2013-04-24

Incorporating Popular Music Into The Choral Classroom

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UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

INCORPORATING POPULAR MUSIC INTO THE CHORAL CLASSROOM

By

Alec Schumacker

A DOCTORAL ESSAY

Submitted to the Faculty
of the University of Miami
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

Coral Gables, Florida

May 2013
A doctoral essay submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

INCORPORATING POPULAR MUSIC INTO THE CHORAL CLASSROOM

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This goal of this document is to empower teachers to arrange and perform popular music with choral ensembles. A detailed step-by-step guide for how to arrange popular music for choirs of various ability levels forms the bulk of the essay. Other topics include pedagogical arguments for the inclusion of popular music in a choral curriculum, rehearsal techniques for popular-style music, practical considerations when performing and programming popular music, and legal implications and issues.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIST OF FIGURES</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIST OF TABLES</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER

1 INTRODUCTION AND METHODS ........................................................................ 1
   Review of Related Literature ................................................................... 5
   Conclusion .............................................................................................. 13

2 THE PEDAGOGICAL BENEFITS OF INCLUDING POPULAR MUSIC IN THE CHORAL CLASSROOM ........................................ 14
   The Standards ......................................................................................... 19
   Conclusion .............................................................................................. 27

3 HOW TO ARRANGE POPULAR MUSIC FOR CHOIR ........................................ 28
   Conductor/Arranger: Producing One’s Own Arrangements ....................... 28
   Selecting Appropriate Repertoire .......................................................... 31
   The Intellectual Side of Arranging ......................................................... 40
   Producing the Arrangement ..................................................................... 47
   Creative Techniques ................................................................................. 66
   Conclusion .............................................................................................. 106

4 REHEARSAL TECHNIQUES FOR POPULAR MUSIC ........................................ 107
   Standard Classical Teaching Techniques Applied to Popular Music ........ 107
   Non-Traditional Techniques Specifically for Popular Music ................. 123
   Conclusion .............................................................................................. 138

5 MAKING IT HAPPEN: PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS .................................. 140
   Creative Control in the Classroom: Who Chooses the Music? .................. 140
   Two Approaches: Everyone-Sing-Everything vs. the Pop Ensemble .......... 142
   Cultivating and Coaching Student Arrangers .......................................... 146
   Conclusion .............................................................................................. 150

6 COPYRIGHT LAW AND THE PERFORMANCE OF POPULAR MUSIC .......... 151
   Copyright Law in Relation to Choral Music ............................................ 151
   The Performance Right .......................................................................... 153
   The Compulsory Mechanical License ..................................................... 154
   Summary: Legal Allowances and Restraints on the Conductor ................. 156

7 CONCLUSION AND ADVOCACY ..................................................................... 158
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Studio and Live Versions of Solo from “The Remedy (I Won’t Worry)”</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Tone Exercise “Sliders” for Evaluating Music</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Solo Ranges of the Top Ten on Billboard Hot 100, July, 2012</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Cascades in a Vocal Arrangement</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Hypothetical Example of a Transcription Method Arrangement by Author</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Hypothetical Example of a Creative Method Arrangement by Author</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Typical Form of a Popular Song</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>Comparison of Sonata Allegro Form and Popular Music Form</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>Formal Analysis of “Save Tonight”</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>Form Chart with Harmonic Progressions</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>Comparison of Tenor Part in Transcription Method and Creative Method</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>Form Chart with Chord Voicings</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>Good and Bad “Repeat Reset”</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>Typical Popular Song Bass Part</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>Bass Part of Figure 3.4</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>First Four and a Half Bars of “Save Tonight” Solo</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>Common Group Rhythmic Patterns</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>Form Chart with Group Rhythmic Patterns</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>Division of Group Rhythmic Pattern Among Four Parts</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>Another Division of Group Rhythmic Pattern Among Four Parts</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>Comparison of First Tenor Parts</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.20. “Save Tonight” Verse Chord Voicing with Added Suspensions................. 67
3.21. “Save Tonight” Group Rhythmic Pattern Division with Added Suspension 68
3.22. Nonchord Tone Additions to Figure 3.20............................................. 69
3.23. Nonchord Tones Applied to Group Rhythmic Pattern from Figure 3.17 ..... 69
3.24. Verse and Chorus Chord Voicings of “Save Tonight”......................... 70
3.25. Passing Tones in Bass with I6 Chord ................................................. 71
3.26. Alternative Inversions for Chorus of “Save Tonight”......................... 71
3.27. Extended Chords Achieved Through Power Chord I......................... 72
3.28. Adding Extended Chords to the Chord Voicing of “Save Tonight”........ 73
3.29. Comparison of Appoggiatura and Extended Chord in Baritone Part........ 74
3.30. Adding a Minor Seventh Chord to the Verse Pattern......................... 74
3.31. First Two and a Half Bars of O Nata Lux by Morten Lauridsen........... 75
3.32. Cascades added to a Progression ....................................................... 77
3.33. Cascade-Suspension Hybrid ............................................................. 78
3.34. Cascade as Textural Shift................................................................. 79
3.35. Texture Variation from First Verse to Second Verse.......................... 81
3.36. Register Shift to Create Textural Variety.......................................... 82
3.37. Adding Dynamics to the Second Verse............................................. 83
3.38. Adding Dynamics to Active Verse Group Rhythmic Pattern................. 84
3.39. Form Chart of “Save Tonight” with Dynamics and Vowels................ 88
3.40. Vowel Change to Achieve Crescendo in Third Verse.......................... 88
3.41. Last Two Measures – “Momentary Choir” Technique.......................... 90
3.42. Lyric Doubling in Second Tenor ....................................................... 92
3.43. Tempo Changes in Bridge and Third Verse of “Save Tonight”................. 93
3.44. Shortened Bridge Section and Third Verse Beginning.......................... 95
3.45. Final Chorus of “Save Tonight” with “Here’s to the Night” Splice............. 98
3.46. Hypothetical Splicing of a Classical Piece into a Popular Arrangement..... 99
3.47. Gender Drop-Out as Climactic Effect.............................................. 102
3.48. Open and Closed Chord Possibilities in Mixed Voicing......................... 103
3.49. Dividing a Bass Line for Women’s Choir........................................ 105
4.1. Solfege Training Exercise...................................................................... 109
4.2. Chord Voicing from Verse and Chorus of “Save Tonight”....................... 110
4.3. Common Progression in A Dorian....................................................... 112
4.4. A Dorian Progression with G Major Solfege....................................... 113
4.5. Baritone Line from “Save Tonight”................................................... 115
4.6. Warm-Up with Sixteenth Note Subdivision......................................... 115
4.7. Subsequent Erasing Applied to Figure 4.6........................................... 116
4.8. Subsequent Ties Applied to Figure 4.6............................................... 117
4.9. Erasing and Tie-ing to Attain Rhythm from Figure 3.5............................ 118
4.10. Excerpt from Judging Form of ICCA................................................ 124
4.11. Excerpt from FVA Judging Rubric..................................................... 124
4.12. Blend Exercise on Cascade............................................................... 125
4.13. Blend Exercise on Cascade for SSAA or TTBB................................... 126
4.14. Blend Exercise on Cascade with Seventh and Ninth Chords............... 127
4.15. “Friendship and Love” Barbershop Tag............................................ 129
4.16. Boots and Cats Vocal Percussion Method......................................... 134
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.17. Vocal Percussion on Group Rhythmic Pattern of “Save Tonight”</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.18. Hypothetical Group Rhythm Pattern</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.19. Two Reductions of Hypothetical Group Rhythmic Pattern</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.20. Group Rhythmic Pattern Divided Between Two Vocal Percussionists</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.21. Visual Performance Section of ICCA Judging Form</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table Number</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Growth of <em>A Cappella</em> Groups at Universities Over the Last Century</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Comparison of <em>The Goo Goo Dolls</em> Key Centers</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Common Elements that Do Not Work Well in an Arrangement</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Common Elements that Work Well in an Arrangement</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Formal Elements in Popular Music</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>IPA English Vowel Chart with Volume Indications</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Popular Songs in Modes</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION AND METHODS

An explosion of interest in popular-style singing is occurring across the United States. For the past eight consecutive years, Amican Idol was the most watched show on television.¹ New programs like *Glee* and *The Sing-Off* garner critical success by focusing on choral-style arrangements of popular songs. Additionally, collegiate a cappella groups are increasing in popularity across the nation. Joshua Duchan, a post doctoral fellow at Kalamazoo College, writes in his dissertation on collegiate a cappella groups, “The genre of amateur vocal music these groups represent has grown prodigiously in numbers and prominence over the past twenty-five years or so. There are now about a thousand collegiate a cappella groups in the United States…”²

By including popular music in secondary and collegiate choral curriculums, teachers can and should capitalize on this upsurge of interest. Dan Isbell, a professor of music education at Ithaca College, writes,

Research indicates that public school music education reaches a fairly homogenous student population (Stewart, 1991). Reasons given by students for not participating in school music programs have included lack of interest, poor repertory and content choices by school ensemble directors, insufficient connection with local ethnicities and cultures, and a lack of relevance of the music curriculum (Hope, 2004). The question of whether including popular music in the

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public school curriculum would reduce or eliminate any of these reasons for dropping out or not choosing to enroll in school music requires further investigation.³

Including popular music in a choral curriculum could counteract some of these problems, and may increase enrollment in choirs.

Recruitment is not the only tangible benefit of the inclusion of popular music in a choral curriculum. Perhaps the most important of these is its pedagogical value. In the 1970’s, The National Association for Music Education (NAfME) devised nine standards to help teachers achieve excellence in music education. They are:

1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
2. Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
3. Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments.
4. Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines.
5. Reading and notating music.
6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.
7. Evaluating music and music performances.
8. Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts.
9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture.⁴

It is not difficult to include many of these standards in a typical choral rehearsal, particularly numbers one, two, five, and six. However, incorporating other standards into a classical-only choral setting provides more of a challenge. A typical rehearsal of any

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³Dan Isbell, "Popular Music and the Public School Music Curriculum," Update : Applications of Research in Music Education 26, no. 1 (-01-01, 2007), 53.
piece from the western canon of choral music infrequently calls for improvisation (three), composing or arranging completed by students (four), evaluating music and music performances (seven), and understanding a piece’s relation to other arts or culture (eight and nine). The aforementioned standards are easily achieved through the programming of popular music. Improvisation is a required element of many subgenres of popular music (three). Popular music affords an opportunity to have students experiment with arranging (four), offers a context for evaluating performances and recordings with which many students are already familiar (seven), and is easily relatable to other arts and present-day culture (eight and nine). By including popular music in a choral setting, teachers can provide what the NAfME considers a more complete educational experience for their students.

Furthermore, the inclusion of popular music also offers a chance to work on concepts of aural skills and music theory within a rehearsal. Since American top-40 style music is mostly diatonic, rehearsal of an arrangement of a popular piece presents an opportunity to focus on solfège training in a rehearsal. Popular music also contains many complex rhythms and rhythmic patterns that are not typically found in Baroque, Classical, and Romantic music.

Perhaps the most important reason to include popular music in a choral setting is to help students relate their in-school singing experience to the music they hear outside of class. Isbell writes, “Those in attendance [at a 1967 Music Educators National Conference] believed that there was a growing disconnect between adult music experiences and those of public school music programs. Attendees at the symposium wanted to find ways to close the gap between school music experiences and the
experiences students had with music outside of school.\footnote{Isbell, \textit{Popular Music and the Public School Music Curriculum}, 53.} Performing popular music in choir is one way to bridge this gap.

The inclusion of popular music in a choral classroom has many benefits. Unfortunately, there are only a few academic resources for teachers wishing to incorporate this style of music in their curriculums. This study seeks to remedy that situation by providing a pragmatic guide to including popular music in a choral setting. In the course of this discussion, I will address the following:

1. The pedagogical benefits of incorporating popular music into the choral curriculum
2. How to arrange popular music for choirs of varying ability
3. Successful rehearsal techniques for popular music
4. Practical considerations in the formation of pop ensembles
5. Legal issues involved in the performance of popular music

Many academic resources have focused only on the vocal aspects of popular music, and have neglected the accompanying theoretical and pedagogical issues. A large amount of research has been conducted from the point of view of the voice teacher, focusing on how to coach a solo singer in a popular style or how to work with a student who is accustomed to singing in a popular style. Much research has been conducted on how a classically-trained vocalist may effectively teach a student how to sing in a musical theater style, which is not unlike the style of singing found in popular music. These approaches are not without merit; popular music differs from western Classical music stylistically, and teaching in this style requires a specialized set of skills. However, a comparatively small
amount of scholarly work has been presented from the point of view of the choral teacher.

Furthermore, the present catalog of quality pop arrangements is quite small when compared with the vast repertory of easily accessible classical choral works. By providing a realistic guide on how to arrange popular music, my hope is that teachers will be able to successfully produce repertoire for their own students’ tastes and ability levels. I will address these issues in more detail in my literature review to follow.

**Review of Related Literature**

As previously mentioned, a fair amount of scholarly work already exists on the subject of singing popular music and incorporating popular music into a general music education curriculum. However, there is not much research that focuses on the incorporation of popular music into a choral classroom, with particular attention paid to practical considerations pertaining to a choral situation. This review divides the study of existing scholarly work on the subject into four groups: 1) works that relate to singing in a popular style; 2) works that relate to pedagogical issues; 3) works that relate to arranging, theoretical, and technological knowledge; and 4) resources for the teacher.

**Scholarly Work that Relates to Singing in a Popular Style**

There is a large amount of research on singing in a popular style. However, most of it is from the position of a voice teacher working with an individual student. Solo singing is quite different from choral singing in classical music as well as in popular
music, and I will address this dichotomy in my essay. However, there are several useful articles that provide basic guides to performing authentically in a popular style.

Julie Balog’s article, “A Guide to Evaluating Musical Theater Singing for the Classical Teacher,” provides good background material on vocal issues that arise when coaching a classically-trained singer in a musical-theater style.\(^6\) Although the article is geared toward the individual voice teacher and not the choral director, much of the stylistic information is the same and will be useful in my discussion of how to create a healthy model of popular singing.

Robert Edwin, the associate editor of the National Association of Teachers of Singing \textit{Journal of Singing}, has written many articles that advocate for the inclusion of popular music, offer vocal and stylistic advice to voice and choir teachers, and offer techniques for rehearsing popular music. Among them, “Are we the National Association of Teachers of Classical Singing?,”\(^7\) “From Classical to Pop: A Case Study,”\(^8\) and “Popular Song and Music Teacher: Cross Training for the Voice”\(^9\) provide excellent discussions of singing in a popular style. They are particularly helpful in addressing issues that arise when working with students familiar with classical style singing.

\textit{The Versatile Vocalist}\(^10\) and \textit{The Professional Vocalist},\(^11\) both by Rachel Lebon, professor of jazz vocal performance at the University of Miami, offer guides to

\(^{8}\) Robert Edwin, "From Classical to Pop: A Case Study," \textit{Journal of Singing} 56, no. 3 (01-01, 2000), 71.
\(^{10}\) Rachel L. Lebon, \textit{The Versatile Vocalist} : (Lanham, Md. : Scarecrow Press), 103.
\(^{11}\) Rachel L. Lebon, \textit{The Professional Vocalist} : (Lanham, Md. : Scarecrow Press), 146.
performing in multiple vocal styles with ease and authenticity. *The Versatile Vocalist* contains a large section that discusses the effects of recording technology and microphones on the voice and the resulting differences in vocal approaches. These books will figure into my discussion of how to create a choral culture in which singing in different styles is encouraged and successfully accomplished.

**Scholarly Work that Relates to Arranging, Theoretical, and Technological Knowledge**

There is little research related to the arranging of popular music, which I perceive to be the greatest problem facing conductors who would like to perform popular music—a general lack of quality arrangements and the scarcity of resources that discuss how to arrange it. There are, however, several scholarly articles that address issues of theoretical and technological knowledge.

Hofstra University associate professor of music Cindy Bell has written a number of articles on the theoretical and pedagogical aspects of including popular music in a music curriculum. Her article, “Harmonizing and Improvising in the Choral Rehearsal: A Sequential Approach,” offers a skillfully crafted week-by-week rehearsal plan to include improvisation within a choral rehearsal.¹² I will draw on this article in my discussion of effective rehearsal techniques.

A very worthwhile resource is the collection of essays *Pop Culture Pedagogy in the Music Classroom: Teaching Tools from American Idol to YouTube* by assistant

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professor of music theory at McGill University Nicole Biamonte.\textsuperscript{13} This book contains helpful information on three large areas that pertain to my topic: incorporation of technology in the assistance of teaching popular music, the use of popular music to teach music theory concepts, and using popular music as a gateway to discussing larger cultural issues. The appendixes are also useful, as they contain lists of popular songs coupled with theoretical principles that each song is best suited to teach. The essays in this book will be an invaluable resource in my essay.

The previously mentioned Joshua Duncan’s article “Collegiate A Cappella: Emulation and Originality” provides a fascinating discussion on the notion of creativity in recreation—a debate that I will address at length in my section on how to arrange popular music for choir.\textsuperscript{14} However, the article largely addresses a cappella groups that are student-run, and therefore not in a pedagogical situation. When the issue of pop-choral music is addressed within a classroom, different factors contribute to the debate between originality and emulation than in a purely student-led group. I plan to address these issues in my discussion of this issue.

Robert Edwin’s article “Working With Mike” provides a concise and helpful discussion of basic microphone techniques when working with a vocal soloist.\textsuperscript{15} The information is basic enough to be helpful to teachers who are unfamiliar with microphones, and I will address it in my discussion of popular music technology.

\textsuperscript{13} Nicole Biamonte, \textit{Pop-Culture Pedagogy in the Music Classroom}, ed. Nicole Biamonte (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 344.

\textsuperscript{14} Joshua Duchan, "Collegiate A Cappella: Emulation and Originality," \textit{American Music (Champaign, Ill.)} 25, no. 4 (-01-01, 2007), 477.

