

CHOOSING MUSIC

IS IT SUITABLE FOR CONTEST?

Music Category Description of suitable song and arrangement:

Melody – singable, interesting, has a musical and lyrical high point.

Form – 32-bar chorus divided into 8-bar segments with melodic pattern (AABA, ABAC, ABCA, etc.) Measures in intro, verse, tag should also be divisible by 4. Song must include chorus and tag; intro and/or verse are optional.

Medley – should still adhere to the form above. In addition, songs should be unified in theme and musical style. Implied harmony of the melody should be in the major mode. The verse or bridge may be in the minor mode, but not the chorus.

Meter – simple, symmetrical meter (4/4, 3/4, 2/4, 6/8). Frequent meter changes or asymmetrical meters are not typical of barbershop.

Harmony (must follow implied harmony of the original song):

Chord progressions are from dominant to tonic (circle of fifths)

Only eleven types of chords are used:

Major: triad, dominant 7th, dominant 9th, major 6th, major 7th, major 9th

Minor: triad, minor 6th, minor 7th

Symmetrical: augmented, diminished

Melody is carried predominantly by the lead voice; highest voice sings harmony

Lowest voice sings a strong chord component (root & 5th)

No chord tone is omitted

Major triad, dominant 7th, and dominant 9th are the predominant chords

Creative devices used appropriately:

Acceptable: swipes, echoes, bell chords

Only in very small doses: solo passages, patter, instrumental effects

Lyrics:

Congruent with melody

Metric unity

Obvious pattern of rhyme

Tell a saleable message

Lyrical high point near the end of the song

Parodies are acceptable (ask copyright holder for permission)

Unacceptable lyrics: patriotic, religious, foreign, racist content or history

IF THERE'S ANY DOUBT, CHECK WITH A MUSIC JUDGE!

Hallmarks of a song/arrangement that will be relatively easy for the average singer:

- A melody line with limited interval sizes and an overall range of a 10th or less
- Limited tempo requirements
- No key changes
- A strong but simple structure
- Limited embellishments
- A preponderance of the “big three” chords (major triad, dominant 7th and dominant 9th)
- Part lines well within the singers’ comfort zones
- Part lines that remain on unaltered tones of the scale (limited number of accidentals)
- A frequent return to the major triad of the keynote

SONG & ARRANGEMENT RED FLAGS THAT AFFECT ALL FOUR CATEGORIES:

- Part lines outside any part's comfortable range
- Part lines that fall mainly in the register break
- Jumpy part lines
- Rangy part lines
- Melody switch to other parts
- Odd intervals
- Abundance of accidentals
- All four parts on an octave (no chord)
- Lots of chord changes
- Wide spread chords (2-octave spread)
- Octave + gap between adjacent parts
- Chromatic runs
- Fast tempo
- Rhythm demands (backbeat or odd rhythms)
- Not enough natural breathing places
- Abundance of hard consonant sounds
- Abundance of short vowels
- Wordy passages
- Baritone above lead for extended passages
- Baritone & lead crossing back & forth repeatedly
- Cross relationships (one voice part has to find a note just ½ step away from the note another voice part just sang)
- Cross-part jumps (one voice part has to find a note that's higher or lower than the note just sung by the adjacent voice part)
- Parallel motion (all 4 voice parts moving the same direction at the same time)
- Tag "hangers" in the voice part's register break
- Tag "hangers" beyond the comfort zone for breath support
- Music that is "over-arranged" in general--too many embellishments, chord changes, arrangement devices that call attention to the arrangement and the arranger and not to the song and the singer
- Music that was originally arranged for men's voices and has simply been transposed to a different key

These issues will impact:
Demonstration of vocal skills (all categories)
Unity (all categories)
Note accuracy (So, Mu)
Balance (So)
Tuning (So, Mu)
Execution of tempo (Mu, Ex)
Execution of vowels, consonants, diphthongs
(Ex)
Creation of overtones (So)
Comfort level on stage (Sh)

***"Your entire competition experience flows from
the music you select." Marge Bailey***

THERE IS NO "PERFECT SONG" - EVERY SONG WILL CONTAIN ONE OR MORE OF THE ISSUES LISTED ABOVE. The more of them you find in a song, the more difficult it will be to perform accurately.

UNLESS YOUR GROUP HAS BEEN SCORING AT A HIGH B LEVEL OR ABOVE, KEEP YOUR CONTEST MATERIAL WELL WITHIN YOUR COMFORT ZONE!