, created a lead sheet, and selected a singable key, then and only then are you ready to begin arranging the song. A few general tips:

1. Play, and play some more! I strongly recommend arranging at the keyboard first. Music software can play back, but it's no substitute for getting your hands on the keyboard and getting progressions into your fingers. Getting them into your fingers will get them into your ear as well. This will take time, but it's so worth it! There's a definite relationship between fluency at the piano and quality of arranging. If your piano skills are not strong, the best way to improve them is by playing.

2. Get regular feedback from an experienced arranger. Ideally the feedback happens live at the piano, so that your mentor can play examples of what's right and wrong and explain any areas of confusion. But it can be done over the Internet, too, either by sharing files via email or live via Zoom, Skype, etc. Whether in person or long distance, regular feedback is important.

3. Find singers to sing your charts. Get feedback from the singers. What did they like, what did they find easy to sing and what was challenging? Even if it's just a pickup quartet, hearing your work sung will tell you what does and doesn't work better than any book or course. Getting feedback from singers will teach you a lot. When it works, there's nothing like hearing a chart sung and liking what you hear.

The Arranging Process: Our Homeland Aotearoa

For this demonstration, I'll use a short passage from a [New Zealand folk song called Our Homeland Aotearoa](#)[1]. Special thanks to Linda Samuelsson, in Palmerston North, New Zealand, for introducing me to this song and for allowing me to use a portion of her arrangement of it here.

Here is the sheet music, in the original key.

[1] A word about copyright: The music for Our Homeland Aotearoa is traditional, from an English folk song. The lyrics are credited to A.G. Hall in the 1920s. The website where the sheet music came from had no information about Hall. Consultation with the National Library of New Zealand (Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa) yielded no information about A.G. Hall. Although the lyrics are over 100 years old, it's possible that they are still under copyright, since [copyright for musical works in New Zealand](#) lasts for life of the author plus 50 years. If you are the copyright holder for the lyrics, or have information about who holds the copyright for them, please contact me (caroleprietto@gmail.com).

G is much too high a key, so I transposed it down to the key of C.

Now, let's work through the first phrase. Begin by harmonizing the chords that fit with the chord symbols.

As you arrange you will inevitably come across chords that do not fit in with a particular harmonic pillar. In the pickup, the note F is not part of a C chord. In bar 2: the melody note G is not part of an F chord; the melody note D is not part of a C chord. Bar 3 has several notes that are not found in the primary harmony of G7. In those cases you will need to find **substitute chords.**

Arranging Barbershop, Vol. I, published by the Barbershop Harmony Society (p.138), gives a good summary of substitution options.

- Extend the chord (add 6th, 7th, 9th)
- Barbershop 7th a 5th above the root of the harmonic pillar
- Barbershop 7th a 5th below the root of the harmonic pillar
- Barbershop 7th a half-step above the root of the harmonic pillar
- Barbershop 7th a half-step below the root of the harmonic pillar
- Barbershop 7th a tri-tone away from the root of the harmonic pillar
- Diminished 7th with the same root as the harmonic pillar

In addition to these, there are non-barbershop-7th options.
- Relative minor in first inversion with doubled 3rd. An example is Am substituting for C, or C-E-A-C for C-E-G-C. BHS refers to this as the "substitute 6th" chord (6th substituting for a 5th), and it's a common use for the minor triad.
- Minor 7th a 5th above or below the root of the harmonic pillar

- Barbershop 9th – especially when the pillar is a barbershop 7th chord and the melody note is the added 9th tone (a variation on the "extend the chord" option)

Let's begin with the pickup. At the word THE, F is not in a C chord.

Here are possible options, working through the outline from the BHS manual.

Possible substitution	Distance of root from harmonic pillar	Is this an option?
Extend chord	On	No – adding F to a C chord does not make a chord. Substituting F for the E in a C chord gives a suspended chord, which is not in the barbershop vocabulary (vocabulary= chords recognized by SAI)
Barbershop 7th	**5th above**	**Possibly – F is part of a G7 chord**
Barbershop 7th	**5th below**	**Possibly – F is part of an F7 chord**
Barbershop 7th	**Half-step above**	**Possibly – F is part of Db7 (Db is half-step above C)**
Barbershop 7th	Half-step below	No – F is not part of a B7 chord (B is half-step below C)
Barbershop 7th	Tri-tone	No – F is not part of a Gb7 chord
Diminished 7th	Same	No – F is not part of a Cdim7 chord

Now that you have options, **play them and compare**. Use your ear. There might be more than one good choice; use your personal preference, knowledge of the Circle of Fifths and demands of voicing and voice leading, to make a selection.

For the pickup:

- F7 – no
- Db7 – no
- **G7 – yes, that fits**

G7 is the one we want here. Now that we have a chord, how to voice it? There are two possibilities, one with bass on root and one with bass on 5th. In a dominant 7th chord bass can be on either tone; both are equally strong.

Bass on root   Bass on 5th

The choice is made based on voice leading, and the one we want is bass on 5th. Why? Because it's easier voice leading for both the bass and the baritone. You want to move the parts as little as possible, and the bass on 5th voicing does that. What about baritone above lead? Baritone below lead tends to be better for the sound of SSAA voices, but baritone above lead is acceptable if the needs of good voice leading require it. Remember: in barbershop, the baritone part harmonizes **above and below** the lead.

Bar2: Harmonic pillar is F and melody note G. The note G is not part of an F chord.

Here are the options, again, working through the outline in the BHS manual.

Possible substitution	Distance of root from harmonic pillar	Is this an option?
Extend chord	**On**	**Possibly - G is part of F triad with add9, which is a vocabulary chord**
Barbershop 7th	**5th above**	**Possibly – G is part of a C7 chord**
Barbershop 7th	5th below	No – G is not part of a Bb chord
Barbershop 7th	Half-step above	No – G is not part of an F#7 chord
Barbershop 7th	Half-step below	No – G is not part of an E7 chord
Barbershop 7th	Tri-tone	No – G is not part of a B7 chord
Diminished 7th	Same	No – G is not part of an Fdim7

Now, play the possible ones.

- The "extend the chord" option, F with add9 works quite well.
- The "barbershop 7th" option, C7, is a stronger barbershop chord, yes, but it's not the best fit for this passage.

The preferred option here is the Fadd9, because it fits better with the pillar harmony of F. The triad with add9 is an outlier chord but can be used when the lead is on the 9th and the chord resolves to the major triad, as it does here.

Bar 2: At "tree" in bar 2 the C chord doesn't require a substitution but note the voicing: lead and bass are on the same note. Why? Putting the bass an octave lower to complete the chord and double the root would put bass on low C, which is a note that most SSAA basses don't handle well. Putting the bass on G and doubling the 5th is not preferred, as it's a more "choral" voicing that pulls the sound away from the barbershop style. One of the challenges of this song is a **do-to-do melody.** The song is in the key of C and the melody line ranges from C to C above, or, in solfege, do to do. The challenge with do-to-do melodies is that low melody notes, or melodies with a low tessitura can be difficult to voice. Low melody notes in the lead leave few if any options for the bass. The key of C, while easy in terms of no sharps or flats, can be a challenging key for SSAA depending on the range of the melody line. One reason that Eb is such a popular key for SSAA is that the key of Eb works especially well for songs with **sol-to-sol melodies**. Sol in the key of Eb is scale tone 5 or Bb. The range of Bb to Bb is a very good range for SSAA leads and doesn't take the bass too low in most instances.

At the end of bar 2, "and the," we see the same pattern that we saw in the pickup – a melody note, D, which is not part of a C chord. The substitution is the same: G7. However, the voicing of the G7 at this spot is different. It must be bass on root because the lead is singing D, the 5th of a G7 chord.

Bar 3 has several substitutions. Let's look at each.

First note, on the word TIPS. C is the pillar; melody note is A natural

Possible substitution	Distance of root from harmonic pillar	Is this an option?
Extend chord	On	**Possibly – A is part of a C Major 6th**
Barbershop 7th	5th above	No – A is not part of a G7 chord
Barbershop 7th	5th below	**Possibly – A is part of an F7 chord**
Barbershop 7th	Half-step above	No – A is not part of a C♯7 chord
Barbershop 7th	Half-step below	**Possibly – A is part of a B7 chord**
Barbershop 7th	Tri-tone	No – A is not part of an F♯7 chord
Diminished 7th	Same	**Possibly – A (Bbb) is part of a Cdim7 chord**

Next step is playing the possible ones -play the C chord of "sun", then play each of the possible ones. It doesn't take long to find that none of them work. From there we go to the non-barbershop 7th options.

Possible substitution	Distance of root from harmonic pillar	Is this an option?
Relative minor	6th	**Possibly – A is in an Am chord**
Minor 7th	5th above	No – A is not in a Gm7 chord
Minor 7th	5th below	No – A is not in an Fm7 chord (Fm7 has Ab, not A)
Barbershop 9th	5th above	**Possibly – A is in G7(9) (D-F-A-B)**
Barbershop 9th	5th below	**Possibly – A is part of F7(9) with no root**

Now we play them.
- Barbershop 9th a 5th above – possibly; G7(9) comes closer than any of the barbershop 7th options, but the relative minor is a better fit.
- Barbershop 9th a 5th below – F7(9) is a no
- **Relative minor – This is the one.** The strongest choice here is the relative minor. It has the needed melody note, it's solidly within the pillar of C and it's the simplest for voice leading.

When the relative minor is used as a substitute chord, it's strong to put bass on 3rd and double the 3rd. The second non-chord tone is on MOUN-tain. Again, the substitution is relative minor, but this time the relative minor of G, not C. Why? Because this substitution falls just before a change of harmony, the G7 at moun-TAIN. **When the non-chord tone happens just before a harmonic change, use the NEXT harmony as the basis of your substitution.**

The third one is on the word TOPS. You can go through the options again, but this is also a case where context and knowledge of the Circle can lead you to the right choice.

At GOLD, bar 4, we have a tonic chord, C. That's where the progression is heading. At the word WITH, the lead note B harmonizes with the G7 pillar. G7 is the dominant of C, or V7 chord resolving to I on the Circle of Fifths. What leads to V7? The possibilities are II7 (D7 in this key) and ii7 (Dm7 in this key). Your ear will tell you quickly that the "tops" chord should be Dm7. Looking at the "non-barbershop 7th" options, Dm7 fits the "minor 7th with a root a 5th above the harmonic pillar" choice.

Now that we've found the substitute chords, how do we voice this passage?

sun   tips   the   moun - tain   tops   with   gold.

At TIPS, there is Am with doubled 3rd. Doubling the 3rd is strong for a **minor** triad. At moun-TAIN TOPS WITH the tenor is on the low end but it must be, to make the voice leading work **in all parts**. In addition, the voice leading should complement the melody line. Here we have a descending passage, so the voice leading needs to move from a higher place to a lower one, in the most logical way.

The complete passage looks like this.