\textsuperscript{15} Robert Edwin, "Working with 'Mike,'" \textit{Journal of Singing} 58, no. 2 (-11-01, 2001), 171.
Scholarly Work that Relates to Pedagogical and Rehearsal Issues

One of the biggest academic names in support of performing popular music in choir was Gene Grier, a former university professor and director of the Academy of Popular Vocal Arts at Oakland University. His article, “Choral Resources: A Heritage of Popular Styles,” contains a wealth of information about practical issues concerning popular music in a choral setting.\(^\text{16}\) His discussion of the role of a pop choral ensemble is particularly interesting, as he concludes that inclusion of a pop choir in a high school curriculum increases enrollment in other, more traditional choirs. I differ with him on this point and will discuss my objections to this differentiation of choirs based on music type in my essay.

Dan Isbell, assistant professor of music education at Ithaca College, wrote a similar advocacy article titled “Popular Music and the Public School Music Curriculum.”\(^\text{17}\) He primarily addresses the same issues as Grier, with one notable exception in which he describes specific examples of successful popular music integration curriculums in public school music programs. I will refer to these successes in my essay.

“Popular Music in the Classroom – Where to Begin?” by Canadian secondary school music educator Sarah Morrison discusses personal success stories incorporating popular music into her choral classroom.\(^\text{18}\) This article will be a fine supplement to my pedagogical section.

\(^\text{17}\) Dan Isbell, "Popular Music and the Public School Music Curriculum," *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education* 26, no. 1 (-01-01, 2007), 53.
A similar approach is taken by Mac Randall, editor of the scholarly journal *Teaching Music*, in his article “A Whole LOTTA Learnin’ GOING ON.” By sharing personal experiences and drawing on the NAfME standards, Randall makes a quality argument in support of the inclusion of popular music in a music classroom.

Also falling into the advocacy-through-personal-story camp is composer-singer Victor Sandman’s article “Boy Bands over Bach.” In it, Sandman outlines the rapidly growing collegiate and high school a cappella scene, as well as the educational benefits provided by these groups.

*Bridging the Gap: Popular Music and Music Education* by Carlos Rodriguez, professor of music education at the University of Michigan, contains several articles geared toward the music educator. His work is helpful in terms of advocacy–much of his material pertains to making a pedagogical argument for inclusion of pop music in a curriculum. However, this book falls short on practical advice such as lesson plans, rehearsal tools, and how to produce arrangements. It also fails to address choral issues in particular.

Randall Everett Allsup, an assistant professor of music and music education at Teachers College, Columbia University, published the article titled, “Popular Music and Classical Musicians.” While this article does present several lesson plans for incorporating popular music into a general music class, it is limited in its scope. It focuses mostly on the role of the teacher and the use of a democratic process in teaching,

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instead of providing pedagogical reasons for doing so. It also is more geared toward a general music class, rather than to choral classroom.

“Bach and Rock in the Music Classroom,” an article co-authored by professor of music education at SUNY Buffalo Terry Gates and professor of harmony at the Berklee College of Music Charles Cassara, provides a framework for advocacy of the inclusion of popular music in a music classroom.\(^\text{23}\) It will be helpful in my discussion of reasons why this topic is important pedagogically, but it is not very practical in its lack of classroom-based application of popular music.

Randolph Love, the music program coordinator at Columbia College, wrote a helpful article entitled “Design and Teach a Popular Music Class.”\(^\text{24}\) The article is practical, offering classroom-ready tips and techniques. However it is limited in its scope, as it only addresses the study of popular music, and not the performance or recreation of popular music.

“Popular Music Performance Class,” by John Ginocchio, a high school instrumental music teacher from Indiana, outlines the author’s trepidations and eventual successes in starting an instrumental-based popular music class.\(^\text{25}\) By stressing the theoretical, composition-based, and historical aspects of popular music, he describes in much detail a project-based curriculum that has much merit. Although many similarities can be drawn to singing, many of his ideas need to be adjusted in order to work in a choral setting.


Resources for the Teacher

Blend and group dynamics are essential elements of performing popular music. The use of barbershop tags, or brief 4-part harmonic progressions set to an actual text, is a good way to work on these aspects of popular music in rehearsal. Barbershoptags.com is a valuable resource that contains sheet music for over one thousand of these tags in the public domain for free.26

During this section of the essay, I will also refer to professional organizations that support singing this style of music. The American Choral Directors Association (ACDA)27, Varsity Vocals28, the Contemporary A Cappella Society (CASA)29, and the National Association for Music Education (NAfME)30 all offer support structures and various informal and formal forums for the discussion of issues pertaining to popular music performance in choir.

An important resource for any teacher who wishes to produce arrangements, performances, and recordings of popular music is the “Copyright Law of the United States of America and Related Laws Contained in Title 17 of the United States Code.”31 There is much ambiguity in federal law regarding copyright issues, especially with regard to popular music and the *a cappella* genre in general, and the potential to violate copyright law is greater when performing and recording arrangements of current popular songs. “Music Copyright Law” by David J. Moser and Cheryl L. Slay contains a summary of copyright law as it pertains to public performances of music and mechanical

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licenses. However, this book fails to specifically address arranging copyrighted music for an ensemble that engages in public performance. By drawing on both resources, I will explain what conductors can and cannot legally do when performing arrangements of popular songs.

**Conclusion**

The inclusion of popular music in a classroom has manifold pedagogical benefits, several of which have been discussed at length by scholars. Much has also been written about how to sing successfully in a popular style and how to coach classically-trained singers to achieve authenticity in the performance of popular music. However, many of these discussions are not specific to a choral situation and settle for general advocacy instead of addressing issues in a practical fashion. This lack of scope in the choral-based discussion of popular music coupled with the small catalog of quality popular-style arrangements predicates the need for a new scholarly resource that addresses these issues in a pragmatic form. It is my sincere hope that this essay will be of great help to many choir directors.
CHAPTER 2
THE PEDAGOGICAL BENEFITS OF INCLUDING POPULAR MUSIC IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CHORAL CLASSROOM

What is Popular Music?

Popular music is difficult to define because the term encompasses a wealth of disparate musical styles and forms. There are many competing definitions of popular music, but the one that most accurately addresses the disjunct and ever-expanding nature of the term belongs to Wayne Bowman, professor of music education at Brandon University. He defines popular music as “…music created by and especially for, the enjoyment and enrichment of everyday people in their everyday lives.”¹ He goes on to say that popular music exhibits the following inclinations:

(a) breadth of intended appeal
(b) mass mediation and commodity character
(c) amateur engagement
(d) continuity with everyday concerns
(e) informality
(f) here-and-now pragmatic use and utility
(g) appeal to embodied experience
(h) emphasis on process.²

Even this definition is not without fault – many of the aforementioned inclinations could also be applied an art song penned by Schubert, or one of Haydn’s Paris

² Ibid, 36-37.
Symphonies, and yet one would be hard pressed to classify either of these works as popular music. His definition also fails to neglect two fundamental aspects of popular music: first, that it is a uniquely American art form, and second that it is essentially an aural tradition whereas classical music is a literal tradition. Ultimately, any attempt to define popular music will fall short in some way because it is a current, expanding, and rapidly evolving genre. For the purposes of this paper, the term “popular music” will primarily refer to music of American top-40 style of approximately the last forty years.

An analogy may be drawn to the Supreme Court case of Jacobellis v. Ohio. In an attempt to determine what constitutes pornography, Justice Stewart uttered, “I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material…and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligibly doing so. But I know it when I see it…”3 On account of its ubiquity in 21st century American culture and its constantly evolving status, the “I know it when I see it” test may be the best way to identify popular music.

Getting over the Stigma

Music educators who do not wish to teach popular music might argue, “These popular songs are not as worthwhile, intrinsically valuable, or as good as a Beethoven sonata. By studying both kinds of music side-by-side, we diminish the value of the classics.” Bowman tackles and debunks this argument:

Taking popular music will make the classics – the greatest musical achievements of the past – all the more momentous. They become far more vital concerns to the extent that they are appropriately seen as part of a continuous, dynamic musical field rather than as constituting the whole of it. Rather than museum

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pieces that demand reverent appreciation, they become part of a broader, living culture…

Comparing a sonata by Beethoven with popular music does not diminish but instead reveals the genius and import of Beethoven. Bowman goes on to state that education in popular music might actually raise the overall quality of the genre:

…Popular music’s dangers or deficiencies should not keep it out of schools: first, it is not uniformly defective or deficient; and second, one of the concerns of education is to enhance people’s access to what is better, to make them more discriminating in the perceptions and choices. Music education might actually presume to improve the quality of popular music by making students more fully aware and competent.⁷

Another argument to be made in favor of the inclusion of popular music in the choral curriculum is that popular music is the “native” musical culture of the 21st century student. Daniel Cavicchi, Dean of the Liberal Arts at the Rhode Island School of Design, writes, “If outside of school a student’s musical life mainly consists of trading MP3 files of obscure emo and grunge songs on his computer or dancing with friends at an all-ages club, then a music class where he studies how to play the clarinet is going to seem incredibly bizarre.”⁵ Noted music educator Carlos Rodriguez notes, “Students should learn about the relevant history of the sounds and styles they know best.”⁶ For better or worse, the sound and style that a majority of present-day students know best is popular music. Rodriguez elaborates on this point:

⁴ Bowman, "Pop" Goes...? Taking Popular Music Seriously, 44.
⁵ Ibid, 40.
⁶ Ibid, 29.
When students are given the opportunity to compose ‘in their own style,’ their music almost invariably resembles popular music. The most immediate explanation for this is the ever-present sound of popular music in their lives – they are saturated with it. Today, pop music is aimed at increasingly younger audiences, causing this saturation to overlay a more developmentally critical time span.\(^8\)

As Rodriguez notes, the inundation of popular music has increased in the last twenty years and shows no signs of slowing. Instead of bemoaning this fact, teachers should use it to their advantage by using popular music to teach broader musical concepts.

Another common argument against performing popular music is “I do not understand the appeal of it,” or “I do not relate to it.” Simply because some teachers find it difficult to relate to popular music does not mean the genre is to be dismissed. Consider the musical features that might cause a teacher to admire a Brahms motet, such as its emotional climax or its beautiful poetry. These very features are also characteristics that a student might admire about a popular song. Rodriguez notes,

\begin{quote}
Equally disconcerting for teachers is their inability to relate to, or find quality in, the music that is popular with students…Rather than hesitate because we cannot relate to or do not know enough about the music of our students, we might remember that our students too frequently possess similar attitudes about the music we choose instead.\(^9\)
\end{quote}

Ironically, the same qualities of popular music that many teachers find distasteful actually serve to make them more appealing to students. Rodriguez writes,

\begin{itemize}
\item \(^8\) Ibid, 21.
\item \(^9\) Ibid, 15.
\end{itemize}
[Students] see pop musicians having ‘fun’ because their music so easily combines with other activities. They are motivated by the prospect of becoming famous without exceptional musical talent or substantial investment of time and practice…the medium does appeal to students’ natural interests, aspirations, and belief that, simply by being themselves, they will have endless opportunities for personal success.10

Teachers also have a responsibility to develop singers with 21st century skill sets. Dr. Rachel Lebon, Professor of Vocal Performance at the University of Miami, writes, “Ultimately, the ability to be [vocally] versatile not only opens one to new cultures and perspectives but also enriches the physical, emotional, and intellectual experience of communicating with the human voice.”11 Teaching students how to healthily sing in multiple styles, especially in their “native” style of popular music, has a profound and positive impact upon the development of those students.

Another fear of teachers is that by teaching popular music, students are missing out on other more important musical skills. Rodriguez allays this fear:

Successful musicians, whether classically or orally/aurally trained [as is typical of many popular musicians], share many of the same attributes, such as a developed musical memory, sensitivity and competence in ensemble playing, self-critical analysis and evaluation, effective practicing strategies, creative energy, and a sufficiently strong ego to perform regularly and well for audiences.12

In reality, performing popular music with a choral ensemble enhances rather than diminishes many of the same skills that performing classical music imparts (more on this in chapter four). Instead of fearing popular music, conductors should embrace it as a teaching tool that garners student excitement and reinforces useful abilities.

10 Ibid, 16.
12 Rodriguez, Popular Music in Music Education: Toward a New Conception of Musicality, 19.
The Standards

As previously mentioned, NAfME devised nine standards in the 1970’s to promote excellence in music education. Addressed below are the ways in which teaching popular music in the choral classroom can fulfill each standard.

1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.

2. Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.

   The first two standards are easily fulfilled in the context of a performing ensemble. Further elaboration is not needed, except to mention that popular music can play a role in ensuring the variedness of the repertoire.

3. Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments.

   This standard is harder to meet in the context of a traditional vocal ensemble. Opportunities for improvisation are fairly rare in the western canon of choral music, and this is a skill that is not frequently taught, reinforced, or practiced in choral classrooms.

   However, improvisation is an important part of many subgenres of popular music. Although it is more common to hear instrumental improvisation such as a guitar solo or a drum solo/breakdown, vocal improvisation is also present in popular music. The vocal solo is the area most open to improvisatory reinterpretation. At first, a student soloist may wish to reproduce the exact rhythms, pitches, and riffs of a recorded song. However, teachers should encourage students to use the solo as a basis for improvisation. Doing so will result in a more individualized and ultimately more fulfilling interpretation of the original song.
The following is a hypothetical lesson plan based on the game ‘Telephone’ that affords multiple students the chance to improvise on a popular song in a chamber-sized choral rehearsal. The group has learned a new arrangement of a popular song, and feels comfortable performing the background to the first chorus from memory. Play the original version of the chorus in class and announce, “We’re going to move down the first row, and everyone in that row will have an opportunity to sing this solo in their own octave while the rest of us sing our background part. We are going to vamp the chorus, and will not stop in between soloists. There is only one rule – you must do at least one thing (either rhythm, pitch, or vocal effect) differently from the person who went in front of you. If you are first, you must do at least one thing differently from the recording I just played.” This activity allows many students the chance to safely experiment with a solo line in the context of class. It is amazing what students can invent when given the parameter of only having to change one thing. This parameter is important, because it actually serves to free the student. Instead of having to alter everything on the first sing-through, the singer only has to change one small thing. This limitation gives the student a higher chance of success.

Once a soloist has been selected for the arrangement, the teacher should work with that soloist outside of class. Encourage him or her to experiment with the solo, with the stated goal of producing a version that remains mostly faithful to the original, is musically interesting to the soloist, and sounds good in the soloist’s voice. In the early stages of learning improvisation, pitch is harder to alter than rhythm. Use this to your advantage by encouraging the beginning student to focus on rhythm – ask him or her to play with rubato, and to try lengthening important words or phrases and shortening less
important ones. Encourage students to listen to live versions of the original song – often the original soloist will alter the solo in ways that will open students’ minds to the manifold possibilities.

The song “The Remedy (I Won’t Worry)” by Jason Mraz provides an example of the usefulness of listening to live versions. Figure 2.1 notates the solo on the first chorus from the original studio recording and compares it with what the artist does in a live version of the song.

Figure 2.1. Studio and Live Versions of Solo from “The Remedy (I Won’t Worry)”

The extreme tessitura of the original version makes it difficult to sing. Thus when performing live Mraz improvises a lower part that is still musically coherent and yet easier to sing. The tessitura is not the only thing that has changed – the tempo is approximately sixteen clicks faster (also making it easier to sing), the rhythm is quite different, and he even alters the words by adding “Oh no.” These two melodies are rather dissimilar, and yet both are functional versions of the solo. Encouraging students to

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listen to live versions can help them realize just how flexible solos in popular music can be.

4. Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines.

5. Reading and notating music.

6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.

These are the three standards that most benefit from the performance of popular music. Popular music affords students the opportunity to arrange and in so doing, listen to, notate, analyze, and describe music. Pure composition is often intimidating to high school students due to its inherent complexity and overwhelming wealth of potential creative choices. Arranging popular songs offers a simpler way to grapple with issues pertaining to the fourth standard, because unlike in pure composition, the framework of the popular song already exists; the original song dictates many fundamental musical features such as tempo, harmonic structure, and form. Although the fact that several important musical decisions have already been made may seem constraining, these limitations provide students with a built in set of “specified guidelines” and thus make the arranging process easier and more fulfilling. Igor Stravinsky argues in his treatise The Poetics of Music, “…my freedom will be so much greater and more meaningful the more narrowly I limit my field of action and the more I surround myself with obstacles.”\textsuperscript{14} The act of arranging popular songs provides students with built-in guidelines that make it easier for them to grapple with the creative and compositional process.

Programming popular music also allows students to hear their arrangements performed with actual voices. This kind of acoustic feedback is invaluable to a developing composer, arranger, and musician. Much more will be said about how to manage and coach the process of student arranging in chapter five.

The process of arranging also gives students a chance to fulfill the fifth and sixth standards. Much of the arranging process is based in dictation. Before a student can begin to arrange, he or she must determine the group rhythmic patterns present in the song, the melodic structure of the solo, and the harmonic progression and harmonic rhythm of the song (more on these features in chapter three). All of these activities are basic steps when arranging popular music, and they all fulfill the fifth and sixth standards.

7. Evaluating music and music performances.

The previously described improvisation activity of listening to multiple versions of the same song also meets this standard, and can be used in the classroom. Another exercise relating to popular music that fulfills this standard is a comparison of various vocal styles. Here is a hypothetical lesson plan called “Sliders” that requires students to evaluate music within the context of popular music. On the board, draw three parallel lines. Label them as follows in Figure 2.2:
Figure 2.2. Tone Exercise “Sliders” for Evaluating Music

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tone</th>
<th>Dark</th>
<th>Bright</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vibrato</td>
<td>Straight</td>
<td>Wide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>Breathy</td>
<td>Focused</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Vocally demonstrate what is meant by the extremes of each ‘slider’ (i.e. sing a pitch with an excessively dark production, and then sing a pitch with an excessively bright production). After you have demonstrated, ask your students to produce the extremes of each slider. Announce that you are going to listen to an excerpt of a classical choral work, and that your students’ task is to determine where this recording falls on each of the sliders. After listening, ask for opinions and mark an average spot on each slider with one color of marker. Then, repeat the process with a different colored marker and an excerpt from a popular song. Not only will this activity give your students a better grasp of the differences between popular music tone and classical tone, it will force them to “evaluate music and music performances” in the context of a rehearsal. This exercise can also be used with different subgenres of classical music, such as Spiritual and Renaissance, etc. However, because it is quite different from classical tone, using popular music is an easy way to help students recognize distinctions in tone.
8. Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts.

