

SoJam 2011: Advanced Arranging

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What is a good arrangement? How does it get that way?

- “Good” in this context means *interesting and engaging*
 - Same as a good book or movie – do you care what happens next?
 - Music is communication – why do we communicate?
- *Create* something
 - What’s your reason for doing the particular song?
 - Use your arranging choices to support this
 - Song choice
 - Even a very good song or a favorite song isn’t necessarily a smart repertoire choice
 - Start with the song, not the record
 - Consider all the elements - groove, major/minor, time sig, etc.
 - The point isn’t to make it gratuitously off-the-wall but to make it yours
- Contrast (simple/complex, noise/silence, tension/release)
 - A song is an organism; it needs to breathe and to grow
 - Arc
 - Net forward motion
 - Pacing
- Make it engaging to sing! That will transfer to the audience.

The human voice is a unique instrument.

- What causes us to gravitate toward the human voice?
 - Visceral, emotional resonance – a non-fungible commodity

Knowledge is power.

- Music is a language – be fluent
 - Build your vocabulary
- Spice rack
 - Know the ingredients not only by themselves but for the effects they have on the other parts of the recipe
- Know the ensemble & write accordingly

Devil's in the details.

- Texture
 - Relationship & interplay between parts > the parts themselves
 - Pads vs. moving stuff
 - Layers!
 - Arpeggios/cascades
 - Don't write 4-part arrangements when your group has 15 people
 - Makes poor/inefficient use of your resources
 - Makes everything sound “heavier” and less energetic
 - Horizontal & vertical
 - Make BOTH directions interesting
 - Counterpoint, counterpoint, counterpoint
 - Remember: relationships & context are everything!
- Harmony
 - Arsenal of color notes
 - 12 tones → 4,094 distinct possibilities (without doubling!)
 - Polychords, modal/quartal harmonies, etc.
- Syllable choice & consonant sequences
 - What works? What doesn't? What's with all the gratuitous crazy?
 - Best vowel you're not using: å
 - Rhythmic/idiomatic imitation is more effective than (attempted) sonic imitation

Eight Simple Rules.

- **DO NOT** mistake your a cappella group for a choir, a gaffe which can manifest itself in the form of:
 - Having the sopranos too high (roughly, above D5) for long periods.
 - Writing bass parts as though they're another vocal line.
- **DO** remedy this inclination by:
 - Keeping sopranos (mostly) in belting range, and
 - Writing percussive bass lines (light on vowels) that have their own rhythm rather than being part of the “block”
- When writing for a treble group, **DO NOT** put the “bass” alto on the lowest chord tone she can sing, regardless of inversion or harmonic function.
- **DO** write her a proper bass line that stands up on its own; if it crosses other parts, goes above middle C, etc., so be it.
- **DO NOT** leave the song in the same key as the original thoughtlessly or without purpose.
- **DO** put the song in whatever key best suits the soloist & your arrangement.
- **DO NOT** write bass lines that stick to the beats and/or never leave the root, 3rd, or 5th.
- **DO** give your basses lines that move around melodically and rhythmically.

**But those are all rookie mistakes. This is Advanced Arranging.
Of what pitfall should advanced arrangers be especially wary?**

- *Losing perspective and putting your ego ahead of what's best for the song*

Listen!

Cadence (any album)

Cluster – Steps

Duwende – Remember: The Music of Michael Jackson

Firedrill! (any album)

The Hyannis Sound – 110, Route 6

M-Pact (any album)

Mosaic – Will Sing 4 Food

Overboard – Help!

Riltens Vänner (any album)

Sonos (any album)

The Swingle Singers – Ferris Wheels

Take 6 (any album)

Not A Cappella, But Listen Anyway!

Ray Charles & the Count Basie Orchestra – Ray Sings, Basie Swings

Tower of Power (any album)

There is no substitute for experience.

Almost Honest

Guitar downstrokes
Pts 3, 4, 7

Guitar upstrokes
Pts 5, 8

Musical score for 'Almost Honest' in E-flat major, 4/4 time. The score consists of ten staves. The first two staves are vocal lines with lyrics 'oh'. The next four staves are guitar parts with lyrics 'jang jang gang— gang goh' and 'gang gang jang jang'. The final two staves are bass lines with lyrics 'oh' and 'gang gang jang jang'.

Listen to the Music

Pad 1 – pts 9, 10
Pad 2 – pts 3, 5, 6

Strumming broken up into
two trios – (4, 7, 8) vs. (1, 2, 4)

Musical score for 'Listen to the Music' in E major, 4/4 time. The score consists of ten staves. The first two staves are vocal lines with lyrics 'dang— ga di di lit'. The next four staves are guitar parts with lyrics 'ding..', 'di di li dank gang— ga di di lit', 'ding..', and 'di di li dank..'. The final two staves are bass lines with lyrics 'ding..' and 'dohng..'. The score features complex strumming patterns and triplets.

Sing a Song

Advanced harmonies illustration

The image displays a musical score for the piece "Sing a Song" in G major (one sharp) and common time (C). The score is divided into two systems, each containing six staves. The first system (measures 1-4) features a vocal line with a melodic line and a bass line. The vocal line begins with a long note marked "oo" and then moves through a series of notes: G4, A4, B4, G4, F4, E4, D4. The bass line provides a rhythmic accompaniment with eighth and sixteenth notes. The second system (measures 5-8) continues the vocal line with lyrics: "ah dah dah sing an' make a way". The vocal line starts with a long note marked "oo" and then moves through a series of notes: G4, A4, B4, G4, F4, E4, D4. The bass line continues with a similar rhythmic pattern. The score is written in a standard musical notation style with a treble clef for the vocal line and a bass clef for the bass line.