Tenor Lead / Bari Bass

When the Tū - ī sits in the Kō - whai tree, and the

Dom.7th a 5th above   C   *Extend the chord (F add9)*   F   C   *Dom.7th a 5th above*

sun   tips   the   moun - tain   tops   with   gold.

Relative minor of C   *Rel. minor of G (G7)*   G7   *min.7th a 5th above G7*   C

That, in a nutshell, is the arranging process. You're thinking about:
- Harmonic pillars
- Chord vocabulary
- Substitutions for notes that fall outside of a harmonic pillar
- Voicing and voice leading

Arranging is all about choices, sometimes about compromises. Every song will present challenges, and you need to know how to handle them. How do you get good at it? You get good at it by practicing. Find songs to arrange, get feedback on them, and find a quartet to sing them. As you get more skilled with these basics, you can begin to layer in the next level of arranging:

- Creative choices like key changes and embellishments
- Original material, such as original intros and tags
- Analyzing sheet music. Sheet music is intended for pianists or guitarists playing an accompaniment and doesn't always reflect the song's implied harmonies. Sometimes the piano accompaniment is more accurate than the chord symbols.
- Knowing when to depart from the sheet music is a skill that is developed with time and a lot of experience playing and listening to barbershop.

[It] doesn't have to be the exact sheet music to be [true to] the song. In fact, the exact sheet music doesn't always help us create a good vehicle for our style - and there are ways to work with that, and still have it come out as the song. Different performers take liberties with many things and it is still identifiable as 'the song'. And jazz musicians...well... that's a whole other world, but yes, the song is still the song. – Joey Minshall

All these elements, put together by a skilled arranger, result in an arrangement that's both accessible for the singer and pleasing for an audience.

I do think it takes a special kind of focus and drive, and plenty of time, to learn to arrange effectively in our style. And then, to go beyond simply putting chords around notes, and get into the art and magic and artistry and emotion of it takes another level of focus and drive...inner motivation, not external...sort of like a chorus moving from B to B+ levels and then beyond to the A levels. – Joey Minshall

Key Changes

Dominant 7th of the new key

There are a variety of ways to make key changes. The most common way is, find the dominant 7th of the new key and get to that chord in a logical way.

For a half-step key change, the transition chord is bVI7 of the old key.
- From the original key, identify the 6th.
- Lower that note a half-step.
- Make a dominant 7th out of that tone.

Half-step key change: Example 1

The original key is Eb. The 6th of the original key is C. Half-step lower than C is B. B7 is the dominant 7th of the new key of E.

Half-Step key change, Example 2

- Original key: E
- Find the 6th: C#
- Lower the 6th a half-step: C7. C7 is the dominant 7th of the new key of F.

For a whole step key change, the transition chord is: VI of the old key.

Whole-step key change: Example 1   Example 2
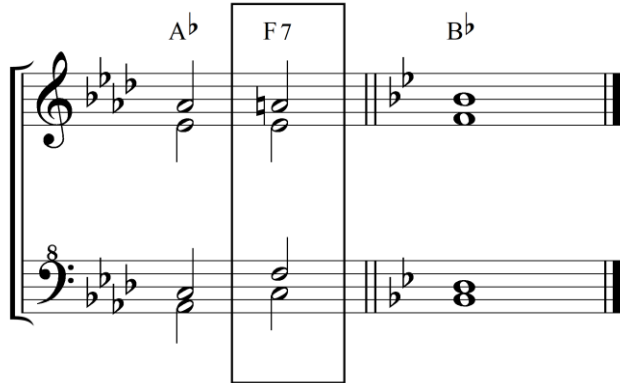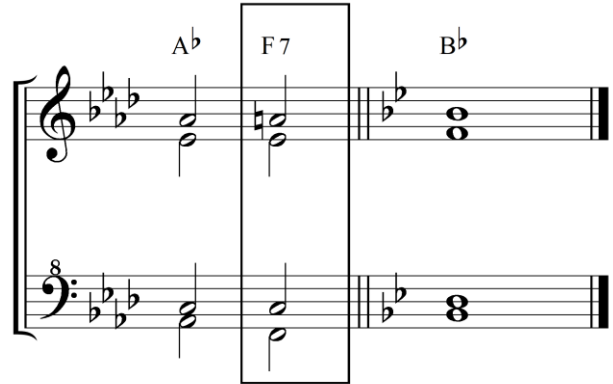
- Original key: Ab
- Sixth of the original key: F
- F7 is the dominant 7th of Bb.

Note the difference in voicing between the whole-step example 1 and 2. Play them and compare how they sound. Both are correct, but the sounds have a different flavor. The first one has more of a sense of "lift" into the new key, and, depending on the harmonic flow of the music, might be preferable.

The bVI7 chord (half-step) and VI7 chord (whole) are both secondary dominant in the old key and dominant in the new one. This is a common pattern in half and whole-step key changes. All these examples show the transition to a new key by using just one chord. In arranging actual music, you might need more than one chord to accomplish the change of key.

When developing key changes think not only of the right intervals (dominant 7th of new key) and the right transition chord, but also good voicings and voice leading which gives the singer's ear the sense of "lift" which makes it clear that new key is coming. Key changes work best when the singer can hear it coming.

Up A 4th / Down A 5th

Liz Garnett, writing about key changes as described by David Wright, described it this way.

> **'Up a 4th'** as David put; I'd think of it as down a 5th, as the examples he gave were generally presaged by I7 to take us gently and seamlessly into the subdominant key for a passage of bass melody. The observant reader will notice that this is technically an instance of the first type, but David listed it separately, probably because it has a different expressive feel. Rather than giving the music a shot in the arm (secondary dominant transformed into actual dominant), it aims to smooth the way into the new key, so we don't really notice … (Dr. Liz Garnett, "David Wright's List of Key Changes" _Helping You Harmonise, October 14, 2018_)

This is the kind of transition that David and Liz are talking about.

Intros and Tags

Intros and tags are special challenges because the arranger becomes songwriter and there's an art to writing good original material. Here are some general tips for intros and tags.

Intros

- Does the song need an intro? For pop songs with well-known lyrics and instrumental hooks, an intro will probably seem out of place – four measures of "ooh" or "doo" on a riff from the song will suffice. For older songs, If the verse sets up the song well, then you don't need an intro. If the verse begins in a way that assumes a scene has already been set, then an intro will be needed.
- Every song is unique. Perhaps the melody of a verse works but the lyric doesn't – it's uninteresting or outdated in some way, so that new lyrics are needed. If the verse has good lyrics but a melody line that's difficult to sing, don't be afraid to change it. Changing the chorus is another matter, especially if the song is well-known.
- Perhaps you've decided to throw the verse out completely and start the arrangement with the chorus. Yes, that's allowed, but it's not easy writing an original verse that blends well with an existing chorus. If you're writing an original intro, **begin with a compelling story**. What's the scene you're trying to set up? What's the mood you're trying to convey? That will be the basis for your lyrics. If you're arranging a medley, the intro needs to establish the idea that connects the songs together.
- Once you have an idea for what you want to say in the intro, the next step is, **write the melody line**. Don't just string chords together. Barbershop is 3 parts harmonizing around a melody –

you have to have melody before you can have harmony. Look at the rest of the song – is there a phrase or a chord progression that can be the basis for an intro?

- Once you have a melody you can begin to put chords around it. It's good to start the intro on a tonic chord so that the singers can have a solid tonal center. If the intro has a pickup, a dominant 7th (V7) chord leading to a tonic is fine. If the chorus begins on a tonic chord (they often do) then ending the intro on a (V7) chord will provide a strong transition to the chorus. Depending on the range of the song and how you've planned the arrangement, you may need a key change to transition from the intro to the verse or chorus. David Wright's arrangement of *South Rampart Street Parade* has 3 key changes in the intro alone. Beginners don't try that at home!
- Contest arrangements often have intros with a big, powerful climax. If that kind of an intro suits your arrangement, it can be exciting for both singers and audience.

Tags

- Tags can be as simple as repeating a line from the chorus; more often they are freely composed by the arranger. Tag singing and tag writing are a whole "sub-genre" within barbershop. Just go to BarberthopTags.com and you'll find thousands of tags. This site can be useful for getting tag ideas, and for studying how good tag writers do it. At the end of the day your arrangement has to have your tag, not someone else's. Intros are the setup to an arrangement – "tell them what you're going to tell them". Tags are the wrap-up: "tell them what you've told them".
- A good place to start for tag writing is, re-state a line from the chorus, and look for ways to add some variation to it, whether that's rhythmic variation or different textures (echo or patter instead of homorhythmic). When starting to write tags, one strategy that's worked for me is: block out the number of measures I think I'll need for the tag, then create simple harmonic rhythm based on the Circle of Fifths, one change for each measure. A measure of I, then a measure of III7 or VI7, then one measure for each 7th going back to the tonic. This basic harmonic movement, plus what has come before in the body of the arrangement, helps to create a new melody that leads back to the tonic in a singable way. It's a good way to get unstuck; it will get your brain going and make it easier to find something that does work. As with intros, once you have a melody, the melody will suggest interesting chords.
- Posting – One part holds a single note out while other parts make chords around it. It's commonly done, and exciting for singers and audiences. Just remember (1) All chords must still be complete (2) Don't make posts so long that ordinary singers can't sing it. Unless you're actually arranging for Tim Waurick, don't write posts that only he can sing! Posts can be in any part, and the note that posts can move from one part to another. The only limit is your skill and creativity. Skilled tag writers can pass the post from one part to another, a good way to add excitement to the tag.
- Length – Tags should be proportional to the length of the overall song; they don't have to be the same length as the intro. If you have an 8-bar into and a 12-bar tag, that's fine, as long as the overall form of the song makes sense to the listener.

"Barber-Pop": Arranging Today's Popular Songs

Barber-Pop refers to arrangements of the pop songs of today, as opposed to songs from the 19-teens, 1920s or 1930s.

The name implies an idea that "barbershop" and "pop" are at opposite ends of a spectrum. If you think about it, that's not really true. Everything we sing is "barber pop" because barbershop harmony has always taken its repertoire from popular songs. Much of our contest repertoire comes from the era of Tin Pan Alley or what is known as the Great American Songbook. The difference is not pop song vs barbershop. All barbershop is made up of popular songs that have been adapted to a certain style of close harmony singing. Remember: barbershop isn't a genre; it's a style of singing and arranging.

Song writing has evolved greatly since the days of Tin Pan Alley. The classic popular song form of an 8-16 bar verse and a 32-bar chorus has gone by the wayside. Songs are much more freely composed, and today's music is heavily Influenced by technology, such as sampled sounds and loops. Often the implied harmonies are repeating patterns of 3 and 4 chords. Newer vocal styles such as a cappella, rap, hip hop have produced new songwriting styles and new vocal sounds. In all of this, our barbershop organizations have given barbershop a fixed set of rules based on a much older style of songwriting.