9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture.

The performance of popular music may also serve these final standards.

William Lee, Professor of Music at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga writes,

History educators declare that history has a special role in education because our understanding of the past can be distorted, sometimes unintentionally, but also intentionally, for material or political gain. Popular music has often been at the center of political, religious, and social movements, and it can play a role in a more nuanced understanding of the past.\textsuperscript{15}

Because popular music is literally “music of the now,” students have an easier time understanding how it relates to current “political, religious, and social movements.”

One way to fulfill this standard is by programming a concert on the theme of war. There are countless war protest songs in both the classical and popular repertoire. A conductor might consider pairing an excerpt from Vaughan Williams’ “Dona Nobis Pacem” of 1936 and a popular war protest song such as Outkast’s “BOB (Bombs Over Baghdad)” of 2000. This can provide an effective bridge into discussing the historical conflicts surrounding the genesis of these two pieces, how they are similar or dissimilar, and what the viewpoints or goals of both pieces of music are.

**Recruiting**

Over the last two decades, group-based popular style singing exploded in popularity. In the spring of 2010, the two non-sporting and non-live television programs with the highest Nielsen ratings were “American Idol” (a show about amateur singing)

and “Glee,” a dramatic comedy about the triumphs and tribulations of a high school vocal popular music ensemble.\textsuperscript{16} The acclaimed program “The Sing-Off” features a cappella groups that perform popular music from across the country competing in a reality competition. The commercial success of these programs mirrors the dramatic increase of the number of collegiate a cappella groups nationwide, charted in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1. Growth of A Cappella Groups at Universities Over the Last Century.\textsuperscript{17}

![Graph showing the growth of a cappella groups at universities from 1909 to 2005.]

The country at large is interested in popular-style group singing, and teachers can and should capitalize on this trend. The most obvious benefit of performing popular music in


\textsuperscript{17} Joshua Duchan, “Collegiate A Cappella: Emulation and Originality,” American Music (Champaign, Ill.) 25, no. 4 (-01-01, 2007), 477, 481.
a choral ensemble is that it can provide a huge boon to recruitment of new singers that might otherwise not be interested in choir.

**Conclusion**

Popular music is difficult to define, because it represents a growing repertoire of music. Teachers should not be afraid of performing popular music – rather than diminishing students’ skills or abilities, it can actually increase them. By meeting many of the educational standards that are otherwise hard to achieve in a choral rehearsal, the performance of popular music can lead to a more enriching musical experience for students and teachers alike.
CHAPTER 3

HOW TO ARRANGE POPULAR MUSIC FOR CHOIR

Conductor/Arranger: Producing One’s Own Arrangements

Due to current copyright law (more on this in chapter six), it is difficult to obtain the print rights to arrangements of music for which one does not own the original copyright.¹ This is not to say that there are not high-quality arrangements in print – many fine arrangements have been produced, performed, and published. The problem is rather that the quantity of these arrangements is quite small. However, teachers can fill in this lack of diversity in the repertoire themselves as copyright laws do make some exceptions for educators.

Popular music, unlike classical music, represents a rapidly expanding repertoire. Musicstop.org, a website that tracks new popular music releases, estimates that there were over 557 new albums of popular music released in 2011.² With a conservative estimate of ten songs per album, 5,570 popular songs were released in 2011 alone – even Schubert at his most prolific could not have equaled this kind of output. By completing one’s own arrangements, the conductor can capitalize on this phenomenon of rapidly

¹ Rey Sanchez, Interview, 2012.
expanding repertoire by programming music that is aurally relevant and culturally of-the-moment to students. Nothing will raise student levels of distrust more than including a “popular” piece of music in a concert, only to have it be so outdated that none of the students have ever heard in its original context. Making use of songs that are literally current can even lead to a semi-democratization of the repertoire selection process that gives students a sense of empowerment. A teacher might select two or three popular songs from the Billboard Top 100 that he or she feels are appropriate and have students vote on which one they would like to perform as an ensemble.

Perhaps the most pedagogically important reason why each conductor should complete his or her own arrangements is the ability of the conductor to tailor those arrangements to the unique needs of his or her ensemble. Finding appropriately challenging and yet fulfilling repertoire is one of the fundamental challenges of any conductor. This becomes particularly important in an educational setting, where the abilities, strengths, and vocal ranges of an ensemble’s students may fluctuate drastically from year to year. A conductor may feature his or her choir’s strengths, write in comfortable ranges for his or her singers, and provide educational opportunities for his or her singers by writing his or her own arrangements.

An example of this is the stereotypical secondary-level or collegiate men’s choir. This type of ensemble will typically include singers of varying musical ability levels and a low number of true tenors and true basses, coupled with a high number of baritones. In the following hypothetical but plausible example, the choir contains five tenor ones, six tenor twos, twelve baritones, and eight basses. Of the eight basses, only two have access to notes below G2, and of the five tenor ones, three primarily use falsetto and do not have
access to a powerful range above F4. Furthermore, many of the baritones are not good at sightreading. In the course of programming for this ensemble, the conductor may encounter several problems: repertoire that goes lower than is comfortable for the basses and higher than is comfortable for the tenor ones, that features difficult inner harmonies for the baritones, or that highlights the ensemble’s uneven balance in voicing.

By arranging his or her own popular music, the conductor can use firsthand knowledge of this (hypothetical) ensemble to prevent potential rehearsal headaches and performance problems. An arrangement can limit the lower and upper ranges for the second basses and first tenors, and can also solve some balance problems by limiting the dynamic levels of the other parts, keeping the baritones and second tenors at a *mezzopiano* level with a lower-in-register part. Furthermore, the melody can be given to the sightreading-challenged baritones.

This is not to say that every singer and ensemble should be spared of all potential musical challenges and opportunities for academic and personal growth. Rather, by doing his or her own arrangements, a conductor can manage the amount and degree of difficulty and give his or her ensemble a better chance for success in rehearsal and performance. The conductor can exert more control over the repertoire and tailor each arrangement to exact specifications of difficulty.

Creating arrangements also affords a conductor more flexibility when programming for concerts. Another typical choral problem is finding a fast and upbeat set or concert closer that is not terribly difficult. Many popular songs fit this category splendidly and provide a high-energy end to a set. Popular songs can fill many slots in a concert set, from the aforementioned closer to the slow, introspective, and beautiful song.
As popular songs are also key-malleable (i.e. the keys centers of popular music are not necessarily fixed at any one pitch and can be shifted like art song to suit the needs of the soloist, ensemble, or concert), they can be altered to create attacca links with other songs whose keys are fixed.

**Selecting Appropriate Repertoire**

There are many reasons why a conductor should arrange popular music for his or her own ensembles. However, one of the biggest challenges of performing popular music is selecting an original song to arrange. When programming popular music from an educational standpoint, there are three basic considerations: lyrics, solo difficulty, and arrange-ability.

**Lyrics**

Unfortunately, many popular songs feature lyrics that are inappropriate for an academic setting. Bowman writes, “...what often makes popular music popular are things like coarseness, corporeality, casualness, and contradiction. Musical validity issues aside, many of these characteristics are simply inappropriate to public institutionalized instruction.”3 It is thus the conductor’s responsibility to select songs whose lyrics are suitable for an educational environment. This can sometimes be tricky, as the lyrical message of a song is not always clear, nor does it always overtly relate to the musical mood set by the song.

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Consider as an example “Pumped Up Kicks,” a song by band *Foster the People* that reached number three on Billboard’s Hot 100 list in the summer of 2011.\(^4\) The musical characteristics of the song are generally upbeat – it features a medium-fast tempo, a well-written hook, and an electronic instrumentation that results in a unique background sound. The soloist, as is typical of popular style, does not exhibit clean diction. A conductor wanting to capitalize on the song’s popularity and relatively easy chord pattern might be tempted to program “Pumped Up Kicks.” However, listed below is an excerpt from the (largely aurally-indecipherable) lyrics to the chorus:

All the other kids with the pumped up kicks,  
You better run, better run, outrun my gun.\(^5\)

This ostensibly charming song is in fact about a school shooting. “Pumped Up Kicks” demonstrates why it is important for educators to have a firm grasp on not just the aural aspects of their selected popular repertoire, but also on its textual content.

**Solo Difficulty**

Another area of concern for the director is the difficulty of the solo line. The conductor may employ certain tricks to make a solo part easier, such as having multiple soloists or by writing it into the background arrangement to be sung by a group; but many popular music solos are too difficult for students to sing successfully. The primary difficulty lies in registration. Consider the following registrations of the ten highest-ranking songs on the Billboard Hot 100 for the first week of July 2012 (which

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conveniently are split into five female soloists and five male solos), found below in Figure 3.1.\(^6\)

**Figure 3.1. Solo Ranges of the Top Ten on Billboard Hot 100, July, 2012.**\(^7\)

![Solo Ranges Diagram](image)

These ten songs demonstrate two truths about solos in popular music – many male solos are pitched quite high and many female solos are pitched quite low. These ranges do not even take into account the high and low tessituras of these songs – the choruses of each male song generally reside in the extreme high of the register, and the verses of each female song generally sit in the extreme low of the register. These registrations create much of the difficulty in replicating popular music solos, as high tenors and low altos are two of the rarest voice types, especially in an educational setting.

There are two potential solutions to this problem. The first is gender swapping, or having females sing male solos at pitch. For songs whose male tessituras are quite high, this presents an attractive answer as that exceptionally high male range fits nicely into the heart of an average female’s register. There are however a few problems with this

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\(^6\) *Billboard Hot 100*

approach. The first has to do with vocal intensity. When accessed in popular music, the upper male range takes on an intense emotional quality and is frequently used to express pain, anger, or sadness. This emotional intensity is one of the fundamental traits that defines popular music. Rodriguez writes:

\[
\text{...in popular music, there may be any number of standards for judging singing skill and quality, since there are so many accepted vocal styles...What is more important is whether the singer is able to express clearly an emotion or feeling through the music. Popular music vocalists are well-known for presenting specific attitudes and emotions in their singing...our students are drawn to the emotional richness they perceive in popular music.}^8
\]

By using a female soloist instead of a male soloist, the middle female range/upper male range is robbed of some of the vocal and emotional intensity that is fundamental to the creation and enjoyment of popular music.

Another problem with gender swapping is the message it sends to men in a mixed ensemble. When a female soloist is given a male solo, the conductor unintentionally sends a subconscious message to the men of the ensemble that there is not a single one of them in the ensemble good enough to sing this particular solo. While this sentiment may be accurate, it is not necessarily the best message to send to young male singers. The same is true of giving an extremely low female solo to a male member of the ensemble. For this reason, performing an originally-male song with a female soloist in an all-female ensemble (or vice versa) is more advisable than performing an originally male-solo song with a female soloist in a mixed ensemble.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, gender swapping creates female registration problems. Take for example the previously mentioned song “We Are

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Young,” by Fun, featuring Janelle Monae. The range of the chorus of this song is exceptionally high for a male singer (A3-Bb4), and one might be tempted to have a female soloist sing it. However, the range of the verse sits well below an optimal female register (C3-Bb3). One potential solution to this problem is to divide the solo into two parts by having a male sing the verses and a female sing the choruses. This is an example of the best possible outcome of gender swapping, as it eliminates the aforementioned issues of negative messages and female registration.

Another potential solution to the problem of extreme ranges is to change the keys of a song so that the solo lies in a more comfortable register. Unlike in some classical music where key altering is not encouraged or even permitted, this practice is allowable within popular music. Popular music artists frequently change the keys of their own songs. In 2004, The Goo Goo Dolls released “Live in Buffalo – July 4, 2004,” an album that featured new live versions of their biggest hits.9 Table 3.1 compares several of these hits’ original keys to their new live keys. The Goo Goo Dolls have altered the keys of seven of their hits in this live performance.

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Table 3.1. Comparison of The Goo Goo Dolls key centers.\textsuperscript{10}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song Name</th>
<th>Original Key and Album</th>
<th>Key on “Live in Buffalo – July 4, 2004”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Big Machine”</td>
<td>Eb Major; “Gutterflower”</td>
<td>D Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Slide”</td>
<td>Ab Major; “Dizzy Up the Girl”</td>
<td>G Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Black Balloon”</td>
<td>Db Major; “Dizzy Up the Girl”</td>
<td>D Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Here is Gone”</td>
<td>Db Major; “Gutterflower”</td>
<td>C Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Broadway”</td>
<td>B Major; “Dizzy Up the Girl”</td>
<td>Bb Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Naked”</td>
<td>B Major; “A Boy Named Goo”</td>
<td>C Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Cuz You’re Gone”</td>
<td>Ab Major; “Superstar Car Wash”</td>
<td>G Major</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, altering keys in a vocal arrangement is not without problems of its own. By lowering the key of a male song, much of the emotional intensity that is essential to the success of the genre may be lost. Furthermore, lowering a key too much may render already low bass parts unsingable. Likewise, raising the key of a female song too high will sometimes result in background soprano parts that sit too high to be comfortable. The best application of this method would be in the case of a song that is just a half- or whole-step out of reach for a particular soloist, or for a soloist who truly sounds better in one key than another. Regardless of the soloist, the key should not be raised or lowered more than a minor third, or else it may be rendered too aurally foreign from its original.

The safest decision is to select songs whose ranges occupy more of a middle ground, or to program songs with a soloist from one’s ensemble already in mind. Thus, when selecting repertoire consisting of popular music, the director must carefully plot the solo’s range and consider who in his or her ensemble, if anyone, could sing this solo convincingly and without difficulty.

Arrange-ability

The final category, arrange-ability, is the most difficult to quantify. Arrange-ability measures the ease with which the fundamental elements of the song can be formed into a choral arrangement. Arrange-ability is largely subjective, as individual arrangers will adopt different tactics and styles when presented with different kinds of popular music.

However there are several musical features found frequently in popular music that do not easily translate into a choral arrangement. A description of each feature, example songs that contain each element, and an explanation of the problem these features create follows below in Table 3.2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example Songs</th>
<th>Why it Does Not Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brass-dominant backgrounds or prolonged brass solos</td>
<td>“The Impression that I Get,” Mighty Mighty Bosstones; “Go Daddy-O,” Big Bad Voodoo Daddy; “Soul Man, “The Blues Brothers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Difficult to replicate brass sounds in a non-comedic way, hard to incorporate brass parts into a homophonic texture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy Percussion or Percussion-Dominated textures</td>
<td>“Boyfriend,” Justin Bieber; “Party Rock Anthem,” LMFAO; “Party in the U.S.A.,” Miley Cyrus</td>
<td>When percussion is the driving/dominant feature of a song (and not harmonic progression, overall rhythm, form, etc.), difficult to recreate this energy via an arrangement or unamplified vocal percussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verse and chorus feature the same harmonic progression</td>
<td>“Save Tonight,” Eagle Eye Cherry; “I’m Yours,” Jason Mraz; “The Old Apartment,” BNL</td>
<td>Audience will tire of same harmonic progression presented repeatedly without variation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Original soloist is superb or iconic; difficult to imagine anyone else singing the song</td>
<td>“Ain’t No Other Man,” Christina Aguilera; “Don’t Stop ‘Til You Get Enough,” Michael Jackson; “My Heart Will Go On,” Celine Dion</td>
<td>Difficult for subsequent soloists to vocally match widely-known and outstanding original example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piano-only accompaniment</td>
<td>“Your Song,” Elton John; “The Luckiest,” Ben Folds Five; “Faithfully,” Journey</td>
<td>Difficult to mirror piano rhythms and textures with voices – will often require an entirely new chord voicing and rhythmic structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prolonged instrumental interludes or instrumental-only bridges</td>
<td>“Hotel California,” The Eagles; “Today was a Fairytale,” Taylor Swift; “I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For,” U2</td>
<td>Creates awkward musical and physical situation for soloists, requires change to form of song or exceptionally creative arrangement to maintain interest in background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excessive use of recording effects such as reverb, layering, etc.</td>
<td>“Thnks Fr Th Mmr,” Fall Out Boy; “Explode,” Nelly Furtado; “Without You,” David Guetta and Usher</td>
<td>Without benefit of recording studio, hard to recreate effects; effects often originally used to mask deficiencies in the song such as difficult solo, or largely inactive background</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is not to say that songs with these features should be entirely avoided. On the contrary, many arrangements have produced exciting and original solutions to the aforementioned problems. The author will in fact use a song that appears as an example-to-be-avoided above as the sample arrangement produced later in this chapter. However, these characteristics are problems that require creative solutions, and will thus take much more time to arrange than songs without them.

On the other hand, there are features that lend themselves well to vocal arrangements. A similar table follows below in Table 3.3.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example Songs</th>
<th>Why it Works</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guitar-dominated backgrounds with lots of rhythmic strumming or</td>
<td>“All At Once,” The Fray; “Live Like You’re Dying,” Tim McGraw; “Here is Gone,” The Goo Goo Dolls</td>
<td>Easy to translate guitar rhythms and cascades into multiple voices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cascading – active background</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Added solo harmonies</td>
<td>“Where the Party At?,” Jagged Edge featuring Nelly; “Demons,” Guster; “What Goes Around…Comes Around Interlude,” Justin Timberlake</td>
<td>Easy to add at any stage of arrangement/rehearsal, way to create “multiple soloists” and build ensemble self-esteem/give more singers a chance to sing soloistically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large band (without dominant brass section) or performing forces</td>
<td>“Jerk it Out,” Caesars; “The Siren Sings,” The Anniversary; “Grey Street,” Dave Matthews Band</td>
<td>More instruments and parts offer more raw material with which to work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality live version exists</td>
<td>“The General,” Dispatch; “King of Anything,” Sara Bareilles; “All for You,” Sister Hazel</td>
<td>Means song is capable of being performed well live or acoustically without benefit of recording technology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cascades or the technique of cascading in popular music are similar to arpeggios in classical music. They are defined as a chord being broken up rhythmically into several different voice parts. The following Figure 3.2 demonstrates cascades in a vocal arrangement.
Figure 3.2. Cascades in a Vocal Arrangement

This list is not fully inclusive or exclusive, but it does provide a starting point for teachers wishing to select their own popular repertoire that will lend itself to a vocal arrangement.

