

Music Selection Guidance

Know your singers' skills and choose music to showcase them! For contest, show judges what you can do well, not what you can almost do. Begin with an honest assessment of their strengths and limitations:

1. What are the good-sounding ranges for your singers? Here are average ranges:
Lead: A below middle C to C above middle C
Bass: Eb below middle C to F/G above middle C
Bari: G below middle C to Bb above middle C
Tenor: E above middle C to F/G an octave and a half above middle C
2. What is their breath capacity?
3. What are their best and worst vowels?
4. How well do they handle jumpy part lines, odd intervals, and wordy passages?
5. What are their rhythmic skills (do they move well to downbeat or backbeat)?

Song and arrangement considerations –

1. Does the song have a sing-able, memorable melody that fits well into the lead range and has intervals that can be delivered well under the pressures of competition?
2. Does the form of the song have a recognizable structure (such as AABA, ABAC) and a musical line that rises and falls? Do the high points of the lyrics and musical lines coincide?
3. Does the form of the arrangement support a musical and lyrical storyline, beginning with an intro and/or verse, building the main theme/chorus with repetition and variation, and bringing the message to conclusion with a satisfying musical coda?
4. If the arrangement is a medley, do the songs have a common theme (musically or lyrically) with logical transitions to and from one another?
5. Does your group have the energy to maintain good vocal production throughout their performance of this arrangement?

More musical considerations –

1. The arrangement should be in a key your group can sing in well. Some keys that work well for our singers are Ab, Bb, Eb and F. Bass range should realistically support the melody.
2. Chord voicings should be strong and appropriate for women's voices, with baritone below the lead and with bass on strong chord components as much as possible. Spread voicings, difficult to tune and balance, should be kept to a minimum.

3. There should be a preponderance of the 'big 3 chords' (triads, dominant 7, and major 9). A prevalence of secondary chords (other than the big 3) will be more difficult to tune and ring.
4. Chords should progress logically and enhance the lyric. Key changes will add to the difficulty of the arrangement but will be simpler when one voice part retains a note through the progression.
5. Lyrics should be interesting and easy to articulate and are strongest (sound-wise) with open vowels on target chords.
6. The arrangement should build in complexity (within singer capabilities), setting the scene at the outset, enriching the story as it moves along with creative embellishments, and culminating in a memorable tag.
7. Creative embellishments should enhance the performance without detracting from the song itself.
8. The arrangement should allow for breathing in natural places.

Problem areas (leading to difficult level or shortcomings of the material) –

Chromatic part lines

An abundance of accidentals

Tricky rhythms

Monotonous melody or part lines

A melody that includes wide interval jumps

Melody transfers between parts

Implied harmonies that do not lend themselves to barbershop

Many lead-ins or pick-ups

Wordy passages with an abundance of hard consonants

Patter (non-homophonic presentation) that weakens unity

Consistent illogical intervals in any part

Over-arranged material

Resources:

- 1) 'Music Selection Made Easy,' by Jan Meyer. Great article in April 2017 Pitch Pipe.
(<https://reader.mediawiremobile.com/SweetAdelines/issues/200669/viewer?page=11>)
- 2) 'The Judging Category Description Booklet' (JCDB) provides in depth information about all aspects of the four categories. To obtain a copy, search the SAI online store.

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