Barbershop vs. Pop

Barbershop	Pop
Four parts, unaccompanied	Solo with instrumental accompaniment
Melody in an inner voice (lead)	Solo. If there is an ensemble of singers, the melody is likely to be in the highest part
Homorhythmic (vertical chords with all parts singing words most of the time)	More use of backing vocals that sing neutral syllables.
Preference for certain kinds of chords, especially barbershop 7ths.	More triad based; greater use of chords outside of our chord vocabulary such as suspended chords.
Preference for progressions that move around the Circle of Fifths.	Often based on a simple three or four chord progression which repeats.
Chord-driven	Rhythm-driven. Greater use of instrumental hooks such as guitar riffs or drum fills.

Less chord variety and greater use of instrumental hooks present challenges in how to treat the song and how to keep it interesting. Rhythm and embellishments are keys to addressing it – greater use of devices such as solo with background syllables, patter, and bell chords. Creative use of neutral syllables is important. The arranger may have to use more than four parts to capture a song well, and this will limit an arrangement's use to choruses. Pop songs often lack barbershop 7th chords, and this is the biggest reason why most current pop hits don't make it as contest vehicles. They lack barbershop

7th chords and the tri-tone energy that strong barbershop songs have. An easy way to tell if a song has potential for the contest stage is, look at the chord symbols. Strong barbershop songs have barbershop 7th chords.

It's important to consider the likely expectations of the audience. When audiences hear a song they know from the radio, they will be disappointed if the arrangement doesn't sound like what they know. The key to arranging current pop songs is knowing when the barbershop rules apply and when they don't. One important barbershop element that you should incorporate whenever possible is barbershop voicing – bass on roots and 5ths, correct doubles for triads. If the song has major triads, the melody is in the lead part, and bass singing the foundational tones the song will have a barbershop sound, even if it doesn't meet the strictest criteria for a strong barbershop song.

What makes a good barber-pop song?

Not all pop songs make good arrangements You've probably seen the [video from Axis of Awesome](#) about how it's simple to write a pop hit, you just have to write a four-chord song. As an arranger, you can work with a four-chord song, but you can't work with a one-chord song. Pick songs that have musical substance. When selecting pop songs, it's important to pick the right one, just as it is for contest songs. The criteria are not all that different than criteria for contest songs.

- Does the lyric tell an interesting story?
- Does the song have a singable melody?
- Does the song have, or suggest, good harmonies? Lots of rap and hip-hop songs have spoken lyrics, and you can't put harmony around spoken words.
- The more harmonic variety the better, and even better if the song has barbershop 7th chords.

Too much reliance on guitar licks, drum patterns, and the like makes for a song that won't translate well to barbershop.

Mashup vs Medley

The difference between a mashup and a medley is how the songs are presented. In a medley the songs are sung one after the other. In a mashup, the songs are sung at the same time. This means the progressions must match exactly. With mashups, as with medleys, the arranger is creating a new song. As with a medley the result has to work as a song, with a defined beginning, middle, and end, and the lyrics of the songs have to tell complementary stories.

Above all – be true to the song

The worst thing you can do in arranging current pop songs is, force them into the style – put barbershop 7th and 9th chords in where they clearly don't belong, change progressions to match the classic barbershop chord movement. Barbershop arrangers are essentially cover artists – we're taking a familiar song and adapting it to our particular style of singing and arranging. There's a fine line to

walk. On the one hand, what will make the song fun to sing and enjoyable for an audience? On the other hand, we don't want to trash the things that made the song great to begin with.

Dr. Liz Garnett sums it up well.

> *And the general distinction between 'what is good barbershop?' and 'what is good art?' still remains – the ideal is to do something that ticks both boxes, but not every example achieves that. We are quite often presented with an arrangement that has achieved good barbershop but has compromised distinctive flavours in the original in the process. Or a song that captures the original well, but doesn't readily accommodate the high-stakes emotional arcs that barbershoppers like to invest their contest repertoire with. If you want to make me really grumpy, compromise on both counts at the same time. Take an interesting song, squeeze barbershop harmonies into it that distract me by their difference from the original, but still leave me in doubt as to whether it's really barbershoppy enough for contest purposes. (Dr. Liz Garnett, "On the Liberalising of the Barbershop Style" [Helping You Harmonise, February 16, 2019](#))*

When Is an Arrangement Finished?

The arrangement

- Song in the right key
  - Unless you intend to feature a certain part, the range of the lead melody determines the key.
  - The right key puts the melody line within the range of the average lead singer as much as possible.
- Chord construction
  - Chords appropriate to the implied harmony of the song
  - Triads with correct double; four-note chords have all tones present.
  - Even in embellishments, chords must be complete, harmonious, and appropriate to the song.
  - For SAI contest songs, no chords outside the barbershop vocabulary are allowed. The BHS recognizes a few chords that SAI doesn't and does allow for **very occasional** use of non-vocabulary chords, but these should be few and far between. The BHS wants strong barbershop chords just as SAI does.
  - Check the spelling of every chord, to ensure your spellings are correct and that you've voiced the chords you intended. Notation programs have a chord analysis function that can help with this.
- Voicing and Voice Leading
  - Correct placement of the bass note
  - Baritone above or below lead, as appropriate to the melody line and good voice leading.
  - Uses a combination of closed, spread to 10th, and open voicings as appropriate for the melody line and good voice leading.
  - Part lines within the generally accepted ranges for each part.

- o   Logical part movement with no awkward skips or leaps.
- Do the singers have places to breathe? Plan for rests or breath marks in appropriate spots, both to denote musical phrasing and to give singers a place to take a breath. "If the singer has to leave words out to take a breath, that's the arranger's fault" – David Wright
- The Ear Test – Listen to the entire chart, start to finish. Does anything stick out as ugly? If so, look at it again. Be careful, though, and don't let your inner critic take over to the point where you start changing *everything*.

The manuscript
- First page: Correct song title, composer and arranger credits, and copyright information.
- All pages and measures numbered.
- Music spacing
  - o   Room on each system for lyrics to be easily read.
  - o   Enough room between the staves so that words for each part aren't crowded.
- Correct lyric placements for all parts.
- Lyrics correctly spelled and hyphenated, and in a font that can be read easily.

The manuscript should be both correctly formatted and visually appealing. As you proofread the chart, look at the manuscript itself, in addition to looking at the arrangement. Whatever program you use, learn to use its page layout features so that you can make the manuscript look as good as possible.

Finally -- Take your time! Doing all the checking described here can't be done in a hurry.

"I feel that arranging music is a discipline… sometimes it is hard and there is a lot of grind, and you just have to keep going. It is so worth it when that final piece is finally on stage! The path there takes a massive amount of grit though … There are seasons … the seasons of nothing, starting, grinding, and finishing." -- Rowena Harper

Contestability and the Music / Musicality Category

Arranging for the contest stage requires a high skill level in chords, voicing, voice leading, and creative devices, as well as a knowledge of the requirements for acceptable contest songs. It's important for arrangers to understand the rules, just as it is for singers. For both singers and arrangers, the rules will vary depending on which organization sanctions the contest.

Sweet Adelines International (SAI) uses a judging system with four categories: Sound, Music, Expression, and Visual Communication (formerly known as Showmanship). The official definitions for each category are contained in: Judging Category Description Book (JCDB). The latest edition is from July 2025. Sweet Adeline members may download a copy from the members area of the Sweet Adelines International website. The downloadable version cannot be printed; purchase a print copy from the International Sales section of the SAI website. Members must log in to the site to get member pricing.

The Barbershop Harmony Society (BHS) and its affiliates use a judging system with three categories: Musicality, Singing, and Performance. Harmony Incorporated also uses the BHS three-category system. The official definitions for each category are contained in: Barbershop Harmony Society, Contest and Judging Manual (C&J). The latest edition is from March 2025.

In both systems, the Music/Musicality Category judges the strength of the arrangement and the skill level of the performer in executing the arrangement. Music/Musicality judges do not have a copy of the arrangement in the pit; they score the arrangement as performed and judge based on what they hear.

The two systems are similar in some ways, different in others. What follows is a broad comparison of the two, based on my study of them. I am not a judge in any organization. I encourage you to read the manuals for both systems, get thoroughly familiar with the rules that apply for your situation, and take any questions concerning the category to a Sweet Adeline or BHS judge. If you are a Sweet Adeline and studying for tests in the Arranger Certification Program (ACP) or Director Certification Program (DCP) don't rely entirely on what you read here. Be sure to get the JCDB and study it, as that is what the test questions will be based on.

Chord vocabulary

Chords that are common to both systems.

- Major Triad
- Dominant 7th
- Dominant 9th
- Major 6th
- Major 7th
- Major 9th
- Minor Triad
- Minor 6th
- Minor 7th
- Half-diminished 7th (as of July 2025 recognized by SAI)
- Augmented Triad
- Diminished Triad (as of July 2025 recognized by SAI)
- Diminished 7th

The BHS chord vocabulary recognizes chords that Sweet Adelines does not.

- Augmented 7th (Dominant 7th with Augmented 5th)
- Dominant 7th with flatted 5th

SAI and BHS: Common Elements

- In both systems, the best barbershop songs feature the barbershop 7th, barbershop 9th, and major triad predominantly. Neither system gives a hard number for how many of these chords a song should have.
- In both systems, the music/musicality judge looks for harmonic movement around the Circle of 5ths.
    - SAI looks primarily for dominant-to-tonic resolution.
    - In BHS other resolutions are acceptable, see C&J Manual, p.5-4 and 5-5.
        - "Secondary dominants (particularly VI7 and II7) which progress around the circle of fifths to the tonic
        - Tritone substitutions functioning as secondary dominants
        - Rich harmonic variety of consonant chords (this includes major triads and other strongly-voiced chords in the barbershop vocabulary)
        - Dominant 7th / 9th chords on a variety of roots
        - Featured usage of any of these seventh chords (e.g., ♭VI7, ♭VII7/9, VII7, IV7)
        - Other circle resolutions that don't resolve to the tonic (e.g., III7-vi)
        - Performances that feature chords with tritone tension (e.g., half dim / minor 6th)"

- Both systems judge suitability to the performer. In both systems there are no "degree of difficulty" points. Performers who sing a difficult arrangement do so at their own risk.
- Both systems address the inter-relationship of the music category to the other categories Read the judging manuals for specifics.
- The Music/Musicality category is not the first tie breaker in either system. In the SAI system the first tie breaker is Sound. In the BHS system the first tie breaker is Singing.
- In both systems there are no category weights. The music judge gives a single score ranging from 0-100 which takes in all the elements of the category. In SAI this is new as of the July 2025 JCDB.

SAI and BHS: Differences

- The role that form plays in evaluating a strong barbershop song. The SAI category puts much more emphasis on the popular song writing style of Tin Pan Alley and the Great American Songbook, especially the presence of a chorus with a regular form such as such as AABA.
- Homorhythmic treatment (all four parts singing together) vs. embellishments. While both systems define homorhythmic singing as an important part of the barbershop style, the BHS system allows for more non-homorhythmic treatments.
- Sweet Adeline contest rules limit the performer to 7 minutes of singing time. BHS has no time limits, which allows for longer songs, with more development.
- The BHS Musicality category allows for very occasional use of out-of-vocabulary chords if they're handled in a musically appropriate way. Sweet Adelines requires that all chords in a contest arrangement be within the SAI chord vocabulary.