The Intellectual Side of Arranging

The Transcription Method and the Creative Method: Two Schools of Thought

There are two equally valid compositional points of view unofficially emerging in the performance of arrangements of popular music in this country. The first states that the goal of any arrangement of popular music for singing ensemble should be to reproduce the exact sound of the original song. The second states that the goal of such an arrangement should be to treat the original song as raw material – a source of inspiration not to be replicated but to be used instead as a template or launching point. Deena Weinstein of Depaul University distinguishes the results of these two approaches as “covers” and “versions.”

A cover song iterates (with more or fewer differences) a prior recorded performance of a song by a particular artist, rather than simply the song itself as an entity separate from any performer or performance. When the song itself (as opposed to the performance) is taken as the reference for iteration, each performer...
does a version or a rendition of the song, and none of these versions is a necessary reference.\textsuperscript{11}

Another approach can be found in that of Anna Callahan, a jazz vocalist who argues that there are three kinds of arranging: “transcribing,” “true arranging,” and “transanging.”\textsuperscript{12} She defines “transcribing” as dictating exactly what is happening in the background of a popular song and transferring these rhythmic pitch patterns directly to vocal parts while selecting syllables that mirror the sounds of the original instruments. Callahan’s definition of “true arranging” is in keeping with the aforementioned second goal – treating the original song as source material to be altered, expanded, and engaged with creatively. She describes “transanging” as a mix of “transcribing” and “true arranging” – transcribing many rhythms and pitches from the original song and using those throughout the arrangement, but not being wedded to those dictations as the only source of compositional material for the arrangement.

Unlike Callahan’s descriptions, this dissertation will only address two approaches and will define the first as the transcription method and the second as the creative method. Both approaches have merit, but the creative method results in a more fulfilling academic experience and is more practical within an educational setting. More discussion of each method’s merits and pitfalls follows below.

An arranger using the transcription method would seek to copy down exactly what she or he is hearing in the original song. Rhythms, instrumentations, dynamics, solo-background interactions, and textures would all be efforts to match the original song.

A print example of this style of arranging follows below in Figure 3.3.

\textsuperscript{11} Joshua Duchan, “Collegiate A Cappella: Emulation and Originality,” \textit{American Music (Champaign, Ill.)} 25, no. 4 (-01-01, 2007), 478.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid. 483
Figure 3.3. Hypothetical Example of a Transcription Method Arrangement by Author.

This method of arranging will typically assign instrument identities to individual voice parts: the electric bass part is exactly transcribed into the bass line with a syllable that the sound of the electric bass, the background singer is placed into the baritone line, and the guitar pitches and rhythms are placed into the tenor line with a syllable that mimics the sound of the guitar. The arranger gives little thought to chord voicing, vertical chord structure, texture, harmonic development, melodic development, and form. The overall effect is at times exciting, especially when edited with recording equipment to mirror the processing that occurs in much popular music.

The creative method on the other hand seeks to use the basic components of the song as raw material for a more unique arrangement. While fundamental elements like the solo melody, text, and tempo might not be altered, other musical features such as form, rhythm, chord voicing, harmonic progressions, textures, and dynamics all come within the purview of the arranger. An arrangement using the creative method of the same song from Figure 3.1 follows below in Figure 3.2.
In this example, no one part is assigned to an instrument. None of these voices is one that exactly occurs in the actual song, yet each has been chosen carefully by the arranger to create an overarching chord and rhythmic structure. Dynamics, phrase shapes, and articulations have been added to each part. The creative method is more fulfilling from the point of view of the arranger as it offers more choice and musical freedom. It also lacks many of the problems associated with the transcription method.

One of the primary problems with the transcription method is that without the benefit of this recording technology, it is difficult to naturally produce many of the electronic sounds and effects that are used in popular music. Some commonly used artificial effects to electronically alter human sounds in a choral or a cappella setting are:

1) Low octave doubling on a bass microphone (artificially adding an additional octave to the lowest produced note)
2) Heavy amplification and equalization of a vocal percussionist (using processing to create a sound more like that of an actual drum kit)

3) Recording multiple solo harmonies and percussion lines (using looping of the same singer to create harmonies with him-or-herself, or using looping of a vocal percussionist to create a thicker percussion texture)

4) Adding electronic buzz to individual voices to make them sound more like a guitar or other acoustic instrument

5) Adding excessive reverb both on an individual and group level

Because of its reliance on recording technology, this type of approach tends to work well on a recorded CD or mp3, but does not sound as fulfilling in a live performance. Within a typical position of a choral educator, particularly one in a secondary school, access to a recording studio is a rarity. This method thus is not well suited for educational situations, particularly those that have live concerts as the primary or only methods of performance.

The audience itself represents another problem with the transcription method. Our culture is quite used to many concurrent versions of the same original material. 2012 alone witnessed revivals of the television program Dallas, the musical Anything Goes, and even a Spiderman movie (which was released just after the musical Spiderman: Turn off the Dark, which made references to previous Spiderman movies, which were in and of themselves based on Spiderman comic books, etc.). Due to their proliferation, our culture places certain artistic expectations on subsequent re-renderings or covers of original material. As George Plasketes of Auburn University points out in his article Reflections on the Cover Age, “with music [covers or arrangements], the song undergoes a recontextualization, remaining in the same medium, with the artists translating the
material into a particular style. Measuring the interpreter’s skill, in part, lies in how well the artist [or arranger] uncovers and conveys the spirit of the original, enhances the nuances of its melody, rhythm, phrasing, or structure…” 13 Audiences expect re-imaginings and creative arrangements rather than exact replications. Duchan recounts a quote from a seasoned arranger of popular music, “I agree with those…who are tired of literal transcriptions of pop tunes. That’s not art, it’s math. I don’t want to go to math concerts.” 14 This is especially true in the case of currently popular music, as by definition many audience members will have familiarity with the original song. Duchan goes on to note, “…the audience already knows how the [popular] song goes, so the thrill comes from how the group will do it in a new, vocal-only medium.” 15 Rodríguez eloquently summarizes the larger educational and cultural point behind Duchan’s statement:

In popular music, summative artifacts are not as important (as in classical music) because pop music audiences expect a certain degree of spontaneous charm, a certain level of sincerity the precludes technical perfection. This is why pop concertgoers feel ‘ripped off’ when an artist or group performs exactly as on the recording. 16

In this way, using the creative method instead of the transcription method makes a more fulfilling concert-going experience.

There is another argument to be made in favor of the creative method, and it is intellectual in nature. Exact replication has its educational merits, but they are limited in


14 Duchan, Collegiate A Cappella: Emulation and Originality, 484.

15 Ibid, 495.

16 Rodríguez, Popular Music in Music Education: Toward a New Conception of Musicality, 23.
scope and value, especially in this case. To borrow a term from astronomy, one of the primary pitfalls of the transcription method is that there will always be a standard candle – a guidepost by which to judge the arrangement or performance – the original song. Without the benefit of recording technology or instruments, it is difficult to reproduce the exact sounds from the original song – this deficiency frequently results in an inferior soundscape when compared with the source material. Students and audience members will recognize aurally that the “arrangement” does not sound exactly like the original song, even though that is the stated purpose of a transcription method arrangement. This will create a sense of distrust amongst students and audience alike.

The opposite is true of the creative method. The more unique the arrangement, the more students will feel a sense of ownership of it and pride in it. Building a sense of buy-in or student investment in choir is one of the main challenges facing the 21st century music educator. By creating and performing music that students can truly feel is in some way their own, conductors can foster this coveted sense of buy-in in the most organic possible way – through the repertoire itself.

This is not to say that elements of the original song should be completely abandoned or neglected. One of the fundamental determinants of the success of an arrangement is an audience member’s ability to determine which song is being performed. Duchan summarizes the importance of achieving this balance between new and old: “An adequate [popular] arrangement sounds like the song’s commercial recording…But an excellent arrangement will present the song in a new way that pays homage to the original while adding something unexpected.”

17 Duchan, *Collegiate A Cappella: Emulation and Originality*, 484.
Just how does an arranger “pay homage to the original while adding something unexpected?” The following section presents an arranging method organized by musical categories, and forms a coherent linear process that can be applied to any popular song.

**Producing The Arrangement**

Up to this point, this discussion has been largely theoretical. The attention now shifts to the practical question “How does a conductor actually arrange a pop song?” A delineated process divided by musical category follows below. The author’s hope in providing such a detailed method is that its formulaic nature will ease the fears of first-time arrangers, who often begin with blank staff paper and become quickly discouraged by the scope of the process. Also included is a step-by-step application of these procedures to the song “Save Tonight” by Eagle Eye Cherry. The author selected this song in keeping with the characteristics found in the arrange-ability discussion: “Save Tonight” has a relatively low, singable solo (primarily resting between C3-A3), is not dominated by percussion, has an active background featuring guitar strumming and cascading, and exists in the form of a quality live version. However, it is not without challenges: it violates the “verse and chorus have the same harmonic progression” rule and has a guitar solo of medium-length. “Save Tonight” thus presents opportunities to creatively solve these and other inherent problems.

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Instrumentation

After the conductor has selected a song to arrange, the first step is to consider what forces he or she wishes to include in the performance of this song. *A cappella* is a fairly standard way to adapt popular music to the choral genre, but it is not the only option. An arrangement may include instruments used in popular music, such as piano, upright bass, electric bass, guitar, ukulele, or drum kit. The arranger should have the instrumentation in mind before he or she begins the arrangement, as this will affect every possible musical decision. In the case of “Save Tonight,” the arranger has opted for a primarily TTBB *a cappella* version, with occasional splits into TTTBB.

Form

The second step of arranging a popular song is to listen to the song in its entirety. While listening, the conductor should make note of the form of the song. Form has the same meaning here that it does in its classical context – the division of a song into large and small sections based on musical features and their relationships. Popular music typically has five basic sections, which are named and defined in Table 3.4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Section</th>
<th>Musical Characteristics/Purpose</th>
<th>Textual Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intro</td>
<td>May be related to material from verse. Frequently coupled with a dynamic fade-in.</td>
<td>Usually no solo, no text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verse</td>
<td>Subordinate to chorus. Typically identical to other verses in every way except for text.</td>
<td>Text does not repeat from verse to verse. Larger section of text than chorus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chorus</td>
<td>Main musical section. May or may not feature different musical material than verse.</td>
<td>Repeats text whenever chorus occurs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridge</td>
<td>Transitional material that does not appear elsewhere in the song. Can be instrumental or with solo.</td>
<td>Lyrics (if with solo) are not repeated elsewhere.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outro</td>
<td>May be related to material from chorus. Frequently coupled with a dynamic fadeout.</td>
<td>Usually text from chorus repeated.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These elements are often placed sequentially and formulaically in a popular song. Figure 3.5 reveals how these elements are typically ordered.

Figure 3.5. Typical Form of a Popular Song.

Intro  Verse 1  Chorus 1  Verse 2  Chorus 2  Bridge  Chorus 3

Popular musicians will sometimes modify this basic form. The most frequent alterations include the addition of an outro or “fadeout” section, the insertion of a third verse instead of or after the bridge, the deletion of the intro, and the repetition of the second or third chorus.

Coincidentally, a useful lesson plan that helps to bridge the classical-popular gap is to compare this fundamental form (plus a third verse after the bridge) with *sonata allegro* form (that includes a repeat of the exposition). The two are more similar than one might think, as demonstrated in Figure 3.6:
Figure 3.6. Comparison of *Sonata Allegro* Form and Popular Music Form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sonata Allegro Form</th>
<th>Exposition</th>
<th>(Repeat)</th>
<th>Development</th>
<th>Recapitulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intro</td>
<td>Theme Group 1</td>
<td>Theme Group 2</td>
<td>Theme Group 1</td>
<td>Theme Group 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular Music Form</td>
<td>Intro</td>
<td>Verse 1</td>
<td>Chorus 1</td>
<td>Verse 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The one major problem with this comparison is that the concept of key relations between the first and second theme group that are altered in the recapitulation, a fundamental feature of *sonata allegro* form, is noticeably absent from popular music. Still, the similarities are compelling.

As the conductor listens and makes note of if and when the song deviates from the standard form, he or she should also observe things that are remarkable about each section, such as relative dynamics, new rhythms or instrumentations, changes in the length of each section, and texture shifts. This is also the time for the conductor to start thinking creatively about the arrangement. Perhaps one of the verses is quieter than the others – the conductor might want to experiment later with dropping out voice parts during this section. Or perhaps one of the choruses is louder than the others – the conductor might want to use higher ranges during this section.

The recommended format for these notes is a handwritten spreadsheet. This way, the conductor can see the song in a visual manner and get a sense of the proportions of the song as a whole. Below, in Figure 3.7, is the formal analysis chart for “Save Tonight.”
Figure 3.7. Formal Analysis of “Save Tonight.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Intro</th>
<th>Verse 1</th>
<th>Chorus 1</th>
<th>Verse 2</th>
<th>Chorus 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dynamic</td>
<td>p &lt; mp</td>
<td>mf</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>mf</td>
<td>f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interesting Features</td>
<td>Instrumental only</td>
<td>Guitar predominant</td>
<td>Added octave doubling in solo</td>
<td>Exactly same as verse 1 - maybe change?</td>
<td>Exactly same as chorus 1 - maybe change?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Instrumental Bridge</th>
<th>Verse 3</th>
<th>Chorus 3</th>
<th>Outro</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dynamic</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>p &lt;</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interesting Features</td>
<td>Guitar Solo, same rhythmic pattern</td>
<td>Percussion and bass drop out, long crescendo back to forte for Chorus 3</td>
<td>Twice as long as before</td>
<td>Vamp on “Tomorrow I’ll be gone”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Save Tonight” has just one deviation from the standard form – instead of one or the other, it includes both a bridge and a third verse. Other than that, the form and dynamic plan are quite normal: the verse is quieter than the chorus, the third verse has a big dynamic build-up into the final chorus, and the outro has a gradual fadeout.

It is important for the arranger to know that he or she does not necessarily need to abide by the form provided by the song. Perhaps there is an instrumental bridge that needs to be shortened, or perhaps the arranger would like to double the length of a chorus in order to feature more soloists. In the case of “Save Tonight,” the arranger recorded that the second verse and chorus were the same as the first verse and chorus and made a note to alter them to create variation. Carefully notating the form of the song grants the arranger a thorough understanding of how the original is put together and thus the freedom to be innovative within that form.
Harmony

The third step in the arranging process is to notate the harmonic progressions in each section of the song. Roman numerals are the best way to do this, as key centers are malleable and writing shorthand chord names such as “C maj” may be confusing later on in the process. The author’s recommendation is to add these progressions to the already-completed form chart, as shown in Figure 3.8.

Figure 3.8. Form Chart with Harmonic Progressions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Intro</th>
<th>Verse 1</th>
<th>Chorus 1</th>
<th>Verse 2</th>
<th>Chorus 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dynamic</td>
<td>p &lt; mp</td>
<td>mf</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>mf</td>
<td>f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interesting Features</td>
<td>instrumental only</td>
<td>guitar predominant</td>
<td>added octave doubling in solo</td>
<td>exactly same as verse 1 - maybe change?</td>
<td>exactly same as chorus 1 - maybe change?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Instrumental Bridge</th>
<th>Verse 3</th>
<th>Chorus 3</th>
<th>Outro</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dynamic</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>p &lt;</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interesting Features</td>
<td>Guitar Solo, same rhythmic pattern and</td>
<td>Percussion and bass drop out, long crescendo back to forte for Chorus 3</td>
<td>Twice as long as before</td>
<td>Vamp on &quot;Tomorrow I'll be gone&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmonic Progression</td>
<td>vi - IV - I - V</td>
<td>vi - IV - I - V</td>
<td>vi - IV - I - V</td>
<td>vi - IV - I - V</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the case of “Save Tonight,” the same harmonic progression is employed throughout the entire song. From an arranger’s point of view, this is one of the biggest innate problems with this song. Some tricks are needed in order to create aural variety; these tricks will be addressed in the “Creative Techniques” section.

Once the main harmonic progressions in the song are noted, the arranger can begin to consider basic chord voicing for each section of the song. By chord voicing, the
author means the pitches assigned to each part that build the basic harmonic progression in each section. These need only be a rough idea of basic chord structures – no rhythms beyond the underlying harmonic rhythm need to be notated at this time.

One of the benefits of the creative method is that the arranger may choose chord voicings that follow more typical classical rules of voice leading and thus create easier lines to sing. Consider the difference between the first tenor part in the transcription method from Figure 3.3 with the same part in the creative method from Figure 3.4, displayed side-by-side in Figure 3.9.

Figure 3.9. Comparison of Tenor Part in Transcription Method and Creative Method.

Whereas the transcription method part has a range of a fifth that includes a leap to and away from G4, the creative method part has a more manageable range of a second, and is entirely stepwise with a high note of C3. The creative method part is easier to sing, both from a sightreading perspective and from a vocal production perspective. The use of most (there is one exception, which will be addressed later) classical voice leading rules makes arrangements more approachable for beginning students.

Some additional principles guide the selection of chord voicings. The two most important are that the use of higher registers and open spacing (more vertical space between each part) creates a louder and more climactic section, and the use of lower registers and closed spacing (less vertical space between each part) creates a quieter and
more introspective section. More will be said on the use of inversions in the “Creative Techniques” section.

These voicings may be added to the form chart, as can be seen below in Figure 3.10 (for page-spacing purposes, the author has left off the intro, bridge, and outro).

