

CHOOSING COMPETITION MUSIC PRINCIPLES

Know your chorus:

- Abilities (See the *Difficulty Factors for Women's Barbershop* handout, written by Vicki Uhr.)
- Image (Brainstorm some show and performance songs appropriate for different age groups, images of choruses represented by the class attendees.)
- Goals (Are you introducing certain songs to help them develop specific vocal skills, a feel for backbeat delivery, ballad interpretation, or cultivating a specific image, for example?)

Know the music:

- Use the *Checklist for Music Selection* (handout included) provided by headquarters in analyzing music either on your own or with your music team.
- Use the needs for your entire chorus year—performances, contest, patriotic, sacred vs. secular and choose music suitable for multiple uses as well as specific performances.

Know the characteristics of strong contest music:

- Songs written in the first three decades of the twentieth century often work.
- A typical song suitable for barbershop has:
- 16 bar verse that sets up the song
 - 32 measure chorus
 - Typically the verse is not longer than the chorus
 - Verses do not have the musical climax or high point
 - The chorus DOES have the musical high point
 - Most common melody form: AABA
 - Another suitable melody form: ABABC

Not Suitable:

- Songs that repeat the same melody line over and over are not suitable (For example: "Down in the Valley")
- Through composed songs are not suitable.
- Songs in languages other than English, art songs, patriotic songs, religious songs, military songs

Consider the note ranges:

- The melody line easiest to sing stays within an octave plus one or two notes (ninth or a tenth).
- Melody lines with a wider range will require very high or very low chords.
- Find the songs your chorus sings best in your current repertoire. Analyze why they work and look for songs that fit that description.
- Match the demands of the music to the vocal proficiency of the sections in your chorus.

Consider the harmony:

- Three very strong chords should dominate:
 - Major triad
 - Barbershop 7th
 - Barbershop 9th
- The other eight chords are used for variety and passing tones

Is there good opportunity for dynamic variance?

- Choose a song where the contour of the melody and the chords provide a natural dynamic contrast.
- Repetitive melodies that stay within the middle range are difficult choices.
- Choose music where the arrangement makes use of open and closed voicings to achieve dynamic contrast.

Voice leading—Do the parts flow horizontally, making them more singable?

Lyrics—Are they meaningful? Do they have dramatic impact?

Vowels

- Open sounds are easier to sing and resonate—ay, ah, oh
- Closed sounds are more difficult—ih, eh, oo
- Important words in the storyline should have open vowel sounds

Creativity

- Composers supply creativity in the well-constructed song.
- Look for opportunities for syncopation and other rhythmic interest
- Be aware of your strengths. Choose the creative effects that you do well. Show off your strengths.
- Involve the audience. Know that the judges are part of that audience and want the same response.

The introduction and the tag

- A good contest barbershop song has a smashing introduction that sets the scene for the song. It's your first impression that counts!
- The lasting impression is in the dynamic tag.
- The arranger creates both and can tailor, if necessary the intro and tag to suit your chorus' needs. Use intros and tags that are in the good vocal singing range of your chorus so they can be performed well under stress.

The climax or high point—all successful contest songs have one! The best occur when the melody's high point, the harmony's most thrilling chord and the lyric's most dramatic point all occur simultaneously.

Some pointers

- Medleys can be fun but may have pitfalls and are often difficult. Too many songs in a medley make it fragmented and create difficulty in the overall form of the presentation.
- Parodies on songs other than those in the public domain must have permission of the composer and the copyright owner. Many times these permissions, if granted, do not extend to video rights. Start your permission-seeking many months before contest! These inquiries take time!
- Check the Sweet Adelines International website for music reviews and difficulty ratings of the music on the published music list.
- Contact headquarters with questions about specific arrangements.
- Seek advice from your regular coach before making your final contest selections.