Form – What does AABA mean?

Barbershop harmony takes much of its contest repertoire from American popular song of the first half of the 20th century. Songs from the era of Tin Pan Alley (1880s to ca. 1920s) tended to have lengthy verses which told the story. The chorus was a refrain that shared a central thought about the story. Songs from the Rock & Roll Era (ca.1960 onward) have largely returned to a form where the verses tell the bulk of the story.

Songs from the era of the Great American Songbook (ca. 1920-1960, especially the 1920s and 1930s) tended to have a form where the chorus tells the story and introductory verses are more optional. A common form for a chorus is AABA, but others are possible such as ABAC and ABCA. What do letters such as AABA mean?. To find the form, take a chorus and divide the number of measures by 4. The first quarter gets the letter A. Each time the melody has a distinct change it gets a new letter. If the second quarter sounds like the first, it also gets the letter A. If the melody changes only slightly, it's sometimes known as, "A prime" or A^1 or it can simply be called A as well. If the melody is distinctly different it gets a letter B. If the next quarter sounds like the first A section, then it, too, is called A. If distinctly different from A or B, then it gets the letter C.

If a chorus has AABA form, it has a first part (A), a second part which repeats or nearly repeats the first (A), a third part with a contrasting melody (B) and a fourth part which comes back to A.

If the form is ABCA, then the chorus consists of a first part (A), a contrasting second part (B), another contrasting part (C), then a return to where the chorus started (A).

Strophic form is a song structure in which all verses or stanzas of the text are sung to the same music. Many folk songs have strophic form. Songs with strophic form are not always the best for barbershop because there is so much repetition and few opportunities for contrast and musical interest. There are exceptions – Vicki Uhr's arrangement of You Are My Sunshine uses a song with strophic form.

In putting an arrangement together, the arranger must consider the various parts of a song - intro, verses, chorus(es), bridge(es), reprise, tag – and how they will fit together. For a detailed discussion of form, see the BHS manual, *Arranging Barbershop*, v.1, pp. 99, 119-123.

What Makes A Song Contestable?

A regular question in Sweet Adeline discussion groups is whether song "x" is contestable and why there isn't a list of contestable songs. Let's begin with the definitive statement on contestability, the Judging Category Description Book (JCDB), from July 2025.

The primary focus of the music category is the performance of a song that has been arranged in four-part harmony, barbershop style. The music judge evaluates the musicality of the performance, the quality of the song and arrangement, and the degree to which the performance reflects the hallmarks of the barbershop style as identified in the category description.

The music judge rewards a performance when:

The song is lyrically and melodically appropriate to the barbershop art form and has been arranged in a manner that is consistent with the characteristics of the barbershop style.

The song and arrangement are, as a minimum standard, accurately performed.

Additionally, the musical performance is sensitive to the lyrics, harmonic and rhythmic content of the arrangement, and expectations of musical delivery in the barbershop style.

The arrangement is a suitable selection for the performer, showcasing their vocal and musical capabilities and, in an ideal scenario, permits the artistic presentation of a magical experience that is aesthetically satisfying and memorable for both performer and listener. The music judge evaluates the effectiveness of the song and arrangement on a continuum of weak to strong

> *adherence to the barbershop style. (Sweet Adelines, Judging Category Description Book, July 2025, Music Category, Section IIB, p.1)*

Jana Gutenson, Music Category Specialist for Sweet Adelines, posted this on Facebook on July 8, 2025.

> *[There] is no list of "contestable" arrangements … Songs and arrangements (the dots on the page) live somewhere on the continuum from weak to strong that reflects relative adherence to the standards of the barbershop style outlined in the Music Category/JCDB.*
>
> *The success of a song/arrangement in competition is inextricably connected to the performer's ability to bring the barbershop style elements forward in performance. (In SA Music Category, we call this Suitability to the Performer.) What "scores well" for one group may in fact be a poor choice for another group.*
>
> ***The Song Assessment Tool is a list of Songs and Arrangements that performers have submitted (including songs/arrangements that are not sung in competition) to be considered Admissible. This term refers to the lack of racial issues as determined by the SAT committee. It is a great resource for song ideas but does not evaluate music for contest [emphasis added].***
>
> *Choosing music that shows your abilities and suits your style is the most important factor, and the "list" of choices is not finite!*

There are two sides to the question of "contestability". The first is, does the arrangement, along with the underlying song, meet the criteria that SAI has established to define a barbershop song? For an arrangement to be strong, the underlying song (or songs in a medley) should be strong as well. These elements are covered in the JCDB, Section II, section "Song and Arrangement", beginning on page 3.

The Song
- Form – Song has popular song form, with a verse (often 16 bars; can be shorter) and a chorus (typically four 8-bar phrases, or 32 bars). In addition the chorus will have a regular pattern such as AABA (other patterns are possible).
- Melody – "Singable, musically interesting, and has a high point that coincides with the climactic point of the lyrics … Melodies that contain a minimum of wide interval jumps are most adaptable to presentation in the barbershop style." Melodies that have wider intervals in them will be both more challenging to harmonize and more challenging to sing.
- Implied Harmony – This has to do with how much the harmonies in the original song match the Sweet Adeline chord vocabulary. Does the original song have a predominance of barbershop 7ths, barbershop 9ths, and major triads? Look back to the earlier discussion about secondary dominants and review the Dave Stevens video. Does the song have secondary dominants that move around the Circle of Fifths in the way that Stevens demonstrates? The more it does, the stronger it is for contest. The JCDB states: **"Songs that utilize only the I, IV and V chords, a pattern often found in country and pop music, lack the harmonic interest**

necessary for a strong barbershop harmony treatment [emphasis added]." This, in my experience, is the number one reason why modern pop songs do not work as contest vehicles. Put simply: Barbershop songs have barbershop 7th chords in them. Modern pop songs often do not have melodies that imply the use of barbershop 7ths and other strong barbershop chords. They are often triad based, repeating a specific pattern of chords. This does not give the harmonic variety needed for good barbershop songs. For singers wanting to know if a certain pop song is contestable, start with the chords. If the song doesn't have dominant 7th chords, it is not a strong candidate for a contestable arrangement. Even if the form is right – which it often isn't for modern day pop songs – if it doesn't have barbershop 7th chords, it's not a good candidate for contest.

- Lyrics – The JCDB states: "The lyrics of a barbershop song are like the words of a poem in that they demonstrate metric unity and an obvious rhyming structure… The combination of music and lyrics is the total message of a barbershop song, and these elements must complement each other. It is especially important that the lyrical and musical high points coincide. An arrangement that builds musically as well as lyrically to the "punchline" of the story will present a saleable, satisfying message."

The Arrangement
- Structure - From the JCDB: "The structure of the arrangement is the way the song has been "packaged" by the arranger into a barbershop style presentation. Typical composition includes an introduction, a verse, a chorus, and a tag. These sections and their sequence may vary depending on the nature of the song. The chorus is the only element that must always be present."
- Lyrics - From the JCDB: "Melodies for the added intro and tag are often composed by the arranger. Sometimes the arranger writes lyrics for these sections and sometimes key words, or phrases are extracted from the author's lyrics. Any section(s) added by the arranger should be stylistically like the song and should contain an identifiable melody line. These criteria also apply to verses or interludes composed by the arranger". It's not a requirement for intros and tags to have words from the song, only that the arranger's original material stylistically fits the song.
- Form: "Added sections will extend, but should not destroy, the musical form characteristic of the American popular song … Transitions between songs or sections of songs should also remain within the boundaries of good musical form so that the overall structure is musically valid."
- Harmonization is discussed in JCDB, section IIB beginning on p.8.
    - Voice parts: Melody in the lead part, Tenor singing the high harmony, Bass singing the low harmony often on roots or 5ths of the chord, Baritone harmonizing sometimes above and sometimes below the melody.
    - Chord vocabulary – strong songs will feature the "big three" – barbershop 7th, barbershop 9th, and major triad. See page 9 for an important addition to the SAI chord vocabulary, the half-diminished 7th: "The minor sixth/half diminished seventh chord contains the same tones as the dominant ninth chord with the root omitted. However, the dominant ninth chord functions in a different manner as it is

almost always used either directly before or immediately after the dominant seventh chord is used, thus retaining its strong major flavor in the phrase. In contrast, the minor sixth/half-diminished seventh chord, when typically used as a tension chord, will always sound more like a minor chord." Another new addition is the Augmented Triad: "The augmented triad is used primarily when the melody is on the raised fifth scale tone. Like the major seventh, this tone is also appropriately used in passing in a single-part swipe."

- Voicing – see JCDB, Section IIB, page 10-11. Strong arrangements make use of strong barbershop voicings. Three-note chords should have an appropriate double. Four-note chords should have all tones present, with no doubles and no tones omitted. The exception is the rootless dominant 9th. From p.11: "The best arrangements incorporate an interesting combination of open and closed voicings."

These are the basic criteria for the arrangement, and the song(s) on which the arrangement is based. This is not the complete text of the JCDB; be sure to read the Music Category description in its entirety.

A given song will be strong for contest to the degree that it meets the criteria of the JCDB. Some songs, and some arrangements, will be stronger than others. The same song can be strong in some ways but less strong in others. The JCDB notes: "The music judge evaluates the effectiveness of the song and arrangement on a continuum of weak to strong adherence to the barbershop style." (JCDB, Section II-B, page 1).

A note about the high point. The category states that a song should have an identifiable high point in the lyric that coincides with the high point of the music. Sometimes a song will have that; often it won't. Why? Because the songwriters of Tin Pan Alley and the Great American Songbook aren't writing for barbershoppers! When considering a contest song, the arranger must study the arrangement with an eye toward whether there is an existing high point or whether one will have to be written in. The arranger must then decide where the high point is. Depending on length, there may be more than one high point. The arranger must also decide how the high point(s) will be executed. For contest songs especially, it's typical to have an intro with a big climax, then other high points later in the song.

The song and arrangement part of the category addresses one half of the question of contestability. From the JCDB: "The best barbershop arrangements are only ink on paper until the performer brings them to life. The performer is the channel through which appropriate tempo, effective dynamics, musical phrase lines, and stylistic devices are conveyed to the listener". The performance part of the category is addressed in JCDB Section II-B, beginning on p.19, "Suitability to the Performer". Remember: the music judge is evaluating both the song and the performance. Even a very strong arrangement will not score well if the performer does not have the vocal skills to handle it.

