

What makes for a good arrangement?

Sharon Babb 2017

1. It always starts with a song with a sing-able, memorable melody that fits well into a contralto's natural range. That melody, under the careful hand of an expert lyricist, then tells a story, reveals a character, reveals a situation, or shares an emotion.
2. It is a must that the song and arrangement have a recognizable structure and a musical line that rises and falls and a rhyme scheme that reinforces the rhythm of an up-tune or the implied cadence of a ballad. It is supreme, of course, when the high point of the lyrical line and the high point of the musical line coincide and reach the climax of the message of the piece.

The structure of a ballad, especially, but in uptunes as well, needs to follow Aristotelian principles for communication and teaching: "Tell 'em what you're going to tell 'em, tell 'em, and tell 'em what you told 'em"--thus a beginning, a middle and an end. In music it often converts to

- an intro or verse,
- a chorus that is structured with 2 somewhat repetitive A sections (one more important than the other), a bridge which differs markedly from the A structures and gives relief and variation, and a final A3 section that again states the thesis and leads to a musical climax which is then often followed by
- a tag that brings the whole message to conclusion and often repeats what was usually stated or implied by the intro.

In all, it's a way of using the impact of repetition of the hook and the build of tension and release, repetition and variation in both the musical and lyrical line.

3. A strong, melodic bass line
4. Chord progressions that are logical and make “ear” sense
5. Sing-able keys that allow for great bass range
6. Baris under lead insofar as possible
7. Memorable tags
8. An arrangement that grows in complexity. A good arrangement is like a well-told story. Set the scene simply at the beginning, then enrich the story as it moves along with swipes, echoes, bell chords, modulations.
9. Abundance of “Big 3 ringers,” especially barbershop 7th's and octave voicing at pillar chords and challenging voicings and spread chords and vocal runs at climactic moments.

STRUCTURAL ANALYSES SAMPLES

Oh, How I Miss You Tonight

The Moment I Saw Your Eyes

Time after Time

Back in the Old Routine

Ain't He Sweet

If You Love Me, Really Love Me

That's Entertainment