Figure 3.10. Form Chart with Chord Voicings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Verse 1</th>
<th>Chorus 1</th>
<th>Verse 2</th>
<th>Chorus 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dynamic</td>
<td>mf</td>
<td>mf</td>
<td>mf</td>
<td>mf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interesting Features</td>
<td>guitar predominant</td>
<td>added octave doubling in solo</td>
<td>exactly same as verse 1 - maybe change?</td>
<td>exactly same as chorus 1 - maybe change?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmonic Progression</td>
<td>vi - IV - I - V</td>
<td>vi - IV - I - V</td>
<td>vi - IV - I - V</td>
<td>vi - IV - I - V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chord Voicing</td>
<td>Tenor 1</td>
<td>Tenor 1</td>
<td>Tenor 1</td>
<td>Tenor 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tenor 2</td>
<td>Tenor 2</td>
<td>Tenor 2</td>
<td>Tenor 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bass 1</td>
<td>Bass 1</td>
<td>Bass 1</td>
<td>Bass 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bass 2</td>
<td>Bass 2</td>
<td>Bass 2</td>
<td>Bass 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The arranger has selected voicings in keeping with classical voice leading principles. The louder sections, the choruses, are given a more open chord spacing with a higher tenor one part while the quieter sections, the verses, are given a more closed chord spacing with a lower tenor one part. The arranger has also elected to have a TTTBB division on the chorus. In general, having more voice parts, especially in a higher register, results in a louder overall dynamic. There is however a point of diminishing returns, as adding new parts will necessarily subtract singers from other parts. With
collegiate singers, the author has found that five parts is about the maximum that an ensemble sized twenty or smaller can healthily and successfully support.

These chord voicings are not set in stone – the purpose behind including them at this early stage is to provide the arranger with a richer framework of materials when he or she begins to notate the actual arrangement. In fact, you will notice that the author has left the voicings for verse two and chorus two blank – this is purposeful, as the author would like to create contrast in that section and is not yet sure (in the process) how to achieve that contrast. Again, this issue will be addressed in the “Creative Techniques” section.

When selecting chord voicings, something to be wary of is what the author terms the “Repeat Reset.” Popular music is based on repeated harmonic motion – the basic vi-IV-I-V progression repeats eight times in the verse of “Save Tonight.” This constant repetition means that chord voicings selected by the arranger will have to repeat seamlessly without a sudden register shift. If a chord voicing ends much lower or higher than it began, an aural hiccup will occur. A musical example of good and bad “Repeat Reset” motion follows in Figure 3.11.

Figure 3.11. Good and Bad “Repeat Reset.”
Generally, the dangers of bad “repeat reset” can be avoided by using classical voice leading principals, with one major caveat – parallel voicing, particularly parallel fifths and octaves, is an accepted and essential part of popular music. Popular guitarists often play power chords, which are not in fact chords at all by a classical definition. Power chords consist only of the root and fifth of a given chord. When played in succession, power chords by definition create parallel fifths. This parallel sound is germane to popular music, and should not be avoided on account of principle. Notice that parallel fifths and octaves are included in the “good” example between the fourth and fifth chords. Once the basic chord voicings are set, the arranger may move on to the role of the bass line.

**Bass Line**

In popular music, the bass line usually plays one of two roles. It is either a somewhat-independent melodic line that occasionally provides harmonic support (similar to walking bass in classical music or jazz) or it is a subservient vehicle of harmonic support that proceeds almost entirely in root motion. When arranging a popular song, the conductor must determine how independent the bass line is in the original song. Is it aurally distinct from the other background instruments? Does it function like its own instrument, or does it simply provide harmonic support? Does the bass part proceed in stepwise motion as a walking bass, or does it always play the root of the chord?

If the bass part is aurally distinct and in fact functions as its own part, then it may be an important enough element of the song to transcribe. This method can produce fine results, but also presents a few problems. Many bass parts are quite difficult, containing
fast rhythms and wide leaps. An example of a typical popular song bass part, transcribed and syllabified for a group of bass singers, follows in Figure 3.12.

Figure 3.12. Typical Popular Song Bass Part.

This transcription is difficult to sing for a few reasons. First, the tessitura is quite low. Cleanly articulating each G#2 in that register at a fast tempo is vocally difficult and taxing. Furthermore, the minor seventh ascent in measure two followed by the octave descent into measure three both create a sudden register shift. These types of figurations sound idiomatic on an acoustic or electric bass, but do not always translate well to the voice. This discussion is not meant to dissuade arrangers from transcribing original bass parts, which can be quite effective when sung well. Rather, it is important to be aware of vocal issues that may arise due to this style of arrangement.

If however the bass part from the original song is not aurally distinct from the rest of the background music, the arranger should feel free to create his or her own bass part that functions in whatever way he or she deems necessary. Quite often this might take the form of a hybrid of the original bass part and new material designed to make the bass part less rhythmic, more stepwise, and generally more singable. An example of this can
be found in the bass part of Figure 3.4 from “Save Tonight,” which is reproduced by itself in Figure 3.13.

Figure 3.13. Bass Part of Figure 3.4.

This new part removes a few of the re-strikings of the same note, making it easier for a singer to articulate, but keeps the basic pitch outline of the original. This kind of hybrid provides a workable solution to the problem of incorporating an active original bass part.

Determining the independence of the original bass part is of course a matter of individual judgment. Many songs have bass parts that are sometimes clear-cut and sometimes not. It is also not a hard and fast law: perhaps the original song has a distinct bass part that is simply too difficult to sing or even to transcribe, or perhaps the independence of the bass line varies from section to section or even from measure to measure. In these cases, the arranger might wish to alter the bass part and it is his or her creative right to do so – the point here is that the role and function of the bass line should be carefully considered early on in the arranging process.

This decision will have an impact on the previously notated chord voicings. If the bass is indeed independent, it may not fit into the chord voicings selected by the arranger (this is particularly true in the case of a walking bass). In the case of “Save Tonight,” the bass line is not aurally different enough from the general background instrumentation to
warrant its treatment as a separate part. The arranger has therefore decided to incorporate the second bass part into the overall choral texture. Once the bass line is complete, the arranger may move on to the solo.

Solo

One of the defining characteristics of popular music is the dynamic between the lead or soloist and the background. At almost all times, the lead is more important than the background music. This is not to say that the background should not be musically interesting or intriguing – the opposite is true. However, a successful arrangement of popular music will maintain this secondary/primary relationship between the background music and the solo.

A common question encountered during the arranging process is “Should I notate the solo part on a separate staff in the arrangement?” If one’s intent is to only have a single person sing the solo at any given time the answer is no. There are several reasons for this answer, but the most important is the following: if the song is indeed popular, there is a good chance that students will have preexisting aural knowledge of the solo. In the author’s experience, it is easier to have a student sing a solo from a lyrics sheet – a piece of paper that contains only lyrics in poetic form and no musical notation – than to have the student sing from a notated solo. The reason for this phenomenon is the intensely difficult rhythms often contained within popular solos. For example, a close-as-possible transcription of the first four and a half bars of the solo from the first verse of “Save Tonight” follows below in Figure 3.14.
It is much easier for non-professional musicians to grasp these improvisatory-sounding rhythms aurally than from the above notation. Another related but no less important reason not to write out the solo is that it will simply occupy a large amount of the arranger’s time to perceive and precisely notate the solo. There is no reason to waste so much time on something that will probably not be helpful to students anyway. Even if the song is not widely known by members of the ensemble, it will be easier for them to practice the solo along with the original recording than it will be for them to attempt to learn the solo from staff notation.

Conversely, the arranger may prefer not to have any soloists and to incorporate the solo part into the “background” instead. To do this requires a skilled arrangement; dividing a solo into several parts by definition creates balance problems in the course of rehearsal and performance. One of the advantages of this kind of arrangement is that theoretically every student and part gets a chance to sing a piece of the solo. Also, if no exemplary or even capable soloist exists in the ensemble, spreading the solo out among the parts is a good way to mask this deficiency and still perform popular music. Once these decisions about the solo have been made, it is time to address the rhythmic features of the song.
Rhythm

Popular music is an inherently rhythmic genre of music. One of the important rhythmic qualities of popular music is the concept of the backbeat – beats two and four being more important than one and three. Many rhythmic commonalities exist amongst popular music: four-four is by far the most widespread time signature, four bar phrases are the most common phrase-level subdivision, and, most importantly for arrangements, each measure of any given section is typically imbued with what the author terms a group rhythmic pattern.

The group rhythmic pattern is not necessarily the rhythm played by only the guitar or even by the percussionist. Rather, it is defined as the amalgamation or summation of all the important elements of each instrument’s individual rhythm – it is the overall rhythmic profile of a single measure of the song. The group rhythmic pattern is usually one measure long, and typically repeats throughout an entire section. As with the classification of the role of the bass line, the identification of a group rhythmic pattern is a subjective decision. Some commonly occurring group rhythmic patterns appear in Figure 3.15.

Figure 3.15. Common Group Rhythmic Patterns.

\[
\begin{align*}
\frac{4}{4} & \quad \frac{\cdot\cdot\cdot\cdot}{\cdot\cdot\cdot\cdot} \\
\frac{\cdot\cdot\cdot\cdot}{\cdot\cdot\cdot\cdot} & \quad \frac{\cdot\cdot\cdot\cdot}{\cdot\cdot\cdot\cdot} \\
\frac{\cdot\cdot\cdot\cdot}{\cdot\cdot\cdot\cdot} & \quad \frac{\cdot\cdot\cdot\cdot}{\cdot\cdot\cdot\cdot}
\end{align*}
\]

In a transcription method arrangement, the arranger would not be concerned with the group rhythmic pattern. He or she would notate each rhythmic pattern that happens in each instrument, often with little regard for how these rhythms fit together. However, in
keeping with tactics of the creative method, the true arranger’s task is to identify what he or she believes to be the group rhythmic pattern. He or she will then use this information to craft the rhythms that appear in each part of the song.

The group rhythmic pattern may be different from section to section, but it typically repeats across sections (i.e. the verse may have a different group rhythmic pattern from the chorus, but typically all verses and all choruses have the same group rhythmic pattern). The arranger should add the group rhythmic patterns of all sections to his or her form chart. An example of this appears in Figure 3.16 (for the sake of space, information other than the group rhythmic patterns has been left out of Figure 3.16).

Figure 3.16. Form Chart with Group Rhythmic Patterns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Intro</th>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Chorus</th>
<th>Bridge</th>
<th>Outro</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group-Rhythmic Pattern</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the case of “Save Tonight,” the intro, verse, chorus, bridge, and outro all have the same group rhythmic pattern. In one respect, this makes the arranger’s and the singers’ jobs easier – there are not several rhythmically distinct sections to arrange and learn. On the other hand, this makes the arranger’s job more difficult, as he or she will have to find new ways to create variety in the arrangement.

Once the form chart is complete, the arranger may turn to music notation software and begin to put together actual sections of the arrangement. Using the blueprint of the extended form chart, the arranger can combine his or her chosen chord voicings with the group rhythmic pattern of every section. The arranger should divide the group rhythmic
pattern equally among all the parts by including all of the various rhythmic points of articulation in at least one part. An example of this kind of division appears in Figure 3.17, which uses the chord voicing and group rhythmic pattern from the verse of “Save Tonight.”

Figure 3.17. Division of Group Rhythmic Pattern Among Four Parts.

Every articulation of the group rhythmic pattern has been accounted for in at least one part. Furthermore, articulations that feel stronger to the arranger have been placed in more than one part to provide extra emphasis, such as the backbeat that occurs on beats two and four being placed simultaneously in the first tenor, baritone, and bass.

However, Figure 3.17 does not represent the only possibility. There are many other ways to spread the group rhythmic pattern out amongst the background parts. Another hypothetical division occurs in Figure 3.18.
There are many reasons to divide the group rhythmic pattern instead of simply presenting it whole in each part. Dividing the pattern creates the opportunity for textural variety. If each part sings the same rhythm for an entire section of a popular song, the resulting homophonic rhythmic monotony will be dull to the audience and will probably overwhelm the solo with its charged rhythmic nature. Dividing the group rhythmic pattern also results in easier parts to sing. Compare the first tenor part from Figure 3.17 with a first tenor part comprised solely of the group rhythmic pattern, found in Figure 3.19. The part from Figure 3.17 is much easier to sing with regard to rhythmic precision and vocal production.
Dividing the group rhythmic pattern also affords the arranger more chances for independent phrasing akin to classical polyphony. Providing each part with a different rhythmic outline will often create different points of dynamic emphasis, and provides the educator with the opportunity to work on the often difficult-to-grasp subject of independent line phrasing in the context of non-Renaissance music.

Dividing a group rhythmic pattern also allows a conductor to highlight his or her ensemble’s strengths and hide its weaknesses. Perhaps the ensemble’s first tenors are great at being rhythmic but not good at phrasing long notes. In this instance, the conductor would probably prefer Figure 3.18’s division to Figure 3.17’s, on account of its more active first tenor part. Perhaps the ensemble’s baritones sing exceptional sustained tones but do not read rhythms well. In this instance, the conductor would also prefer the figuration found in Figure 3.18 because of its lyrical baritone part.

The possibilities for division are plentiful, and an arranger should try several options before settling on any one. It is important to listen to many choices, and as these sixteenth note subdivisions can be difficult to play accurately on the piano, the author’s recommendation is to use the playback features of music notation software. This playback feature is often criticized by classical musicians for its lack of phrasing in long lines and its inhumanly precise rendering of rhythm. However, this mathematical nature is well suited to play popular music arrangements that include multiple parts with different sixteenth note subdivisions. As many synthesized voice sounds are not good at quick articulations, the author recommends listening to a synthesized piano sound, which gives a better rendering of rhythmic attacks in each part. It is important for the arranger
to also sing each hypothetical part, as this will help him or her to determine the ease and also the natural dynamic phrasing of the part.

Once the conductor has completed a segment of the song, the method may be repeated on each section of the song. At this point the arrangement, while mostly fleshed-out, may seem formulaic and not aurally compelling. The next step in the arranging process is the application of creative techniques.

Creative Techniques

A conductor-arranger should strive to make each arrangement of popular music artistically fulfilling for the singers and the audience in keeping with the goals of the creative method. While this seems like a daunting task, the arranger can apply tools and principles from his or her knowledge base of classical music in order to make the arrangement more musically fulfilling. Many of these techniques, such as the use of suspensions, inversions, and nonchord tones, are standard compositional tools that have existed since the Baroque era. Others, such as the use of extended chords and cascades, are newer techniques. The following discussion enumerates many compositional devices, both new and old, and how they can be applied to a vocal arrangement of popular music.

Suspensions and Other Nonchord Tones

The first compositional technique worth discussing is the suspension. A suspension is defined as the holding of one note while one or more other notes move into temporary dissonance with the suspended note. Suspensions have an important place in
the history of vocal music, as during the Renaissance they were the primary method of 
creating dissonance and in the Baroque period were often used for textual or dramatic 
expression. Conductors wishing to capitalize on these associations should feel free to use 
suspensions in arrangements of popular music.

In the case of “Save Tonight,” consider the original chord voicing of the verse, 
found in Figure3.10. This chord voicing provides two opportunities for four-three 
suspensions, as evidenced in Figure 3.20.

Figure 3.20 “Save Tonight” Verse Chord Voicing with Added Suspensions

It is important to see how suspensions can be added to the original chord voicing, 
because this is the underpinning for the bulk of the arrangement. Once the arranger 
realizes suspension opportunities on this level, he or she may add them to the actual 
arrangement. Figure 3.21 demonstrates this by adding these two suspensions into the 
group rhythmic pattern division from Figure 3.17.
Figure 3.21. “Save Tonight” Group Rhythmic Pattern Division with Added Suspensions

The arranger should bear in mind that this level of polyphonic complexity may not be appropriate for all sections of the song. In general, an arrangement should build in intricacy over time, and in fact might not ever reach the complicated pattern from Figure 3.21. How much complexity is appropriate at any given moment is a matter of personal discretion.

One of the benefits of incorporating suspensions into a popular arrangement is that the conductor may teach dynamic and phrasing concepts associated with suspensions, a concept that can be applied to many other styles of music. A concert program that includes popular music and music of the Renaissance will benefit from interconnected instruction. By creating this kind of educational crossover, the conductor can create a link between older classical music and popular music in the minds of his or her students, and hopefully generate mutual excitement about each style of music.

Other nonchord tones may be incorporated as well. Passing tones are especially useful in the bass, as they can be used to fill in the space in a leap of a third, thereby making the part easier to sing. Appoggiatura’s are a good way to add harmonic intrigue...
in the middle parts. The arranger can apply retardations (in essence, a suspension that resolves via upward motion instead of downward) to a V-vi progression found in “Save Tonight” (and commonly in popular music). Anticipation tones also work quite well and can be given to inner voices to create harmonic interest. Figure 3.22 contains these four types of nonchord tones, labeled and added to the chord voicing with suspensions from Figure 3.20. Once the arranger has tried a wide variety of nonchord tones, he or she can apply any or all of them to the group rhythmic pattern divisions of each section of the song, as in Figure 3.23.

Figure 3.22. Nonchord Tone Additions to Figure 3.20.

Figure 3.23. Nonchord Tones Applied to Group Rhythmic Pattern from Figure 3.17.
It is important to bear in mind that not every section needs to have the same nonchord tones. One way to create aural variety throughout a harmonically monotonous song such as “Save Tonight” is to use different nonchord tone patterns in the verse and the chorus. The arranger should consider the relative importance and overall dynamic level of each section when selecting which and how many nonchord tones to insert, and may want to save higher levels of musical sophistication for climactic verses and choruses. The same principle can be used with the next creative technique, inversions.

Inversions

Another way to add interest to an arrangement is to incorporate inversions. The easiest way to create variation in a song that has the same harmonic progression in the verse and chorus such as “Save Tonight” is to use chord voicings with inversions in either the verse of the chorus and chord voicings without inversions in the other. The author decided to include a I6 inversion in the chorus of “Save Tonight” in order to create this contrast. Figure 3.24 shows the verse and chorus chord voicings side-by-side.