Suitability to performer considers the fit of the musical selection presented to the skillset of the performer presenting it. In effect, this element of the music category unites the "Song and Arrangement" and "Performance" elements of the category via the performer. The music judge evaluates the relative suitability of the song/arrangement to the chorus or quartet by considering the musical capabilities of the ensemble (including vocal skills and barbershop performance skills) against the demands of the song and arrangement performed. For example, the singers must be able to execute the part lines accurately and demonstrate vocal ranges sufficient to handle the extreme highs and lows while remaining in balance (see sound category). The performer also needs to demonstrate sufficient vocal energy, support and musical stamina to handle the phrasing, dynamics and musical characterization required to convey the interpretive plan effectively. [JCDB, Section II-B, p.19]

The question of contestability has two components. One is in the hands of the arranger: the song chosen and the arranger's choices for chords and embellishments, original material, etc. The other is in the hands of the performer: what's the performer's skill level and what does the performer do well? Has the performer chosen an arrangement that shows off their style, their personality, and what they can do? If so, they have a good chance of scoring well. There is no list because there are too many arrangers, producing too many arrangements, and too many factors to consider concerning whether a chart is the right one for a given performer. Remember Jana's comment: "Choosing music that shows your abilities and suits your style is the most important factor and that "list" of choices is not finite!"

SAI singers should familiarize themselves with the current (2025) Music Category and consult a coach, music judge or an experienced arranger concerning song choices. Take questions about the specifics of the SAI Music Category to an SAI Music judge.

What does the BHS say about the Musicality Category and what the judge is looking for? The opening statement from the Musicality section of the BHS Contest & Judging Manual says this:

The Musicality category judges musicality in the barbershop style. The category assesses the musicianship demonstrated in bringing the song and arrangement to life. Further, the category assesses the performer's skill in accurately and artistically delivering music in the barbershop style. The best examples of musicality in the barbershop style will feature:

Music suited to the performer

A performer that both understands, and demonstrates intent and perspective for, the music

The key elements that define the barbershop style

*The performance elements of the Musicality category consider the **guiding principles of musicality,** such as tension/release, unity/contrast, and theme/variation, which are common across most musical styles. A satisfying and rewarding musical journey requires sensitivity to the song and arrangement. The Musicality (MUS) judge weighs both technical (harmonic integrity,*

execution) and artistic (thematic development, embellishments, delivery) elements of this journey. These elements are not assessed independently; the MUS judge considers how these elements work together and even overlap to inform the judge's holistic assessment of the musicality exhibited in the performance. (BHS Contest & Judging Manual, 2023, Musicality Category, page 5-3).

For all the details, read the C&J Manual and address questions to a BHS Musicality judge. Even in this short statement we see many of the same elements that SAI is looking for. The BHS category, like the SAI category, has a "music" element (the song and arrangement) and a "performance" element (what the performer brings to the stage). Both elements factor into the contestant's score.

In January 2025 a BHS member asked this question on Facebook:

[Is] Keepsake's "Blue Skies" contestable or not? I've heard that it's not, but also seen places that it's marked as contestable… if not, why not?

Here are two responses to that question from BHS Musicality Judges.

Jay Dougherty: MUS judge here. It is not the strongest vehicle ever due to not a whole lot of tritonal tension resolving around the circle of fifths, other than in the intro (which isn't even part of the original song), and the various non-homorhythmic sections. HOWEVER, it IS contestable and will not receive a penalty of any kind. Are there stronger barbershop vehicles out there? Most certainly. Can you sing this one without penalty and knock it out of the park and score well still? Also, yes. Hope that helps!

Note the first part of Jay's answer: This arrangement of Blue Skies is not strong harmonically because it lacks strong barbershop chords. That's what Jay refers to when he says "lack of tritonal tension". Look back to the discussion at the beginning of the book about tri-tone energy and barbershop 7ths moving around the Circle of Fifths. This, especially, is what an SAI judge would be looking for as well – strong barbershop chords, and good harmonization of those chords. Note the second half of Jay's answer – the song has weaknesses but it **is** contestable in the BHS system and it is possible to sing it and score well. SAI would probably say that weak harmonization and too much non-homorhythmic treatments mean that this is not a contestable arrangement from SAI's point of view.

Patrick McAlexander: Jay nailed it that this shouldn't receive a penalty. The elements of it that previously would've gotten you docked ("too much" non-lead melody, limited harmonic development) have either softened as barbershoppers' sensibilities have evolved (and judging has evolved as a result) or don't hit any penalizable rules.

Going beyond that: Rather than the more judge-y terminology of strong or weak vehicles, I think it's better for us as performers to consider what opportunities an arrangement gives us to show what we can do.

Opportunities that Blue Skies gives us:
- Show that we can crush chords- Show off good melody singers across all four parts
- Killer intro and tag

Opportunities that Blue Skies does not give us:

- Strong buildup of harmonic tension and release - this is absent for most of the song outside of the intro and tag

- Storytelling opportunities - the song is pretty one-note emotionally

For quartets/choruses that aren't particularly great at storytelling or complex harmony but can crush chords and have four solid melody singers (or sections) to show off, I'd say Blue Skies is actually a pretty great choice! For quartets/choruses who are more expressive but not as technically sound, Blue Skies would expose their weaknesses and limit their strengths, making it a bad choice. For groups with really strong skills both technically and artistically, I think the limitations of the chart will limit the group's possibilities more than some other charts would.

Note Patrick's comment, that for groups with the right set of skills, this arrangement of Blue Skies would be a good choice despite the harmonic weaknesses. Note the end of his comment: for a group with a high skill level both technically and artistically, this song is not a good choice **because the limitations of the arrangement won't let them show off everything they can do**. Again we see both the music element and how it affects the performance element. Note, too, Patrick's comment on how requirements have "softened". That, I think, is a key difference between the SAI and BHS systems. The SAI system would, I think, put greater weight on the lack of harmonic development, and that lack of harmonic development would figure more prominently into the score. An SAI group would have to work a lot harder to score well with this chart because it's not harmonically strong to begin with.

Jana, Jay, and Patrick are making the same basic points. For the singer, as Jana put it, "Choosing music that shows your abilities and suits your style is the most important factor". For the arranger it still starts with picking a good song, one whose underlying harmonies lend themselves to the barbershop style.

I can't say it enough: Get familiar with the category in whatever system applies for your situation and take questions to a judge or an arranger with experience arranging for a given system.

Selecting Contest Music

Some things to consider when choosing potential contest music.

- Chords
    - Song primarily in a major key
    - Chords that fall within the barbershop vocabulary. A strong song either has, or suggests the major triad, barbershop 7th and barbershop 9th – the more the better. Songs can have minor chords, but the song shouldn't have an overall feel of the minor mode.
    - Harmonic movement that follows the Circle of Fifths.
- Unless the arrangement is for a very skilled group, the melody line should fall within the range of the average lead singer. The fewer awkward skips or leaps, the better.
- Form – Does the song have a chorus with a regular pattern such as AABA? This is a requirement in the SAI music category; less so in BHS musicality category.
- Lyrics
    - Do they tell an interesting story? Is the subject matter appropriate for today's singers and audiences?
    - Are there dated lyrics which may need to be re-written? Are there stereotypical lyrics which need to be eliminated? This is especially important for Sweet Adelines, as all songs sung on the contest stage must go through the song assessment process and be rated as admissible. The arranger should research the history of the song before committing to an arrangement.
- Construction
    - Does the song have climactic moments, or will the arranger have to create them?
    - Does the verse work as an intro or will the arranger need to write an original intro?
    - In the words of David Wright, songs have episodes. Many top arrangers spend a good amount of time planning the arrangement before they ever start arranging. For more on this, see volume 2 of the BHS Arranging Manual, Part B on developing an arrangement.

Done With Dixie: Inclusion and Music Selection

Barbershop harmony takes much of its repertoire, especially contest repertoire, from the American popular song hits of the first half of the 20th century. Many songs from the era of Tin Pan Alley (1895 to roughly the 1920s) and the Great American Songbook (1920s to ca. 1960, especially the 1920s and 1930s) were written at a time in America when racial prejudice was an accepted part of American society. Blacks and other ethnic minorities were often portrayed in stereotyped ways on the covers of sheet music, such as showing Black people with exaggerated facial features or using images with blackface. Derogatory terms were sometimes used to describe non-white people. For example, the verse of Irving Berlin's song Play a Simple Melody has this line: "Your spoony rags and coony drags all make my poor heart ache." The word "coon" refers to a black person. It was, and is, a racial slur, not acceptable to use today[2]. The opening words to the original intro of the song Birth of the Blues are: "Oh, they say some darkies want to know." Darkie is another racial slur referring to a black person. You won't see that word in modern editions of Birth of the Blues. The verses to Play a Simple Melody is no longer sung and no longer included in sheet music. It was common for publishers, songwriters, or cover artists, to change or remove lyrics as the public's tastes in music changed over time, so that songs would remain marketable.

Both the Barbershop Harmony Society and Sweet Adelines have exclusion of African Americans as part of their history. While the formal exclusion of African Americans no longer exists in BHS or Sweet Adelines, repertoire has been slow to change in some respects. For too long it was common for barbershop singers to sing "Dixie" songs – songs such as Swanee, which are about longing to go back to Dixie where "mammy, mammy's waitin' for me prayin' for me down by the Swanee". Longing to get back home to Dixie was a common songwriting trope of the Tin Pan Alley era. One reason for the popularity of Dixie songs was that they were seen as the epitome of the barbershop style. From a purely musical standpoint, it's hard to disagree – the chords, harmonic movement, and singable melody lines, are all strong examples of the barbershop. However, the idealized picture of the South painted in songs like Swanee is both false and painful for African Americans who have slavery as part of their heritage.

Both Sweet Adelines and the Barbershop Harmony Society have taken, and continue to take, broad organizational steps to address diversity and inclusion within their organizations. Both organizations have recognized, and apologized for, the exclusion of African Americans from membership in previous years. The BHS' *Everyone in Harmony* initiative emphasizes diversity and inclusion, stating:

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[2] I do not mean to imply that Berlin was a racist, or that everything he wrote was racist. Berlin wrote hundreds of classic American songs that are not racially problematic.

… We must unequivocally turn away from any cultural vestiges of exclusion. We must become radically inclusive and diverse, across cultural, ethnic, racial, sexual orientation, social, economic, and generational lines. (Barbershop Harmony Society, [Everyone in Harmony Strategic Vision, July 3, 2017](), accessed on BHS website, March 25, 2023)

The BHS has written about the racism in its past in the Harmonizer. See Matthew Beals, ["Honoring the Grand Central Red Caps"](). Harmonizer, November-December 2017.

The complete run of the Harmonizer can be found in the members area of the BHS website. The BHS website also includes extensive information about the [African American roots of the barbershop style](). For details on the African American origins of barbershop, see these articles:

- 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.

In Sweet Adelines the formal exclusion of African Americans took place from 1958 to 1966. Then-Sweet Adelines International President Paula Davis acknowledged this history in her [State of the Organization Address, in October 2016.]() (Starts at 18:38). In her address, Paula recognized Valerie Clowes. Valerie's mother, Lana Clowes, was denied membership in Sweet Adelines in the 1950s because of her race. Paula presented Valerie with a plaque and a posthumous lifetime membership in Sweet Adelines for Lana Clowes. In accepting them, Valerie said:

"That messy, painful past is out there in the light of day, and it's there to teach us, not to haunt us … the [award and membership] stand for Sweet Adelines stepping forward and owning our rightful place in conversations about inclusion – not just racial inclusion but all kinds."

