Why Arrange? Want vs. Need

- Want – “I can visualize this song being successful in an alternative setting”
  - Are you adding to this and/or making it better?
  - If it’s worse than the original, what does this accomplish?
  - Artistic focus/project

- Need – “My ensemble has specific requirements to make this song work”
  - Is this helping my choir?
  - Whether it’s artistically “better” or not is much less relevant, as this is fulfilling a need.
  - Practical focus/project

Why Else?

- To improve at arranging and composition
- To explore a new musical style
- To cross or combine musical genres
- To honor another composer/arranger and/or learn their tendencies

Picking A Song – Some Considerations

- Can you “hear” a song in an alternate setting?
- Is it musically, stylistically, and contextually appropriate for your ensemble?
- Has someone already done this? Research and listening required.
- Who owns the copyright? (Hint: It’s probably Hal Leonard)
- Using your knowledge of vocal music, can it be performed well by this instrument? Often this is a matter of preference or taste.

Different Styles of Arranging

- Notational/Written
- Improvisational/Circle-Singing
- Recording/Looping/Layering
- Gray Areas:
  - Adaptation (Online Example #1)
  - Transcription (Online Example #2)
Foundational Changes & Easy Arranging Starters

- **Style/Feel**
  - Primarily an Aesthetic Change (Postmodern Jukebox)
  - Easy to try – Record different “grooves” to test quickly
  - Careful of creating a parody

- **Major to minor, minor to Major, and Modal Writing**
  - Sometimes this actually supports the lyric better
  - Modes often work really well with pedal tones and drones

- **Time Signature**
  - Odd meters (5/8, 7/8, etc.) are cool
  - A great exercise to adapt melodic content accounting for appropriate lyric setting
  - (Online Example #3)

  - Vocal Exercise

  - Autumn in New York, why does it seem so inviting?

  - Autumn in New York, it spells the thrill of first-nighting

- **Tempo**
  - Faster = Simplify

- **Form**
  - It’s okay to add, subtract, and re-arrange
  - Not all sections of form need to be the same

- **Instrumentation/Density**
  - Re-voice for need OR aesthetic appeal (sometimes requires change of key)
  - Density is often overdone – less is more
  - Do not fear unison and 2-part writing

- **Words/Syllables**
  - No words? Write some! (Online Example #4)
  - Syllables are a vocalist’s tool for articulation – use effectively
    - Used to enhance melody, not detract from it
  - (Online Example #5)
  - Again, careful of parody
• Re-harmonization
  o Change the underlying chord so the melody note has a different function
    • Ex: If the melody note is the 3rd, change chord so it functions as the 5th.
  o Trial and error is crucial – don’t settle too early

```
\[\text{Oh, Shenan-doah, I long to hear you a-way you rol-lin’ riv-er Oh,}
\text{C mi} \quad \text{B} \quad \text{E} \quad \text{G mi}
\]
```

5 \[\text{Shenan-doah, I long to hear you ‘way, I’m bound a-way, ‘cross the}
\text{C mi} \quad \text{B} \quad \text{E}
\]
9 \[\text{wide Mis sour - i.}
\]

Effective Starter “Tricks”

• Use pedal tones/drones
  o Pedal tones create stability, simplicity, and naturally enhance melodic content
  o 5ths in men add further stability, or shift it to women for men’s melody
  o Choral exercise – full choir drone, shifting to closest correct note on chord changes

• Ostinatos = Motor that drives an arrangement
  o Similar to style/feel in their function

• Write More Unisons
  o Incredibly effective for teaching blend, balance, style, and listening
  o Allows the ensemble to feel successful right away

• 2-part Writing
  o Prioritize using 3rd and 6th intervals combined with good voice leading
  o Study Phil Mattson – he’s the master

• Write FOR the lyrics, not against them

• Pass the melody around
  o (Online Example #6 & #7)

• Have a section or sections drop out for effect
Process – Different Approaches

Everyone arranges a little differently based on natural preference. Here are a few considerations as you figure out your own:

• Arranging from a lead sheet
  o (Online Examples #8 & #9)

• 7th Chord Voicings
  o Closed
  o Drop 2
  o Open/Spread

13

(OPEN/SPREAD VOICINGS)
• Accompanied vs. Un-accompanied
  o Accompanied works = Voices are functioning as a melodic “section”
    ▪ Often primarily homorhythmic
    ▪ Accompaniment is able to supply harmony, rhythm, counter-melody, and motor.
      Voices are the featured instrument.
  o Un-accompanied works = Voices fulfill ALL roles
    ▪ Melody, harmony, rhythm, counter-melody, motor
    ▪ Often polyrhythmic
    ▪ Use of vocal bass, vocal percussion common
    ▪ (Online Example #10)

• Writing Vertically vs. Horizontally
  o Vertical = Great voice leading, good for homorhythmic
  o Horizontal = Very “Sing-able” lines, good for polyrhythmic
  o Often influenced by instrumental background

• Finding your writing space and tools
  o Where? With what? When?

• Record yourself
  o Raw ideas, scratch tracks, etc.
  o Allows you to experience externally vs. internally
  o Sibelius/Finale playback is okay, but it’s not vocal
General Words of Wisdom

• Start your arrangement at the first part you can “hear”
  o Hint: This is often not the beginning

• Be ready to set aside several sections/revisions of your work
  o Do not throw away or delete – You will probably miss it!

• Good piano voicings are generally good vocal, horn, and string voicings
  o Start practicing piano!

• Consciously direct your audience’s focus
  o In any given section, which part do you believe is the most important? The least important? Does your arrangement emphasize what you want it to emphasize?
  o Hint: If it doesn’t, this almost always involves simplifying something too dense
  o Remember: Your audience is hearing this for the first time

• Prioritize good voice leading unless going for a specific effect
  o Counterpoint rules, while helpful, are not universally applicable in 2016. You WILL get parallel 5ths. Everyone is doing it!

• Be aware of the effective “life span” of each arranging idea
  o i.e. How long can the listener enjoy it before they’re bored or tired of it?
  o Sometimes great ideas are under-utilized, others are exhausting
    ▪ Consider audience’s focus, complexity, and context
  o If you have a great/interesting idea, bring it back (recall)
  o Avoid the “kitchen sink” arrangement – too many ideas confuses the listener (ie. too many colors mixed together end up brown)

• Golden Arranging Rule – 50% Familiar, 50% Surprise!

• Sing your work often as you are writing

• Seek out the feedback of someone you respect and/or study successful works

• Work with a pianist on written accompaniments

• Arranging is hard. Get used to it!
“Do or do not. There is no try.”

Questions?

Additional Resources
- “A Cappella Arranging” by Dylan Bell & Deke Sharon
- “Arranging for Large Jazz Ensemble” by Ken Pullig & Dick Lowell
- “Barbershop Arranging Manual” by the Barbershop Harmony Society
- “Choral Arranging” by Hawley Ades
- “Circlesongs: The Method” by Roger Treece
- “The Complete Guide to Teaching Vocal Jazz” by Steve Zegree
- “Jazz Arranging Techniques” by Gary Lindsay
- “Modern Jazz Voicings” by Ken Pullig & Ted Pease
- “Scatability” iPhone App by Michele Weir
- “The Vocal Jazz Ensemble” by Paris Rutherford
- http://www.acdacal.org/repertoire-standards/jazz-choirs/