Figure 3.24. Verse and Chorus Chord Voicings of “Save Tonight.”
A benefit of using this kind of inversional variation is that it allows for different nonchord tone options. For example, the I6 chord in the chorus allows for the inclusion a nicely symmetrical and smoother bass line via two passing tones, as demonstrated in Figure 3.25.

Figure 3.25. Passing Tones in Bass with I6 Chord.

For less experienced choirs, inversions can be used to decrease the range of vocal lines and make them easier to sing. The bass line in Figure 3.25 is too low for many high school singers, so a possible alternative is found below in Figure 3.26.

Figure 3.26. Alternative Inversions for Chorus of “Save Tonight.”

Using several kinds of inversions, the arranger can create many possible iterations of this simple progression, all of which have different strengths and weaknesses.
Inversions can be used to make popular arrangements moreaurally interesting and easier to sing.

**Extended Chords**

Extended chords, or diatonic tertian chords that exceed the seventh, are widespread in popular music. The most common is the major ninth chord, although the major eleventh is common as well. Popular music artists typically achieve these extended chords by simultaneously playing a power chord I (a power chord consists only of the root and the fifth) while strumming other chords. This collection of notes allows for the most common extended chords in popular music, the IV9 and the V11. Figure 3.27 demonstrates how this is achieved.

Figure 3.27. Extended Chords Achieved Through Power Chord I.

The conductor can capitalize on the prevalence of extended chords in popular music by inserting them into an arrangement. Figure 3.28 demonstrates how extended chords may be added to the basic chord voicing of the verse of “Save Tonight.”
Figure 3.28. Adding Extended Chords to the Chord Voicing of “Save Tonight.”

It is important to note that including extended chords does not necessitate an expansion of the number of voice parts. Figure 3.26 achieves these chords without exceeding a four part texture by only including the most important notes of an extended chord: the triad and the ninth or eleventh (alternatively, by leaving out the seventh in ninth chords and the seventh and ninth in eleventh chords). Furthermore, the voice leading required to achieve these chords is not terribly difficult. The most difficult part is the second tenor’s jump by a third to a half-step dissonance on the fourth chord; even this motion is not beyond the capabilities of high-school-level singers.

Passages with extended chords can often function like passages with nonchord tones. Compare for example the appoggiatura in the baritone part from Figure 3.22 and the dissonance in the baritone part from Figure 3.28, reproduced below in Figure 3.29. The parts have nearly identical alterations, even though they were achieved via different techniques. However realized, both changes offer an aural intrigue and sophistication not present in the original.
Although not technically an extended chord, seventh chords are also prevalent in popular music. Whereas the most commonly occurring seventh chord in classical music is the dominant V7, the most commonly occurring seventh chords in popular music are the minor seventh chord vi7 and the major seventh chord IV7. The chord vi7, as well as other minor seventh chords, can be easily inserted into most popular arrangements.

Figure 3.30 takes the group rhythmic pattern from Figure 3.23 and adds a minor seventh chord in the second tenor part.

In the same way that suspensions can link popular music to the musical style of the Renaissance and Baroque eras, extended chords form an aural bridge to a different
style of music: American choral compositions of the last thirty years. Arguably the two most popular (in terms of octavo sales and total performances) living American choral composers are Morten Lauridsen and Eric Whitacre. Their soundscapes are littered with extended chords, especially I9, IV9, and V11. Consider the piano reduction of the first two and a half bars of Lauridsen’s *O Nata Lux*, analyzed below in Figure 3.31.

Figure 3.31. First Two and a Half Bars of *O Nata Lux* by Morten Lauridsen.\(^{19}\)

These first bars of *O Nata Lux* are packed with extended chords, the most prevalent being I9 and V11 – two chords common to popular music. There are many reasons why the music of Lauridsen and Whitacre is quite trendy among younger students, and one of them is the extended chord soundscape it shares with popular music. The sound of these chords is already in students’ ears, and thus students both relate to them and find them emotional (as stated previously, one of the key features students find appealing in popular music is the perceived heightened emotional content) when they occur in classical choral music. The next creative technique is not as common in classical music.

\(^{19}\) Morten Lauridsen, *O Nata Lux, from Lux Aeterna* (Los Angeles, CA: Peer Music; 1997).
Cascades

The technique of cascading takes a chord and breaks it apart rhythmically into multiple voice parts. Cascading is a useful tool in two situations: when the group rhythmic pattern is primarily consecutive eighth notes, and when the arranger wants to create a texture break from what has come before.

Many popular songs feature group rhythmic patterns of running eighth notes, with an emphasis on the backbeat. This rhythm can become boring over time, as it offers little variation from the continual stream of eighth notes. Cascades are one way to fight this rhythmic monotony. Figure 3.32 applies the technique of cascading in three different ways to a hypothetical song that uses the same harmonic progression as “Save Tonight” but has a group rhythmic pattern of continuous eighth notes.
By filling in the rests in the above example, the arranger can create a cascade-suspension hybrid that results in dense and complex harmonies. This technique emphasizes the tension-release fundamental to suspensions in the context of a cascade. It is also a great way to create a texture that is simultaneously rhythmic active on every eighth note and legato with longer lines in each part. Cascade-suspension hybrids are demonstrated in Figure 3.33.
As in the above example, the use of cascade-suspension hybrids creates new suspensions and complex chords automatically. In the upward cascade-suspension hybrid of Figure 3.33, the Baritone holds over an E on beat three of the first bar while the bass moves to F. This suspension temporarily creates a IV7, one of the most common seventh chords in popular music. On the third beat of the second bar of that same example, the baritone holds over an E while the bass moves to G, momentarily producing a I six-four chord before resolving to V. In the fourth beat of that same bar, the first tenor part’s prolonged C automatically generates a four-three suspension against the bass and
baritone motion. The simple act of applying an upward cascade-suspension hybrid to the original chord voicing produced all of these suspensions and complex chords.

The second use of cascades is to create a textural shift from what has come before. If a section of the song features prolonged and independent rhythmic activity in each part at a forte dynamic, shifting suddenly to a unified group cascade at a piano dynamic creates a satisfying and emotional contrast to the previous section. Figure 3.34 uses a hypothetical arrangement to showcase this technique.

Figure 3.34. Cascade as Textural Shift.

Texture Variation

Even though popular songs do not often alter textures from section to section, there is no reason an arrangement cannot use this technique. By texture, the author means the general interaction and interrelatedness of the background parts. There are a number of ways to accomplish variation in the overall texture from section to section –
changing which parts are singing or leaving out a part or more, or shifting from rhythmically-independent polyphony to homophony. This is an important technique in establishing creativity, because popular music largely features no textural variation due to its insistence on the importance of the solo. Duchan writes, “Unexpected textural variations reveal flashes of originality because they disrupt the relationship between the lead and its accompaniment.”

In the case of “Save Tonight,” the author had previously identified that the second verse and chorus are exactly the same as the first verse and chorus and would benefit from modification. The author has elected to change the texture of the second verse in order to differentiate it from the first verse. Figure 3.35 displays the eight-measure pattern used in the first verse and the second verse.

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20 Duchan, *Collegiate A Cappella: Emulation and Originality*, 492.
Figure 3.35. Texture Variation from First Verse to Second Verse.

The bass part drops out for most of the second verse, creating the desired textural shift. The absence of the bass makes its reappearance as a pickup gesture in the last measure of Figure 3.35 more exciting and noteworthy. In addition, some of the rhythmic and nonchord tone-related complexity has been removed from the baritone part to match the lighter texture.

Modifying the ranges of all parts either higher or lower also creates an effective texture change. An example of this appears below in Figure 3.36, a hypothetical arrangement where three parts suddenly switch into falsetto on a downward cascade-suspension hybrid. This is alternated with a bass line on a hum, which suddenly sounds lower even though it is in the middle of the bass register due to the range shift.
Dynamics

A key difference between music in the standard choral repertoire and popular songs is the presence of small-scale or phrase-level dynamics in the former and not in the latter. Dynamics appear in popular music on a section-wide level, often only by the addition or subtraction of instruments; popular musicians often achieve dynamic contrast by variation of textures. “Save Tonight” is no exception to this rule. The third verse is quieter than the rest because the percussion and bass have dropped out; there is no real difference in decibel in either the singer’s voice or in the guitar from what has come before. Likewise, the last chorus is loudest primarily because the bass and percussion reenter, an additional solo doubling occurs, and a guitar solo is added on top of the already dense texture.

Therefore, when arranging popular music, the arranger should start with macro-dynamics. What sections are loudest, and what are softest? This goes back to the form chart made during the first listening to the song. The arranger, if he or she wishes to keep
the original large-scale dynamic plan, should mark these dynamics into the score section by section.

However, the absence of micro-dynamics in popular music is no reason not to include them in arrangements of popular music; the voice is not an instrument that is meant to perform at one constant dynamic level eight bars at a time. Adding small-scale dynamics that indicate phrasing, suspensions, and overall tension/release structures are helpful to singers, make the rehearsal process go faster, and most importantly add another level of musical sophistication to an arrangement. Since most popular songs feature repeating two or four measure patterns, these micro-dynamics can be built into the repetitions. Figure 3.37 adds dynamic markings (based upon the suspension principle of crescendo through greatest tension and decrescendo after release) to the second verse pattern from Figure 3.35.

Figure 3.37. Adding Dynamics to the Second Verse.
These measures feature the same overall dynamic plan for each part – a crescendo to the downbeat of the second measure followed by a half-bar long decrescendo and crescendo. This kind of dynamic unanimity does not have to be the norm – as the parts become more independent and polyphonic, dynamic high points can occur in different places from part to part. Figure 3.38 takes the active group rhythmic pattern division from Figure 3.30 and applies dynamics to it using the same tension/release principle. In Figure 3.38, each part has a different micro-dynamic plan. This dynamic interlocking results in an aurally engaging texture with an innate ebb and flow.

Figure 3.38. Adding Dynamics to Active Verse Group Rhythmic Pattern.

Syllabification

Syllabification is the technique of choosing syllables for the background parts to sing. Often these are neutral, or meaningless, syllables that are chosen only for their aural qualities. Because of this neutral quality, the temptation will be to think of these syllables as unimportant; nothing could be further from the truth. The selection of
syllables requires great thought, as it can have an impact on dynamics, formal considerations, vocal production, articulation, and even the rehearsal process.

Throughout this section, the author refers to potential syllables using bracketed symbols from the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). However, musical figures will use not use these IPA designations, and will instead use syllables that are intended for a primarily English-speaking choir. Therefore, what appears as [du] in the body of text will appear as “doo” in the arrangement of “Save Tonight.”

The reason for this dichotomy is to be able to discuss these syllables in a standardized way: “jsun” might sound completely different when imagined and produced by singers who speak different first languages, or even by native-English speakers from different regions of the United States. However, the author has found that using IPA symbols in arrangements intended for student-choirs whose singers are not fluent in IPA can produce unnecessary trouble in the rehearsal process. Therefore, “English-ized” syllables will appear in the arrangement, and IPA symbols will appear in the body of the text.

Duchan has covered the plethora of potential background syllables in his essay *Collegiate A Cappella*. He identifies a syllabic shift that occurred in this style of music in the 1990’s: whereas syllables that originated in barbershop and doo-wop such as [du], [ba], [bap], [wa], and [o] dominated pre-1990, syllables that mimic guitar sounds such as

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21 This is not meant to discourage arrangers from the use of IPA. In fact, popular music can be a practical way to familiarize students with IPA symbols. Since backgrounds are mostly comprised of repeated neutral syllables and not meaningful words, marking them in only IPA does not detract from the text underlay. Of course there is an initial learning barrier with this method, as students will have to learn what each symbol means, but the constant syllabic repetition that occurs in arrangements of popular music can help students to memorize sonic associations with IPA symbols.
[50n], [3In], and [5Igə] came into vogue after 1990. The shift in syllables coincides with the rise of the transcription method – as collegiate *a cappella* groups sought to exactly mimic the sounds of popular music, they invented new syllables suited to this purpose. It is important for the arranger to have a wide variety of syllables from which to choose. Just because syllables such as [50n] and [5Igə] are more mimetic than [du] and [ba] does not mean that they are inferior. Syllables should be chosen only for their ability to increase the appeal of the arrangement.

The first decision about syllabification should be whether or not the arrangement will be polysyllabic or monosyllabic. Polysyllabic arrangements feature different syllables in different parts at the same time, while monosyllabic arrangements feature (roughly) the same syllable throughout all parts at the same time. These terms are not meant to describe the arrangement as a whole, but rather a vertical slice of any moment or section of the arrangement. There are many benefits to monosyllabic arranging, such as an easier ability to tune sonorities through a unified vowel and an increased potential for blend. However, there are also benefits to polysyllabic arranging, such as increased polyphonic distinction between parts and more easily discernable rhythmic articulation. In an educational setting, monosyllabic arrangements provide more opportunity for teachable concepts that carry over into other kinds of classical singing, such as the opportunity to work on pure vowels achieved via classical vocal tone, vowel unification, and overall ensemble. Monosyllable-ism also tends to be more in keeping with the creative method, while polysyllable-ism lends itself better to a transcription method.

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22 Ibid, 486.
arrangement. However, both methods are valid and are also not exclusionary; a single arrangement could feature both monosyllabic and polysyllabic sections.

In the case of “Save Tonight,” the author elected to go primarily with a monosyllabic arrangement. One of the prime reasons for this is that the parts are frequently related, functioning as a collective unit instead of separate pieces. Furthermore, the dynamic structure of “Save Tonight” is quite clear, and the author wanted to use syllabification to help enact this dynamic plan.

Vowels in particular can assist the arranger in achieving dynamic contrast. In general, vowels increase in innate volume the more open and forward they are. This corresponds neatly to the International Phonetic Alphabet’s chart of English vowels, reproduced below in Table 3.5 with added volume indications.

**Table 3.5. IPA English Vowel Chart with Volume Indications.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IPA Designation</th>
<th>Loud</th>
<th>Central</th>
<th>Back</th>
<th>Soft</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>[i], [i]</td>
<td>[u], [o]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>[e], [ɛ]</td>
<td>[ʌ], [o], [ɑ]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open</td>
<td>[æ], [a]</td>
<td>[a]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 3.5 demonstrates, [u] is the quietest vowel, while [a] and [æ] are the loudest; [o], [ɛ], and [ɛ] lie in the middle of the dynamic range. The arranger can use this knowledge when selecting syllables. Below in Figure 3.39 is the form chart of “Save Tonight” with dynamics and generic vowels.
The quieter sections have closed vowels such as [u] and humming while the louder sections have open vowels such as [o] and [a]. The arranger can also account for crescendos, as in the case of the bridge. By shifting from the closed vowel [u] to the open vowel [o] in the middle of the section the author has built in a natural crescendo. Figure 3.40 shows this change in the actual music.

This gradual opening of vowels will help the singers achieve the four-bar crescendo. It is important to note that the vowels do not have to be opened simultaneously across parts. An interesting way to create differentiation between the
parts is to open the vowels at different times; Figure 3.40 uses this technique by opening to [o] at three different times in the first tenor, second tenor, and bass. Furthermore, the first tenor’s premature opening to [a] before the arrival of the chorus serves to accent their pickup eighth notes. Vowels are not the only consideration when it comes to syllabification – the arranger should also consider many consonant options.

When selecting consonants, the arranger should ponder how percussive each respective section of the arrangement should be. If a section is rhythmically active and polyphonic and needs distinct articulation, the arranger should choose percussive consonants such as [p], [b], [t], [d], [k], and [g], which IPA designates “stops.” Voiced stops like [b] and [d] are easier to sing in quick succession, and this is why they are prevalent in the neutral syllables of popular style group singing genres such as doo-wop and barbershop. If the section does not need clear articulation, nasal consonants such as [m] and [n] may help singers articulate some rhythms without disrupting the legato texture. In general, fricative consonants such as [f], [v], [s], [z], [ʃ], and [ʒ] are dangerous because, unlike stops, fricatives can be prolonged indefinitely. The use of fricatives can disrupt rhythmic ensemble by inviting vocal onsets of unequal length. This tendency is exacerbated by popular music’s frequent sixteenth-note level subdivisions; it is difficult enough to maintain an ensemble’s sense of pulse without the additional problems created by fricative production.

However some fricatives, if produced quickly, are quite useful in a percussive section. Fricatives are used frequently in guitar-mimicking sounds such as the aforementioned [ʂun], [ʂɨn], and [ʂɪŋ], and these syllables enable singers to rapidly rearticulate a single note. In the case of “Save Tonight,” the author wanted to draw
distinctions between the active rhythmic parts and thus mainly chose syllables that begin with [d]. During the quieter and non-percussive parts of the song, such as the bridge and third verse, the author elected to go with [m] or to remove the consonant entirely.

Another syllabification option is not to use neutral syllables at all, but rather to use the lyrics from the solo. One or more parts can sing solo lyrics. A particularly striking effect occurs when all of the background parts join together to sing solo lyrics in homophony; Duchan labels this the “momentary choir” technique. He writes:

After spending most of a song singing instrumentally functioning background syllables, having the entire group explode, *fortissimo*, with dense harmonies along with the soloist, singing the same lyrics at the same time, creates a dramatic statement.\(^{23}\)

In the case of “Save Tonight,” the author opted to use the “momentary choir” technique for the reasons Duchan enumerated in only one spot in the arrangement—the last measure. The final two measures of the arrangement appear in Figure 3.41.

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**Figure 3.41. Last Two Measures – “Momentary Choir” Technique.**

\(^{23}\) Ibid, 493.
The use of “momentary choir” here creates a dramatic ending to the song. At its best, the “momentary choir” technique can have extra musical implications. This is true of the passage found in Figure 3.41, which uses the lyrics to create text-painting. By having every part sing the word “gone” for only one quarter note followed quickly by a quarter note rest, the arrangement draws attention to the silence that follows. This silence is meant to emphasize or even represent the departure of the protagonist in the song – “tomorrow I’ll be gone.”