The Sweet Adelines website states:

Sweet Adelines International openly recognizes our racist history, a past that saw the organization ban membership for women of color from 1958 to 1966. It is an ugly truth we acknowledged at our 2016 convention, and since then we have worked — in videos and in The Pitch Pipe — to educate our members about this truth and how we are working to use the history as a catalyst for our inclusion and equity work of today. We believe it's important to be clear about what happened in the past, because racism and discrimination were unacceptable then and they are something

we will not tolerate now. (Sweet Adelines International, [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#), accessed June 25, 2023)

The Sweet Adelines Mission Statement and Guiding Principles state:

We celebrate our differences as essential to the rich harmony that unites us. As we recognize barbershop's African American origins and learn from our exclusionary past toward women of color, we reject discrimination and unwaveringly strive toward greater awareness, openness and understanding of each other. (Sweet Adelines International, [Mission Statement and Guiding Principles](#), accessed March 25 2023)

Sweet Adelines has published educational articles both in the Pitch Pipe and on the web about both the racism in the organization's past, and about Diversity Equity and Inclusion moving forward, including:

- 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
- ["Telling Our Story: A Historical Account"](#). Pitch Pipe, July 2018
- ["Building A Diversity Garden"](#). Pitch Pipe, January 2019
- Carole Prietto, ["The Song Assessment Tool: A Guide for Arrangers and Singers."](#) The Pitch Pipe, April 2025.

Sweet Adelines has established a process to educate members about the songs that they are singing, the Song Assessment Tool (SAT)

The SAT was designed to aid in achieving Sweet Adelines International's Guiding Principles of Diversity & Inclusion and Culture of Belonging, by providing ensembles with a tool to learn about the songs they are singing and to highlight inclusion aspects to consider in selecting their repertoire. The SAT is now also utilized as an official evaluation method of a song's appropriateness for public performance by groups or individuals representing Sweet Adelines International. (Song Assessment Tool Home Page, in Sweet Adelines website, members area, accessed March 25, 2023)

The [Song Assessment website](#) contains extensive resources for learning about the Tool, the SAT submission form instructions on how to fill out the form, and resources for song research. Resources for song research can be found in the Resources section of this book. Sweet Adelines has produced a series of [YouTube videos on the song assessment process](#). Songs that have been assessed are contained in the Song Evaluation Database (SED); the SED grows continuously as more songs and arrangements are evaluated. In Sweet Adelines contests, all songs sung on stage are now required to have been assessed and rated as admissible; contestants who do not follow this directive will be

disqualified. An important note about Song Assessment: The song assessment process does not have anything to do with contestability. The song assessment process addresses **admissibility** – whether or not a song has racist history, lyrics, or messages, and whether or not that song is acceptable for performance based on DEI-related factors. The song assessment process **does not address contestability –** whether a song meets the musical criteria outlined in the Judging Category description book ("Is this a barbershop song?").

Our barbershop organizations have a shared goal to make all singers feel welcome so that they can feel the joy of singing barbershop harmony. If the goal is more diversity and inclusion in our singing, then our choices in what songs we arrange should be part of the solution. Arrangers have a special responsibility to pick songs that are appropriate for all singers. Why? Because every song that we sing starts with an arranger who takes a piece of sheet music and creates an arrangement in four-part harmony, barbershop style. In a widely read Facebook post, Joey Minshall coined the hashtag #donewithdixie in writing about her own decision to no longer arrange songs about Dixie and the Old South. She wrote:

> *… It is entirely possible to choose good, strong barbershop contest (and other performance) material that doesn't require you to tell a story about pining for 'home' in a romanticized version of life in the American 'Old South' (nor require listeners to understand that story and, presumably, pine along with you); that doesn't conjure up images of Al Jolson in blackface singing about his longing for 'Dixie'; that doesn't include any hankering to get back to 'Dixieland', neither its jazz, nor its razzamatazz; that doesn't tell of yearning for mammy, her cookin' or her lovin' arms.*
>
> *Not only is it entirely possible to choose good strong barbershop contest material that doesn't celebrate 'dear old Dixie', it is entirely desirable. That is, it's entirely desirable if you embrace the vision of a future for our beloved barbershop art form in which people of colour feel completely at home, comfortable, part of, valued and welcome. (Joey Minshall, Facebook, August 17, 2017)*

I couldn't agree more, and I wish to be the change that I want to see. I encourage all arrangers to think about these issues and make informed choices about what songs you arrange for our singers. I encourage all Sweet Adeline arrangers to learn about the Song Assessment Tool and participate in the song assessment process by submitting arrangements to the Song Evaluation Database.

Copyright Basics

Copyright is a complex, often confusing subject, but it's one that arrangers must be familiar with because much of the time we are arranging songs that belong to someone else. If you want others to sing your work, you must understand how copyright works. Ignorance of copyright law is not an excuse, copyright holders take their rights seriously, and fines to infringers are steep.

Please note: The discussion below is for informational purposes only. While I have taken steps to make this section as accurate as possible, I am not an attorney, and this is not legal advice. Copyright questions concerning barbershop arrangements should be referred to a qualified attorney in your U.S. state or home country, to the Sweet Adelines International Headquarters, or the Copyright and Licensing Manager at the Barbershop Harmony Society.

The information here pertains primarily to U.S. law. Arrangers from countries outside the U.S. should consult copyright resources in their home country.

What is Copyright?

Copyright gives the owner of a copyrighted work the exclusive right to control the use of that work for a period of time. Copyright is more than the right to make copies. It is a bundle of rights which includes:
- The right to reproduce the work, either in paper copies, electronic copies, or recordings.
- The right to distribute the work.
- The right to display or perform the work publicly. A song is considered to be publicly performed whenever it is heard by the public, whether in live performance, on a recording, or on radio or television.
- The right to prepare derivative works. Arrangements in four-part harmony, barbershop style are an example of a derivative work.

Copyright works at a variety of levels: case law, national copyright legislation, and international treaties. In addition, the various rights covered by copyright are licensed in different ways. Use of songs in sound recordings, film or video, on the Internet, and at public venues such as your chapter show all have different requirements and different fee structures. To keep the discussion simple I will focus on aspects of copyright that deal with creating arrangements of copyrighted material.

For an excellent overview of how copyright works and how singers can legally acquire music, see Glenda Lloyd, "The Particulars of Purchasing Sheet Music". The Pitch Pipe, July 2024

In many respects, songs are like any other piece of property. Rights to songs can be bought, sold, or assigned to someone else. Hal Leonard and Alfred Music are two examples of companies which are both music publishers in their own right and agents who represent many other publishers for the purpose of printing and distributing sheet music and granting licenses. Tresona Music is a company which licenses music for a variety of uses, on behalf of a number of large music publishers, including both Hal Leonard and Alfred. In the United States, ASCAP, BMI, and SESAC are examples of Performing Rights Organizations – they collect and distribute licensing fees on behalf of copyright holders.

Who Owns the Copyright for a Song?

In most cases the first copyright owner is the person who wrote the song; there are special rules for songs with multiple authors. There is one exception to the first-owner rule: if someone creates a work in the course of their employment, the employer holds the copyright, not the individual.

Do I Have to Register My Arrangement with the Copyright Office?

In most countries, including the U.S. and Canada, formal registration of copyright is not required for a work to have copyright protection. For a work to have copyright protection it must meet two basic criteria:

*   Fixed in a tangible medium of expression. This can be hard copy sheet music, a recording, or a computer file.
*   Originality. The work must be the writer's original work and not copied from another source.

If you have written an original song, you automatically hold the copyright on the song, and you have the same bundle of rights that a commercial publisher has. You can arrange that song, and you hold the copyright on that arrangement, and you, as the songwriter, can control how your song and arrangement are used.

If you arrange a song in the public domain, you hold a copyright on your arrangement but not the underlying song.

If you arrange a copyrighted song, you do not have copyright on your arrangement. The copyright holder controls the rights for arrangements and other derivative works. Again, when it comes to copyrighted songs, **the arranger does not own the rights to their arrangement.**

How Long Does Copyright Last?

Copyright term varies, depending on the laws in the country where the song was written. Under current U.S. law, copyright lasts for the life of the author(s) plus 70 years. For works with more than one author, current copyright term is 70 years after the death of the last author. In the U.S., the life + 70 term only applies for works created after 2002. For older songs, copyright term in the U.S. depends on a variety of factors.

- Published or Unpublished
- Year of publication
- Whether a song was registered with the Copyright Office or not. Registration was required in the U.S. until the 1976 Copyright Act.
- Whether that registration was renewed.

Over the course of American history copyright laws have changed many times and in different ways. Copyright term in America was at one time a fixed term based on date of publication with a possible renewal term. Over time this has changed to a term extending to 70 years after the author's death. In addition to the copyright term for works created now, the law has had to deal with the backlog of works created in past years, under different sets of laws. Every time the U.S. laws changed; Congress put in transition rules to ensure that every work got the greatest amount of protection for the longest period of time. As a result, determining copyright term and public domain in the U.S. is anything but straightforward. The Cornell University guide to copyright term in the U.S. is a helpful summary of copyright term in the U.S.

What is Clearance? What is a License?

Songwriters can sell their copyright to a music publisher in return for continuing royalties; money generated from licensing is divided between the publisher and the songwriter. The owner of a copyrighted work grants permission for others to use the work, usually for a fee. Song owners make money when people pay for the right to use their songs in various ways.

The terms "permission", "clearance," and "license" mean essentially the same thing, that the copyright holder has granted permission to use the song in some way.

A license is a temporary grant of permission. The copyright owner maintains all copyright ownership and has the right to put any conditions they wish on the terms of the license. They are not obligated to grant a license, nor are they obligated to give the reason why if they turn down a request. In most cases, copyright owners set their own fees, and they can charge whatever fee they want.

Limitations that can be imposed by copyright holders include, but aren't limited to:

- Time limitations, such as one year, three years, or whatever time period they wish. Three years is common. After the time limit expires, the license is no longer valid, and the song is not legal to sing. To continue singing it, a new license must be obtained, and any fees must be paid again.
- Licensing songs for sale in some countries but not others.
- Licensing songs for a single chorus or quartet, a practice that has become more common in the barbershop world in recent years. Each chorus or quartet gets its own license and pays its own licensing fee.
- Requiring that the arranger submit a copy of the arrangement before granting clearance. This is required under the contracts that Sweet Adelines and BHS have with the publishers. Copyright owners can require changes to be made if they think the arrangement has strayed too far from the original song, either in the melody or the lyrics.
- Specifying that the arranger's name does not appear on the music, only the original composer and lyricist.
- Authorizing only certain individuals to create arrangements of a song.
- Performance limitations, such as singers not being allowed to portray characters from a movie or musical in performing the arrangement.

I have experienced all of these at one time or another.

Both you and anyone who commissions an arrangement from you need to be aware that clearance might not be granted or granted with stipulations attached. The copyright holder owns the song, and legally they also own your arrangement. It's their music and their rules. If you want different rules, your choices are:
- Write and arrange your own songs.
- Arrange songs in the public domain.

What is Public Domain?

When the copyright term for a song ends, the song enters the public domain, meaning no one owns the copyright on the original song and arrangers are free to create arrangements without having to seek permission. If you arrange a song in the public domain you do own the copyright on your arrangement, but you do not own the copyright on the underlying song.

When Does a Song Enter the Public Domain?

There's no single answer because public domain laws vary around the world. Under an international treaty called the Berne Convention, copyright must extend for the life of the author plus at least 50 years. Countries can stipulate a longer period and many countries, including the U.S., have done so. The Berne Convention has existed since 1886; the U.S. didn't sign on until 1989. When the U.S. became a signatory, the basic copyright term changed to life of the author plus a fixed number of years -- currently life plus 70 years in the U.S.

As of January 1, 2025, songs published in 1929 and earlier are public domain in the United States. The date changes every year on January 1. However, songs that are public domain in the U.S. might not be public domain outside the U.S. It's also possible for songs to be public domain outside the U.S. but still under copyright in the U.S.

- I have an arrangement of Irving Berlin's song *Everybody Step*. Because of the song's publication date (1921) *Everybody Step* is public domain in the U.S. I own the copyright on my arrangement of it and can sell it in the U.S. for whatever terms I wish. However, because Irving Berlin died in 1989, all of his works, including *Everybody Step*, are still under copyright outside the U.S. and will be for many years (2059 for countries with a term of life +70). Singers from outside the U.S. need to license *Everybody Step* in their home country in order to sing it legally.
- I have an arrangement of a song by the American composer Charles Ives called *A Christmas Carol*. Charles Ives died in 1954, so his works, including *A Christmas Carol*, are public domain in countries with a copyright term of life + 70 years. In the U.S. however, it's different. The song was published in 1935 and will be under copyright in the U.S. until 2031.

For older songs, it's important to know not only when the song was published, but the death date of the composer(s), in order to determine whether a song might be in the public domain. For more about when works go into the public domain in countries around the world, see the [Wikipedia article "Public Domain](#)"

What is Fair Use?

The [Stanford University Copyright and Fair Use](#) website notes that "Fair use is a copyright principle based on the belief that the public is entitled to freely use portions of copyrighted materials for purposes of commentary and criticism." In the U.S., Fair Use became a part of the copyright law in 1976. Section 107 of the 1976 Copyright Act states:

> *The fair use of a copyrighted work … for purposes such as criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching … scholarship, or research is not an infringement of copyright. In determining whether the use made of a work in any particular case is a fair use the factors to be considered … include: (1) the purpose and character of the use, including whether such use is of a commercial nature or is for nonprofit educational purposes (2) the nature of the copyrighted work (3) the amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole; and (4) the effect of the use upon the potential market for, or value of, the copyrighted work. (U.S. Copyright Act, 1976, quoted in Stephen Fishman, J.D., The Copyright Handbook: What Every Writer Needs to Know [Nolo Press 2017], p.249)*

Courts look at the facts of each case and how the four factors apply in that particular situation. Applying fair use in a given situation is difficult because it's subjective and can only be decided by a court of law.

For an excellent overview of what Fair Use is and is not, listen to this episode from the Scoring Notes Podcast: "The Rights Stuff". The hosts, Philip Rothman and David MacDonald, discuss copyright with a practicing attorney. The entire podcast is excellent, but the discussion of Fair Use is especially valuable. Scroll to 45:25 for the discussion on Fair Use.

What is Fair Dealing?

Fair Use is a copyright principle from U.S. Law, and it applies **only in the U.S.**

Countries in the British Commonwealth, such as the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, observe a copyright principle called Fair Dealing, which differs from Fair Use in the U.S. Fair Dealing laws vary from country to country. Below are links with introductory information about Fair Dealing in various countries. I am not an attorney; arrangers with questions concerning Fair Dealing in their home country should consult a qualified attorney in that country.

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

Other Copyright Links

- Sweden – Intellectual Property Office, Copyright – English / Swedish
- What Is the European Union Copyright Law? – from songtrust.org

How Do Arrangements Get Cleared?

- You can ask the barbershop organizations to request permission on your behalf.
    - For Sweet Adelines, the member section of the website has an online form to fill out. You'll need to know the song title, composer name(s), publisher, and how many copies are needed. The headquarters staff will contact the publisher on your behalf. If the publisher grants permission, you'll receive a form with title, composer credits, and copyright information that must go on the first page of the arrangement, along with the clearance fee. You'll send back a copy of the arrangement and any required fees. Fees can be paid through the member section of the website. The website also has a downloadable form that can be used to request a custom license for a specific group.
    - For the Barbershop Harmony Society, contact the Copyright and Licensing Manager. You'll fill out an Arrangement & Reproduction Request Form. There is no fee to initiate the process. You'll need current copyright information, the name of the group requesting the arrangement, and the number of copies you'll need. If permission is granted, you'll get paperwork giving the needed credits and copyright information for page 1 of the arrangement, and you'll pay the clearance fee. The clearance will apply for a single chorus or quartet, for a limited time.

        The contracts that BHS and SAI have with the publishers specify that any song cleared by the organization must be sold by the organization, not by individual arrangers.

        BHS and Sweet Adelines often cannot license songs for use outside of the U.S. and Canada. If you are outside of North America you'll need to work through the copyright entities in your home country to obtain clearance.

- You can contact the publisher directly and request permission. Some publishers have a place on their website where you can start the request online.

Whether you work through barbershop organizations or contact the publisher yourself, the first thing you'll need to do is determine who holds or administers the copyright for the song. The best places to start is by searching the website of the performing rights organization for your country. In the U.S. there are three: ASCAP (American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers), BMI (Broadcast Music, Inc.) and SESAC (Society of European Stage Authors and Composers. SESAC represents American artists as well as European ones). If you are outside the U.S., you'll need to search for the

performance rights organization(s) in your home country. On Wikipedia you'll find a list of [performance rights organizations around the world](). Often the websites for performing rights organizations have databases of songs that they manage.

If you plan to arrange a medley, note that every song used in a medley, no matter how large or small, must be cleared, which often means multiple publishers are involved. If a single publisher denies permission, that will invalidate the entire request. Even if permission is granted, the license fee will be costly.

For songs in the public domain, no clearance is needed. You are free to arrange and adapt the song in any way you wish. Be sure that the song you are arranging is in the public domain in your home country.

Clearing arrangements yourself is time-consuming and expensive, with no guarantees that clearance will be granted. Working through the organizations means someone else handles paperwork and logistics, but it's still time-consuming, expensive, and not guaranteed to work. There is an alternative, known as ArrangeMe**,** which has become the go-to place for both arrangers looking to get arrangements cleared and singers looking to procure music.

What is ArrangeMe?

ArrangeMe is a service run by the Hal Leonard Corporation. It is the [successor to the service known as SMP Press](). With ArrangeMe, Hal Leonard has done all the work of securing worldwide clearance for a catalog of over 5 million songs. If a song is listed in the ArrangeMe catalog, all the arranger has to do is arrange, insert the title and copyright language provided by Hal Leonard, and upload. Arrangements uploaded to the ArrangeMe platform are available for sale on both [SheetMusicPlus.com]() and [SheetMusicDirect.com](). Titles in the ArrangeMe catalog are cleared for worldwide sale, a benefit for singers outside the U.S., who no longer need to purchase an arrangement, then pay to clear it again in their home country before they can sing it. For copyrighted songs, arrangers receive a 10% commission on every sale.

ArrangeMe allows uploads of public domain and original songs as well. The commissions are higher (50%), and the composer / arranger retains all rights to their work. To be eligible for the public domain catalog, the work must be in the public domain everywhere, not just in your home country. Check the ArrangeMe website for more information.

While the ArrangeMe copyrighted songs catalog is huge, there are limitations.
- The copyrighted songs catalog doesn't have everything. Songs that are controlled by songwriter estates (Cole Porter, George Gershwin, Irving Berlin, etc.) may be incompletely represented or not represented at all. Lesser-known songs from the Great American Songbook may not be there.
- Copyright holders can and do remove songs from the ArrangeMe catalog. If that happens, all arrangements of that song are removed immediately.

- ArrangeMe's licensing terms do not allow arrangers to create exclusive arrangements. Anything sold on ArrangeMe must be available to the public. Arrangers may not put an arrangement up on ArrangeMe, then take it down when a particular group has purchased it. Groups wanting an arrangement specific to them and only them should request a custom license, either directly from the publisher or through the Copyright and Licensing Department at BHS.
- Songs cleared using ArrangeMe must be sold on the ArrangeMe website. Arrangers can provide links to the music on ArrangeMe; they cannot sell directly.

Despite the limitations, ArrangeMe is the fastest, cheapest, and easiest way to make arrangements available to singers all over the world.

In late 2024, ArrangeMe introduced a new service level called ArrangeMe Pro, which has a yearly fee. In addition to slightly higher commissions and wider distribution, ArrangeMe Pro allows arrangers to upload arrangements of medleys. Medleys can be up to 5 songs; each song in the medley must be in the ArrangeMe song database. See the ArrangeMe Pro website for more information and current pricing. If you or a group for whom you are arranging needs clearance for a song not in the ArrangeMe catalog, either SAI or BHS can facilitate a request for a custom license.

Arranger Fees: What is Allowed and What is Not

What is allowed:
- Arrangers can charge a work-for-hire fee to a group that commissions a new arrangement. Arrangers can set their own prices and can negotiate a price with the chorus or quartet.
- If a group wishes to purchase an existing arrangement of a copyrighted song, the only fee that is allowed is a per-copy fee, from which the arranger receives a small percentage.

What is not allowed:
- Arrangers cannot charge an arranger fee, a copyright fee, or any other kind of fee for any sales of arrangements of copyrighted songs after the initial commission.
- Arrangers cannot charge a fee for "unlocking" access to music on ArrangeMe. This is a violation of ArrangeMe's Terms of Use.

Preview Copies

For original songs and arrangements of public domain songs, sending previews is permissible and you can set whatever pricing and terms you wish. For arrangements of copyrighted songs, it's illegal to send out unlicensed preview copies. BHS, Sweet Adelines, Sheet Music Plus, and Sheet Music Direct offer online preview – how much you can see varies from site to site. In the ArrangeMe program, there is no way to sell a single piece of music, as Hal Leonard imposes a 10-copy minimum on purchases of choral music. Customers who are members of Sheet Music Direct's PASS Program or MuseScorePRO can view all pages of a chart online. Check the websites for details

Marketing and Promotion

Once you have arrangements available for singers to purchase, think about how to market your work and your services. Customers should be able to find and buy your music easily. A website with links to your charts is one of the best ways to do this. Many companies provide this service. Search "website hosting" on Google to find companies, prices and features. In addition, consider registering a domain name (I've registered caroleprietto.com). It's easier for customers to remember a domain name than a long web address. Some website providers offer domain name registration. Search "domain name registration" on Google to find them.