Insertion of lyrics into the background part does not have to include the entire group – lyrics can be inserted into individual parts to provide harmonic emphasis, add stress to a particular lyric, or to reinforce the solo, either at pitch or in octaves. The author elected to accentuate the solo in this fashion in the final chorus of “Save Tonight,” by doubling the solo up an octave in the second tenor part. Figure 3.42 shows two measures that contain this lyric doubling. Doubling the solo in this way gives the second tenors a chance to sing soloistically, and also helps bring prominence dynamically to the solo in this loud, dense texture.
Tempo Variation

 Tempo variation is rare in popular music, but the use of *rubato* and marked tempo shifts can be quite effective in arrangements of popular music. The alteration of tempi can be an effective tool in heightening the emotional content of a popular song. In the case of “Save Tonight,” the arranger wanted to exploit the *piano* and sorrowful third verse, so he included a *ritard* in the bridge into a slower tempo in the beginning of the third verse. As the build-up to the final chorus begins, the author includes a gradual accelerando back to the original tempo that provides added excitement. These tempo

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24 As with suspensions, the author has found that teaching *rubato* in the context of popular music serves as an entry point into discussing *rubato* in more difficult classical music. In the classical world, an emotional context is often ascribed to *rubato* – the slight tempo shifts usually coincide with text painting or phrasing that delivers a heightened emotional context. Because of their emotional associations with popular music, students are easily able to feel where the emotional pull is in a popular song, especially in a sophisticated arrangement that features frequent tension and release via dissonance. By teaching *rubato* in a popular context, the conductor can provide students with an aurally-familiar entry point into an otherwise difficult concept.
changes are showcased in Figure 3.43. The use of accelerando from a temporarily slower tempo to the original fast tempo in Figure 3.43 enlivens the arrival of the third chorus.

Figure 3.43. Tempo Changes in Bridge and Third Verse of “Save Tonight.”

Formal Expansion and Diminution

Creating aural intrigue through formal elasticity is a concept that is at least four hundred years old. One of the key features that made the music of Franz Josef Haydn so appealing was his apparent delight in toying with the audience’s expectations of formal
structures and lengths. This technique may also be applied to the arranging of popular music.

The most common formal variation is the contraction of one or more of a song’s segments. This is most frequently applied to a lengthy instrument-only bridge, a section that creates an uncomfortable dynamic between the soloist and the background singers. Instrument-only bridges are usually just long enough (usually eight or sixteen measures) to make it seem as if a soloist is done singing, but also just short enough to make the absence of the soloist (especially if they are physically placed in front of the ensemble) seem awkward and too brief. Another problem is that these instrument-only bridges often center on a guitar solo – something that is difficult to reproduce with voices without a comedic effect.

“Save Tonight” has an instrumental-only bridge that encounters this problem: it is of sufficient length and also includes a guitar solo. In this case, the author elected to shrink the length of the instrumental-only bridge from eight measures to four measures. The author also removed the group rhythmic pattern and introduced a downward cascade for the first time in order to create a complete textural break from what came before. Coupled with a ritard to a fermata and a closed mouth [m] syllable, the sudden change in sound is quite striking and effectively sets up the quiet third verse that follows. Figure 3.44 displays the new shortened bridge section and the first measure of the third verse.
When considering formal diminution, the arranger must first and foremost consider what section comes after the section he or she would like to shrink, and more importantly, what role that section plays in the overall form of the song. Is the following section piano and thoughtful, or is it bombastic and climactic? Answering these questions will help the arranger decide what kind of music should serve in place of an originally larger section.

A less common but equally compelling alteration of the form of the song is achieved via expansion. There are two options for doing so – the arranger can take material found in the original song and develop it further, or he or she can add outside music to the original song. The reasons for formal expansion are plentiful – a section of the song might be particularly compelling and worthy of more development, a song might be too short to stand alone in performance, the director might want to add length to a section in order to feature more soloists, or perhaps the arranger would like to have a section of the song features the choir as a whole without the soloist. The most common
occurrence of this technique in arrangements of popular music is the expansion of materials found in the bridge to create a dramatic build-up to the climactic final chorus. In the case of “Save Tonight,” the author feels that no section needs expanding.

**Splicing**

Splicing is the insertion of material not found in the original song into an arrangement of the original song. The primary benefit of splicing is creation of aural variety; the insertion of non-original material can singlehandedly create contrast between two otherwise identical choruses or verses. It is also the sign of a sophisticated arrangement, as successful splicing requires great skill to achieve. Duchan writes, “The prevalence of musical allusions in collegiate a cappella [i.e. arrangements of popular music] suggests…an appreciation of intertextuality’s complexity.” Splicing can take many forms – a solo from another song can be sung simultaneously with the original solo, a well-known chord progression or background riff can be borrowed, or an entire section of a different song may be inserted. These kinds of splicing can be overt or covert. Duchan writes:

> Whether or not the audience recognizes the quotation and appreciates its significance depends partly on how apparent it is, on whether it is executed by a soloist (making a direct and apparent association with the secondary song) or only within the background parts (remaining ‘insider knowledge,’ a feat of musical fusion of which the singers, themselves, are proud but that remains mostly hidden to listeners.”

As Duchan notes, the degree to which the audience recognizes the addition of a second song depends on how the arranger treats the new material. Since many popular songs

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25 Ibid, 492.

26 Ibid, 492.
share similar chord progressions, the most common type of splicing is the insertion of an additional solo.

When selecting a solo to splice, the arranger has several options. For the point of view of the audience, one of the most pleasing splices is the incorporation of a different song by the same artist or band. Other options include incorporating a solo by a different artist that shares poetic ideas with the original song, integrating a solo that is a complete contrast from the original (often for the sake of humor), or assimilating a song that has nothing to do with the original song for musical-only purposes. When splicing only a solo, it is important to make sure that the harmonic progression of the spliced song is similar to the harmonic progression of the original song. It does not have to be identical, but the arranger should make sure that the spliced solo at least interlocks with the harmonic progression of the original song.

In the case of “Save Tonight,” the author wished to distinguish the final climactic chorus from the preceding choruses, and elected to insert as an additional solo a portion of the song “Here’s to the Night,” by the band Eve 6. The lyrics of “Here’s to the Night” are about cherishing a night spent with friends, and thus mesh well with the message of “Save Tonight.” It also features a delightfully similar lyric: “Here’s to goodbye, tomorrow’s gonna come too soon” from “Here’s to the Night” and “Come tomorrow I’ll be gone” from “Save Tonight.” Although the original harmonic progression of “Here’s to the Night” is different from the harmonic progression of “Save Tonight,” the notes of the spliced solo still fit into the original chords. A section of the final chorus that includes this splice can be found in Figure 3.45, which leaves out the background syllabification for the sake of spacing.
Figure 3.45. Final Chorus of “Save Tonight” with “Here’s to the Night” Splice.

Unlike the solo of the original song, the arranger should include musical notation for the spliced solo. Writing out even a rough approximation of the important pitches of the spliced solo allows the arranger to see how well the spliced solo fits into the harmonic progression of the original solo. Furthermore, the spliced solo is much shorter in length than the original solo and thus does not present the same headaches of notating an full-
length solo. Lastly and perhaps most importantly, splicing an additional solo into a song is a creative formal decision that requires notational clarity so that the additional soloist knows exactly when, where, and for how long to sing the supplemental solo.

Splicing can also occur in the entire background. By referencing a well-known classical piece of music, this kind of splicing can create a faux dramatic and often comedic contrast to what surrounds it. An example of this can be found in Figure 3.46, a hypothetical arrangement that borrows material from Strauss’ *Also Sprach Zarathustra* to create a dramatic introduction.

Figure 3.46. Hypothetical Splicing of a Classical Piece into a Popular Arrangement.
A frequent question encountered during the arranging process is, “Should the arrangement be produced on notation software? With all of the repeated measures, it only consists of twenty or so total measures.” The answer to this question is a resounding yes, and there are many reasons why it is important to make an arrangement of popular music look as professional as possible.

By arranging popular music for his or her choir, the conductor is fighting an academic stigma that is admittedly dissipating but still exists. By producing as-professional-as-possible a score, the conductor is doing his or her part to legitimize the performance of popular music in an educational setting.

There are also many benefits in the rehearsal process to having a professional-appearing score. Most of the difficulty in reading a popular arrangement lies in immediately understanding the road map of the song, particularly with regard to repeat signs. A clean-looking computer-produced arrangement will result in fewer errors on initial readings. Furthermore, educational transference of concepts (such as the previously discussed dynamic connotations of suspensions) will be easier if the arrangement of popular music looks like other published scores with which students are engaging. Lastly, having a professional score also legitimizes the song and the process of performing popular music for students. By having the score appear as “classical” as possible, students will be less tempted to disregard classical choral concepts such as vowel production, tone, and volume.

A list containing some general guidelines for how to make an arrangement appear professional follows:
1) Try to include all repeated areas on the same staff, or at least on the same page. For example, if one four-measure-long section is repeated three times, try to place it on the same staff so students do not have to look back-and-forth at different staff systems.

2) Make sure the font for the text underlay is large enough to be read.

3) Provide rehearsal numbers or section identifications in the score. Due to the neutral syllables, there are generally fewer natural marking-places that are easily named in arrangements of popular music. Clearly identifying “Rehearsal B” or “Verse Two” in the score will make the rehearsal process smoother.

4) Make sure items added on or outside the staff of each part such as dynamics, repeat indications, lyrics, and section identifications do not overlap.

5) If one staff divides into two rhythmically distinct parts, consider dividing it into two staves with one part per staff. This will make both parts easier to read.

6) Notate every syllable and provide slurs over two or more consecutive notes that share the same syllable (so long as this slur does not interfere with #5). If the entirety of a section is on the same syllable, the temptation will be to write something like “doo…” underneath the first note and leave the rest of the notes without text underlay. This is both confusing and lazy, and due to the way that notation software places notes with and without syllables will often result in inconsistent note/beat/measure spacing. Uneven metric positioning is a common cause of unanticipated rehearsal mistakes. Failing to label the syllable of each note also precludes the possibility of a melisma on groups of notes, which may make the line easier to sing with regard to vocal coordination.

7) Label each staff clearly with the name of a voice section and not a popular music instrument.
Mixed Choir

Throughout this chapter the author has dealt primarily with a TTBB ensemble. This decision was made for the sake of consistency, and not because this kind of music should only be performed with all-male ensembles. There are a few considerations not previously addressed that apply specifically to mixed and SSAA choirs that warrant mention.

When arranging for mixed choir, the increased range potential can be used to great effect to achieve texture and register variation. Particularly effective are passages where one gender drops out of the texture momentarily only to reenter to create a climactic statement. This technique, particularly meaningful when combined with the technique of incorporating solo lines into the background, is demonstrated in a hypothetical adaptation of “Save Tonight” in Figure 3.47.

Figure 3.47. Gender Drop-Out as Climactic Effect.
The arranger can also use this increased range to create a greater contrast between open and closed chord voicings. When working with six or eight parts, the arranger may select a wide spacing in the men’s parts (typically more than an octave) and a closed or tight spacing in the women’s parts (typically less than a sixth). This spacing is commonly employed in currently-popular American-composed choral music in order to create extended chords with harmonically stable triads in the men’s parts and dissonances in the women’s parts. Figure 3.48 demonstrates both of these techniques by presenting three series of possible chord voicings. When working with mixed choir, the arranger should experiment with many chord voicings to achieve a greater dynamic and textural contrast.

Figure 3.48. Open and Closed Chord Possibilities in Mixed Voicing.
Women’s Choir

The biggest difference between arranging popular music for a men’s choir and a women’s choir is the role of the bass line. Whereas male singers can more or less reproduce original bass lines at pitch, female singers cannot, nor should they have to. Thus, a creative solution is required when arranging a song that features a largely independent and aurally-important bass line. One potential solution is simply to move the bass part up into a comfortable register for an alto. The main problem with this approach is that the lower part of the female register from approximately F3-B3 is typically quieter than the corresponding F2-B2 part of the male register. A solution to this problem is to take the original bass part and divide it amongst several parts in a middle register, giving the bass line more dynamic power. Figure 3.49 takes the bass part from Figure 3.12 and divides it into three parts while adding a few new pitches to make it more harmonically interesting. With this technique, the arranger can build an entire section out of the bass line, effectively incorporating it into the texture without forcing the second altos to articulate quickly in their lowest register.
Another distinction between arranging for men’s and women’s choir is the more limited range possessed by a typical women’s choir. Whereas a typical collegiate men’s choir has access to a range from E\textsubscript{2} – D\textsubscript{5} or E\textsubscript{5} via the use of falsetto, a typical collegiate women’s choir has access to a range of A\textsubscript{3} – A\textsubscript{5}. This smaller range limits the number of chord voicing options and range variation possibilities. This is not a valid reason to be discouraged from arranging popular music for female choirs – some of the most successful popular music groups of the last twenty years such as *Destiny’s Child*, *Salt-n-Pepa*, and *The Spice Girls* have been all female. The arranger should not have problems with this smaller range, but should merely be cognizant of it when contemplating chord voicings and texture shifts.

Aside from these two differences, arranging popular music for women’s choir is largely the same as arranging for men’s choir. Conductors should practice arranging for many kinds of ensembles, as this is the best way to learn firsthand what works well and what does not.
Conclusion

Conductors should feel entitled and empowered to arrange popular music for their own ensembles. The lack of published arrangements of popular music coupled with the educational benefits of doing so make this a worthwhile endeavor. Due to its many educational benefits, teachers should strive to use the creative method of arranging instead of the transcription method. As most popular songs are formulaic and follow normal conventions and practices, arrangers can apply the same delineated approach to many popular songs with great success.
CHAPTER 4
REHEARSAL TECHNIQUES FOR POPULAR MUSIC

As with any subgenre of choral music, arrangements of popular music demand slightly different vocal and ensemble-wide techniques than selections from the traditional canon of repertoire. Specialized rehearsal methods can aid in the teaching and performing of popular music. Fortunately, many of these techniques are already widely known among choral conductors and only require slight (or even no) modification in order to assist with the rehearsing of popular music. Other techniques however are less familiar and are worthy of elucidation.

Standard Classical Teaching Techniques Applied to Popular Music

Solfege

Solfege is a common tool for choral conductors and its application to popular music yields many benefits. In general, popular music is distinct from most classical music in that it is often entirely diatonic and features no chromatically altered tones. “Save Tonight” serves as an example of this principle. There is not a single chromatically altered tone in the entirety of this song – only the seven notes of C major are present. Even songs that are ostensibly minor-based rarely resort to chromatically
altered tones that make up the harmonic or melodic minor scales, opting instead for a reliance on the identical-to-relative-major natural minor scale.

This reliance on diatonicism means that popular music serves as an excellent introduction to moveable-do solfege, especially with a beginning-level group for whom solfege is a new or difficult concept. Because of the repetitive nature of popular music, students will be exposed to small amounts of solfege in repeating two- or four-measure chunks. This kind of reinforcement can help students who are new to the concept have repeated aural, and not just theoretical, exposure to solfege. As an example of this principle, consider the following mini lesson plan that features the author’s arrangement of “Save Tonight:”

**Hypothetical Lesson Plan Using Solfege**

Before class, write on the board a vertical pattern of solfege syllables and corresponding pitch names in C major, as seen in Figure 4.1. Aurally establish that the pitch C is Do, by having the choir sing a unison (or in octaves) C on the syllable Do while pointing to Do on the board. Ask students to sing Re by pointing to it, and then ask them to sing Do again (teachers who use Curwen hand signs may use this instead of the board method). Repeat the process with several different solfege syllables, always moving by step or third; the conductor should freely improvise melodies simply by pointing to the syllables. Once all of the syllables have been covered and students can sing them accurately with relative ease, ask students to sing the note names instead of the syllables. Repeat the entire process with note names. It is important to include note names in the process because doing so serves as a guide to help students who can read
music but are not proficient in solfège translate the syllables into their own part. To create variety, the teacher may also divide the choir and have some students sing solfège while others sing note names.

Figure 4.1. Solfège Training Exercise.

After students can fluently do note names and solfège syllables, distribute the chord voicing to the verse and the chorus from “Save Tonight,” reproduced in Figure 4.2. Ask students, “Who can identify the first syllable that the basses sing?” Repeat the process as necessary for other parts. Ask the easiest part, the first tenors, to sing their melody alone on solfège. Add the other parts via gradual downward layering. By adding the parts one-by-one, the conductor gives each part a chance to hear both how it functions with the others and also how the harmonies are constructed.
Once all parts are proficient, other musical elements such dynamics can be added. Ask students, “What do you think is the most important note of your part’s group of four notes in the verse?” Once the student answers, instruct: “When we sing the pattern this time, let’s make the _____ (first, second, third, or fourth) half note the loudest we sing.” After performance, ask the students whether they liked singing the music this way. Repeat the process with the input of students from different parts. By encouraging students to experiment with phrasing in this context, not only is the teacher reinforcing solfege skills but he or she is also encouraging creative thinking about dynamics and shaping.\(^1\)

Once students are proficient on the chord voicings, the conductor can progress to the actual arrangement. It is important to begin with the basic chord voicings instead of

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\(^1\) This activity fulfills the often difficult-to-obtain-in-a-traditional-choral-rehearsal sixth and seventh standards for Music Education of the National Association for Music Education: 6) Listening to, analyzing, and describing music and 7) Evaluating music and music performances.
the arrangement, because the arrangement will feature fast and active rhythms that make both the identification and articulation of solfege syllables difficult. However, the conductor can still apply solfege to parts of the song that are slower or less active. Even when singing neutral syllables, the conductor can still ask students solfege-related questions if they are struggling with pitches, such as: “What solfege syllable would you sing on that note?” The conductor can also slow the tempo of a given section so that solfege can be articulated.

The use of solfege also provides a gateway into the discussion of modes in the choral rehearsal. It is not uncommon for popular songs to be in mode (which by definition means that the song is still entirely diatonic). A list of popular songs in each mode appears below in Table 4.1.