Business cards can be helpful in promoting your website when you're at barbershop events. Thanks to digital printing, full-color business cards can be produced at a low cost. There are many online outlets for designing and printing business cards. Check Google for providers.

A PayPal or Venmo account can make it easier to get paid, both by individual customers and by services like ArrangeMe. Check the websites for more information.

The best promotional tool of all is your music! Buyers like to hear a song sung, and they are more likely to buy an arrangement if it has good learning tracks. Commissioning tracks from a track maker can be expensive, but they're not always something you have to pay for out of your own pocket. If a chorus or quartet commissions an arrangement from you, there's a good chance that they'll commission tracks for it as well. Similarly, groups will often commission tracks of existing arrangements when no tracks exist. If you are just starting out in arranging, it can take time to build up a library of tracks, but it's worth it because the 4-part mixes can be used as demos. Sheet Music Plus and Sheet Music Direct limit sound clips to 30 seconds in length, but even a short clip is better than none. Remember, too, that learning tracks other than the 30-second clips allowed on ArrangeMe must be licensed by paying appropriate mechanical licensing fees.

Social media is another promotional outlet. Facebook discussion groups are a great way to connect with potential customers. Be aware that clearance obtained through ArrangeMe allows buyers to purchase sheet music, but their purchase does not include a mechanical license (sound recordings) or a synchronization license (video or Internet streaming). Those rights must be licensed separately.

Appendix: Collected Wisdom from the Best Arrangers in Barbershop

Adam Scott's 10 Mistakes Beginning Arrangers Make, and How to Avoid Them

(Facebook Barbershop Arrangers Group, June 5, 2016)

1. Arranging your favorite song first.
Why? You won't be very good at first. Remember it takes 10,000 hours to make an expert in any subject. Assuming you're painting the Sistine Chapel on your first go is a little naive if we're being honest, and many a budding arranger has quit because they couldn't find their Michelangelo right off the bat. Aim to do that chart you really want to do at least 10 charts into your craft. Most arrangers I know aren't keen on people singing their oldest pieces anyway.

2. Picking a song with no guts to it.
Duke of Earl won't shop. Like, ever. Find music of substance. Seek out songs with great harmony in them. They'll give you more options in the end.

3. Arranging a song that has a few really solid versions already is a trap
 If I Had My Way, Sweet Georgia Brown, Come Fly With Me have already been done. Many songs have The One already done. There can be a trap in arranging with someone pretty much whispering in your ear. Kind of the same thing we do when listening to a quartet sing *On The Street Where You Live* that isn't Vocal Spectrum.

4. Going out of order when filling in parts
If you sing tenor or bari avoid writing the melody and moving anywhere but bass next. The bass needs to be on predominantly roots and fifths to avoid weak sonority. Yes, I realize there are exceptions, but too many weak voicings and your music tunes poorly and your overtones are non-existent.

5. Kitchen sink arranging
It's tempting to toss every tchotchke into an arrangement. I wanna use a bell chord, this sweet key change, and… gets you into too much stuff. Like Darth Vader. Can we paint the villain any more clearly? Dressed in black, long cape, mask, deep voice, really physically tall and imposing. Simplify. Get out of the way of the song. Gradually introduce devices rather than right up front. Development is more exciting than business. Compare a quartet that sings everything at forte. Matt Swan calls this "Embellishment for embellishment's sake."   Putting every trick into one arrangement.

6. Arranging outside reality

Ask yourself "who is this for" before putting proverbial pen to paper. Even if it isn't for or to anyone at the moment, if you picked the style and even had a quartet in mind (aka, this sounds like a chart 'Round Midnight would sing, or OC Times, etc.) you'll arrange for actual ranges and make saner choices rather than relying on [software] which can obviously play anything. Dr. Val Hicks gave me a great piece of advice when I was first starting to arrange. He said he arranged for groups specifically. One, they were flattered when he handed them music because it was tailored for their ranges. Two, it was certain the group then had a song no one else was singing. Three, the arranger knows the strengths and weaknesses and personality of the group. It's the difference between a suit off the rack and a tailored, perfect fit.

7. Writing original intros/verses

I don't dwell on this, but simply put, barbershop takes popular songs and arranges them in a particular style. Sometimes we get it right and craft wonderful original materials. Often, though, these original pieces don't quite fit the song to come later, have disjunct themes, or just don't work well. A great song may be well known but it has a disadvantage when an audience has to sort through an original intro it may not be familiar with. The fact there are so few lasting original pieces shows that from the very beginning we were most comfortable singing stuff we already knew.

8. Moving too fast for, or ignoring the latent pillar harmony within the song itself

This deals with going against the harmony in the song itself. Sometimes a surprise chord, or a curveball cadence is just what the doctor ordered. Shoe-horning chords in where chords do not naturally belong gives a feeling of discomfort or uneasiness. They can feel like a mistake or hiccup to your audience.

9. Looking at either Horizontal or Vertical but not both

 Yes, the chords need to line up and work, but don't be a chords guy at the expense of your poor baritone. They're not infallible. Think through how many simple Don Gray charts you've sung through. Don has a knack for making the easy, sensible choice rather than the 'cool, flashy' choice. It's tempting to write what you want, singer be hanged, but really excellent groups keep the songs that work. Don once advised an arranging class at Apple Corps "Don't write anything you couldn't sing." This assumes you have the range, of course, but make sure you don't have any awkward leaps, unnecessarily high range, or other oddities in your individual lines.

10. Being afraid to start

This last piece of advice comes from Tony Bove. We all were novices at some point. Get over your fears. Don't be afraid to try arranging. Whether or not you arrange 1,000+ arrangements a la Walter Latzko or Ed Waesche is irrelevant. You learn so much musicianship from arranging and you will get better at it. Start with shorter songs. Start with Public Domain, 1900-1920s pieces and learn what works and what doesn't. Study the polecats with new eyes. Look at the published pieces from the BHS. Study your favorite works and find out what rings your bell. Then analyze and find out why.

More on Common Mistakes of Beginning Arrangers

(Barbershop Arrangers Facebook Group, July 16, 2018)

William Christopher: Unnecessary tags. Tags that may sound cool on their own, but don't fit the integrity of the piece. As if it sounds like the tag as written and then the song was written just as an excuse to sing the tag.

Adam Bock: This might be more of an Intermediate Mistake, but my biggest gripe is variation for its own sake. If you're going to treat the second (or whichever) iteration differently, make it very different. Direct repetition is usually far preferable to just voicing the same chord differently.

Ken Potter's 10 Tips for Taking Your Arrangements to the Next Level

(Barbershop Arrangers Facebook Group, January 15, 2019)

1. Study more theory.
2. Learn some keyboard skills to play through more complex arrangements.
3. Learn chord substitutions.
4. Arrange many versions of a melody for practice.
5. Study other arrangers charts.
6. Do some transcription, even though it can be tedious. I started with the Boston Common.
7. Do a chart and then record your own learning track of it.
8. Use your imagination.
9. Study your classical voice leading and counterpoint.
10. Send your charts to other arrangers for critical comments!

(*If you can only do one of these, work on #2 – better keyboarding leads to better arranging! – CP*)

More from Liz Garnett

("[Miscellaneous Barbershop Arranging Thoughts](#)" Helping You Harmonise, July 17, 2016.)

Voice diminished 7ths closely. The diminished 7th chord has the greatest harmonic charge of any chord in the barbershop vocabulary. With its two tritones, its sonority is rattly and edgy, and with its structure of equal intervals its narrative connotations are full of ambiguity. (Having said that, it does usually resolve where we expect it to - but it always has the potential to surprise us.). If you have all that inherent musical energy at your disposal, the last thing you want to do is deploy it in an open voicing that gives all the energy away. That would be like getting a really tightly coiled spring to power a clockwork machine, and then unwinding it before fitting it. It also makes life hard for the singers. Wide-spaced chords need placing carefully, with a certain delicacy of touch. But high-energy chords need singing with oomph and intensity. So - with a wide-voiced dim7, which do you choose? Do you

balance the chord, but sing it with the wrong expressive feel, or do you go for the narrative shape and take your chances with balance and tuning?

No wider than a 10th is what I'd suggest for diminished 7ths, and, so long as they're not too low in tessitura, within an octave usually shows them to the best effect.

When the melody goes elsewhere, keep the leads on roots and 5ths. Looking back, I see this is actually exactly the point I made in my post about arranging in tune all those years ago. It's still true, though, and I'm mentioning it again because it makes everyone's lives easier, for several reasons. First, there's the point about balance I made before (and, indeed, above). Leads are used to coming through the texture to be heard, as this is what you need from a melody. Thus, when they are not on tune duty, the music will balance best if they have the notes that, from the perspective of harmonic structure, want to be strongest in the chord.

This point has two corollaries. On the positive side, everyone else is used to tuning to the leads, so if they have a line built on the harmonically strong parts of the chord, they will act as a glue to bind the chords together. If the leads are voiced well, everybody else can sing better.

On a less positive, but realistic, side, leads aren't terribly practised at singing awkward intervals, and lines based on roots and 5ths tend to be simpler and thus less likely to expose their weaknesses than the kind of lines that baritones handle routinely. Even if you don't care about the feelings of leads, if they are feeling anxious it won't sound as good, and time spent on tricksy, fiddly bits is time wasted for everyone.

Kevin Keller on Changes in Songwriting Over Time

(Facebook, June 7, 2022)

Note: Sweeping Generalizations here.

By and large, the pre-TPA (Tin Pan Alley) and early TPA song form had the storylines in the verses (Sweet Adeline, Love Me and the World is Mine, Where the Southern Roses Grow, Nellie, You had a dream, etc., etc.). The choruses were shorter in length and the lyrical content was more of a statement or takeaway … the additional verse lyrical quality was poor given the backdrop of "did it stand the test of time?". But you have to have at least one verse to have some sort of storyline.

As songs moved into the TPA era and ultimately into the Great American Songbook (GAS) era, the form changed to having character introduction in the verse (usually one) and the storyline in the chorus. As a result, popular artists dropped the verses simply because the story was self-contained in the chorus. Our barbershop songbook is predominantly made up of these GAS songs so our experience base is mainly using these songs. The chorus is of high quality and then arrangers often

invent intros, verses, and bridges because the original material is too weak to stand up to the quality of the chorus (not my opinion, but shared by countless performers who didn't see the value either!).

As we went into the rock & roll era, the song form once again changed back to the pre-TPA/early TPA. The storyline went back into the verses. The chorus (refrain) is now more of an anthem or affirmation or statement. There are, of course, exceptions – the Beatles "Oh, Darling" uses AABA but by and large think of any popular R&R song and the chorus is repeated. This makes R&R extremely hard in the barbershop style because of the length and what it demands of the performer to keep the audience's interest.

Arrangers and performers simply have to look at the song material and figure out how to make it interesting and engaging.

Resources

Websites are current as of July 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
  - 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, Apreggios, & 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 – Window, 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

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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](#)

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]()