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2 Rare popular songs can also be used to teach non-diatonic scales. There is even a popular song that uses the octatonic set – “Get Low” by Lil Jon & The East Side Boyz and Ying Yang Twins. The song’s bass line C-Db-Eb, E♯, the basic half-step–whole-step–half-step set of the octatonic scale, recurs throughout the song. The lyrics of “Get Low” make it unsuitable for an academic environment, but it serves as proof that popular songs can be used as teaching vehicles for all kinds of theoretical musical concepts.
Table 4.1. Popular Songs in Modes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Dorian</th>
<th>Mixolydian</th>
<th>Lydian</th>
<th>Phrygian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

A teacher wishing to program a modal pop song could use the previously described on-the-board solfege method as well. The key is to use the solfege of the key signature, so that the major-scale intervallic quality of the syllables is maintained.

Consider the common progression in A Dorian, voiced for an SATB choir in Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3. Common Progression in A Dorian.
This progression tonicizes the pitch A, even though it is not in A major or A minor. The raised sixth degree F# coupled with the otherwise A natural minor scale makes this passage A Dorian. In order to reflect the A minor-ish sound, the conductor might be tempted to leave the key signature empty and simply notate the F sharps as they arise in each part. However, in Figure 4.4, the author elects to put F# in the key signature. This means that students can use major-scale solfege from G major to sightread the progression in A Dorian.

Figure 4.4. A Dorian Progression with G Major Solfege.

Before sightreading this progression, the conductor should give students an aural grounding for working in Dorian by tonicizing Re while improvising solfege melodies by pointing to the board. This is accomplished via frequent repetition of Re, the interval La-Re, and brief plainchant-esque cadential figures like Fa-Mi-Re, Mi-Do-Re, and So-Fa-Mi-
Re. After singing several of these figures, the conductor should ask, “What pitch feels like home?” Hopefully, some students will say Re and some will say Do. By using the “feels like home” test, the conductor can distinguish between Re, which should feel like a resting tone, and Do, which is the key signature grounding. The conductor can then apply this principle to the Dorian progression from Figure 4.4, and draw the aural and theoretical distinction between G (Do) and A (Re). This modal solfège teaching technique can be applied to other modes as well.

The benefit of teaching modes through popular music is that students are already familiar with the soundscape of the mode through their previous exposure to the popular song. By drawing on this aural familiarity, the conductor can establish a firmer understanding based on aural memory and not just theoretical conjecture. Too often, modes are conceived of only intellectually and not aurally, and this is one of the reasons why students struggle understanding them. By using popular songs, teachers can overcome this shortcoming and give students an understanding of the modes they already hear in their daily lives.³

Because of the diatonic nature of popular music, the pitches in an arrangement of popular music are not usually difficult to produce. The same is not true of the complicated rhythms found popular music.

³ Although they are outside the scope of choral music, movie soundtracks, particularly those belonging to epic action movies, are probably the foremost source of modal music being performed and listened to today. From the Dorian theme used to portray the horse-riders in the Lord of the Rings trilogy to the Mixolydian below-deck Irish dance scene in Titanic, modal music abounds in movies. In a choral context, the playing and identification of these tracks can serve as a supplemental modal teaching tool.
Rhythmic Exercises

One of the primary sources of difficulty in arrangements of popular songs for students is the rhythmic complexity inherent to the genre. In particular, the frequent use of sixteenth-note level rhythmic subdivisions and ties that result in syncopation cause consternation. One of the ways to familiarize students with sixteenth-note level subdivisions is to incorporate them into the rehearsal process as a warm-up exercise.

Consider the following excerpt from the baritone line of “Save Tonight,” reproduced in Figure 4.5. This part is rhythmically difficult, as it contains syncopation and sixteenth-note subdivisions. However, the conductor can give his or her ensemble exposure to this rhythmic pattern through a warm-up exercise.

Figure 4.5. Baritone Line from “Save Tonight.”

Consider the following commonly used warm up: the conductor writes one full measure in common time of sixteenth notes with the syllables “one-ee-and-uh” on the board, as seen in Figure 4.6.

Figure 4.6. Warm-Up with Sixteenth Note Subdivision.
After students are comfortable on the above rhythm, the conductor may create new rhythmic patterns by erasing selected notes but keeping the overall pulse the same. This technique is used in Figure 4.7, which demonstrates one potential sequence of erased notes.

Figure 4.7. Subsequent Erasing Applied to Figure 4.6.

By erasing various sixteenth notes a few at a time, the conductor can get his or her students to read complicated rhythms with relative ease. In addition to erasing, the conductor can add ties to various sixteenth notes to achieve the same effect. Figure 4.8 demonstrates this method.
By combining these two methods, the conductor can have students reproduce exactly the rhythm from the baritone part in Figure 4.5 before they even look at the sheet music. Figure 4.9 displays the original two-measure part and a potential sequence of erasing and tie-ing that results in the rhythm of the original part.
Figure 4.9. Erasing and Tie-ing to Attain Rhythm from Figure 3.5.

With only a few erasures and ties, the conductor can go from straight sixteenth notes to the complicated baritone rhythm. The benefit of this method is that it begins with students feeling and producing a sixteenth-note subdivision in each beat of each measure. In the author’s experience, it is easier for singers to begin with a high level of subdivisions and remove them via ties or erasing than it is to insert sixteenth notes into a basic quarter note pulse. The sequential and cumulative departure from this basic subdivision allows students to isolate new rhythms while still keeping a group pulse. 4

4 A useful variation of this method is to have a group of students continue to pulse every sixteenth note while another group performs the new iteration. This division encourages independence and leadership, but also helps keep the overall rhythmic integrity and pulse in tact when the syncopations become more difficult.
Via this system, students deal with small and manageable pieces of rhythmic difficulty instead of attempting to read and produce many complexities at once.

**Conducting**

Conducting is the primary method of in-concert communication between teachers and students. However, conducting is not authentic to the style of popular music. Popular musicians will almost never incorporate a conductor in performance, as conducting detracts from the visual elements that are important to popular music, such as dancing and staging. If an educator chooses to include a choreographed section in a popular song (more on this later), conducting in front of the ensemble will deflect visual attention away from his or her students. Furthermore, placing the conductor in the customary spot directly in front of the ensemble upsets the solo-background dynamic that is so important to popular music. It is possible for the conductor to sing with the ensemble and provide a few gestures, or for the conductor to be at the piano in a similarly reduced role. The soloist should be the visual focal point of attention, and the presence of the conductor in the traditional place directly in front of the ensemble can unintentionally upstage the soloist.

However, conducting should not be summarily removed on account of stylistic authenticity – in practice conducting might be necessary. Conducting can be helpful in maintaining ensemble togetherness as well as a steady pulse – in the author’s experience, popular songs with fast tempi tend to rush due to student excitement. The conductor can also offer reminders about group dynamic phrasing – again, in the author’s experience, inexperienced singers tend to get so excited about popular songs with fast tempi that they
perform them mostly *forte* (especially when performing for their peers) and forget
dynamic shaping. Conducting can also serve to help students with memorization by
providing subtle hints about formal structure such as how many repeats are left, or
whether to go back to the beginning or to go onto the next section. A hybrid style of
conducting typical of jazz vocal ensembles, where the conductor stands to the side of the
ensemble, sets the initial tempo, and provides via gesture only a few notes and shaping
ideas serves as a useful and appropriate middle step between typical classical conducting
and no conducting at all.

It is up to the discretion of the conductor as to how much conducting is both
necessary and helpful, remembering than an ideal and authentic scenario will have no
conducting at all. Hopefully, a conductor will not need to micromanage a performance
of a popular song because of his or her in-rehearsal use of the next technique, sing back
layering.

**Sing Back Layering**

The practice of modeling, or vocally demonstrating a short passage either for
stylistic, dynamic, or pitch/rhythm accuracy purposes, is a standard rehearsal technique.
If the conductor is pressed for rehearsal time, one way to speed up the process is by the
application of what the author terms “sing back layering,” an extension of modeling.
Because of the repetitive nature of popular music, most of the large-scale sections in a
popular song background divide into two- or four-measure long repeated phrases.
Through *ostinato*-based sing back layering, the conductor can capitalize on the repetitive
coracter of popular music.
Sing back layering works in the same general way as authentic South-African-based choral teaching. The conductor sings and repeats the basic two- or four-measure pattern of the bass line. The conductor then invites the bass section to join when they feel comfortable. After singing with them a few times, the conductor stops singing the bass line and begins to sing the tenor part. The choir repeats this process until one by one all parts have entered on their own lines. Once all parts have entered, the conductor can lead group dynamic shaping via gesture.

The main benefit of this method is that choirs can quickly learn large swaths of music. With good modeling from the conductor, singers can also glean other musical characteristics such as dynamics, phrasing, location of breaths, and vowel production. This technique is also best for beginning choirs with poor music reading skills, as it does not even require looking at the sheet music. Conversely, one of the problems with this method is that it limits other educational benefits of performing popular music, such as solfege reinforcement and the opportunity to improve rhythmic sightreading. However, it is still a useful tool, especially with limited rehearsal time. One of the unintentional benefits of sing back layering is that it supports the memorization process.

Memorization

Popular music is an inherently memorized genre of music – popular musicians almost never perform with sheet music in front of them. When performing arrangements of popular music, the conductor should strive to have his or her ensemble sing from memory, especially since 21st century popular music is so visually oriented.
Standard rehearsal techniques related to memorization can also apply to popular music. Frequently running large sections of a popular piece, or running it entirety at the beginning or end of a rehearsal can help students memorize larger swaths of music. With for-credit collegiate ensembles, performing memory checks in small chunks is a helpful tool in memorization. For example, after a few rehearsals, the conductor might ask students to perform the verse section from memory. After a few more rehearsals, he or she might ask for the verse and the chorus.

An unconventional way to help students memorize popular songs is through the process of solo auditions. If the conductor elects to have open solo auditions, they can and should be held during rehearsal time for several reasons. It is important to hear what the soloist sounds like with the ensemble and not just by him- or herself. A soloist who sounds fantastic in a small room may have trouble projecting over the ensemble and have balance issues. Furthermore, by holding auditions during rehearsal, the conductor can use this time to help students memorize the background parts.

As an example, here is a solo audition process that uses this method: after several rehearsals of the popular song, the conductor announces that solo auditions will occur in class in two rehearsals’ time (the extra time is to allow students a chance to practice the solo on their own). Students wishing to audition for the solo will be asked to sing the entire second verse and the beginning of the following chorus. Even if only five students wish to audition for the solo, this provides the ensemble a chance to sing through the second verse and chorus five times uninterrupted. This kind of repetition is an

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5 Make sure when doing open solo auditions (i.e. without a soloist already in mind) to select the part of the solo that is the most difficult, or includes the highest or lowest range. A male soloist may sound stellar on the lower verse, but the conductor needs to know if he can produce the high notes in the chorus.
exceedingly useful way to help students memorize a popular song, and it is doubly effective because students do not realize that they are memorizing during that time. If the conductor opened a rehearsal by saying, “We’re going to sing this song five consecutive times in order to memorize it,” he or she would probably be greeted by groans. However, by doing these repetitions in the context of a solo audition, the conductor disguises and diminishes the tediousness of the memorization process.

The conductor may use many familiar tools in the rehearsing of popular music. However, there are some helpful techniques that are not widely-known or used by classical conductors. These techniques will be addressed in the following section.

Non-Traditional Teaching Techniques Specifically for Popular Music

Blend

The author defines the sometimes-nebulous concept of blend as how well the background parts mesh together sonically to create the illusion that one voice is singing all of the parts. Blend is an important concept in popular music, and especially in choral arrangements of popular music. Figure 4.10 contains an excerpt from a standardized judging form of the International Competition of Collegiate A Cappella (ICCA), an organization that holds yearly competitions similar to those held by NAfME, but features choral arrangements of popular music instead of classical music.

In the eyes of the ICCA, “balance and blend” is worth twice as much as more classically important elements such as tone quality, dynamics, and diction. Contrast this with an excerpt from the Florida Vocal Association’s (FVA) adjudication rubric, found below in Figure 4.11. In this classical singing competition, blend is only a small part of
the much larger area of tone quality (it is even listed last, as if an afterthought). Blend is more important in popular-style singing than in classical singing.

Figure 4.10. Excerpt from Judging Form of ICCA.6

**GROUP ADJUDICATION SHEET**

**Vocal Performance**— 75 Points (Circle the appropriate score)

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**Figure 4.11. Excerpt from FVA Judging Rubric.7**

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Good blend for group popular singing is achieved through absolute vowel unification, minimized (but not absent) individual vibratos, and dynamically balanced voice parts. Blend is as much a function of listening as it is of vocal production – for a choir to be well-blended, each member must be aware of the overall group sound at any time and also aware of how his or her voice is fitting into that group sound. There are several useful exercises that can be used as warm-ups to help choirs listen for blend. Figure 4.12 contains one such exercise designed by colleague Matthew Allen – a downward cascade on a major chord that diverges from a unison pitch.

Figure 4.12. Blend Exercise on Cascade.

Starting on a nasal vowel like [m] in octaves limits the potential for variety of vowel formations that can accompany open-mouthed vowels and allows for initial clean tuning. Opening to a wider vowel on the higher note while still in octaves encourages singers to
have proper breath control and onset technique while also listening for unified vowels.

Descending into the chord allows each part a chance to sing independently, and gives the choir as a whole a chance to tune. The open vowel can be changed to afford the choir opportunities to practice many vowels. This exercise works well in men’s and women’s choirs, as Figure 4.13 demonstrates.

Figure 4.13. Blend Exercise on Cascade for SSAA or TTBB.

Another redeeming feature of this exercise is that because it starts in unison or in octaves, it can modulate without a piano. The conductor can challenge singers’ ears by instructing: “Same exercise, up a half step,” and inviting singers to produce the half step on cue. For more aural challenges, the chord can also be changed to minor or sung in inversion. The chord can also be changed into a seventh or ninth chord to provide students with a chance to become accustomed to singing and tuning these sonorities, as Figure 4.14 demonstrates.
Figure 4.14. Blend Exercise on Cascade with Seventh and Ninth Chords.

A “blend circle” is another useful technique for working on blend, and requires students with confidence and self-discipline. Members of the choir stand in a circle, and the conductor picks someone to begin. The conductor sings a pitch that lies in the middle of most registers on a given vowel, and the student sings it back. After that student begins, the student to his or her left (in the author’s experience, most people hear better out of their dominant-sided ear, usually the right) joins in with the same vowel and pitch, and the pattern continues around the circle until everyone is singing the same vowel and pitch in unison (for single-sex groups) or octaves (for SATB choirs).

The goal of the exercise is to produce exactly the same pitch and vowel as the person directly before. By forgoing pitch and rhythmic complexity, the exercise encourages a hyperawareness of vowel formation— in a successful blend circle, individual entrances will not be distinctly audible, but rather the overall sound will gradually and evenly get louder. With advanced students, the conductor can pick a starting person and ask him or her to come up with the pitch and the vowel. A blend circle is a useful warm-
up technique that encourages blended singing through the principle of individual
accountability to the group – the exercise does not work without everyone’s equal
participation, but also fails if any one singer’s voice stands out above the overall texture.
Another way to work on blend is by using a genre of music that is not really related to
popular music – barbershop tags.

**Barbershop Tags**

Barbershop tags are short, texted, four-voice homophonic phrases, originally sung
only by men. They come from the long and storied history of Barbershop Quartets,
which is unfortunately too massive to include in this essay. The website
www.barbershoptags.com contains a library of almost two thousand barbershop tags
available for free download and distribution.8 Barbershoptags.com also contains other
helpful information, such as midi files and video performances.

Working on barbershop tags in the context of rehearsal of popular music yields
many benefits. They are quite short and give choirs a chance to work on blend while
singing actual words and not just neutral syllables. They can be repeated as warm-ups
from rehearsal to rehearsal. A conductor can even work on one or two over the course of
a semester, to work on fine-tuning blend, dynamics, phrasing, and balance. Barbershop
tags also often contain seventh and ninth chords that are frequently found in popular
music, and thus provide an opportunity to work on those kinds of sonorities. As a bonus,
many of them feature uplifting or sweet lyrics wholly appropriate for an educational

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setting. A representative example from barbershoptags.com, “Friendship and Love,” appears below in Figure 4.15.

Figure 4.15. “Friendship and Love” Barbershop Tag.\(^9\)

This specific tag affords choirs to work on blend on an [ə] vowel, tuning minor seventh and half-diminished seventh chords, and rhythmic precision via the controlled and notated glissando. Although this tag was intended for a TTBB voicing, its ranges are such that an SATB choir could sing it without modification. Due to the high tessitura of barbershop tenor parts, this is true of many barbershop tags.

Barbershop quartets also offer a unique opportunity to include vocal quartets or octets in the rehearsal process. Once a barbershop tag is well known, the teacher may invite four or eight students to perform it by themselves for the other students in the ensemble. This small performance process yields many benefits to the volunteer or chosen small group: it can bolster the confidence level of students, it gives them an

\(^9\) Ibid.
opportunity to perform in front of their peers, and it gives them a chance to work on balance and blend in a smaller and more manageable context.

The quartet/octet method also yields benefits for the listeners. After each small group has performed, the teacher should ask, “What did that group do really well?” By encouraging students to engage and constructively critique what they are hearing, the teacher is subconsciously reinforcing the idea that they should be listening and critiquing all the time in rehearsal, even (and especially) when they are singing. The conductor is also fulfilling the sixth and seventh NAfME standards by engaging in this activity: “Listening to, analyzing, and describing music, and “Evaluating music and music performances.”

Once the mini-performance is complete, the conductor should also ask, “What can that group do better?” This activity, if framed in a constructive way, gives the students something to work on in the future. It is important for the teacher to constantly say “the group” when posing these questions, because he or she does not want to draw individual attention to any one student in the quartet or octet. It is best to address group issues such as blend, tuning, and rhythmic precision during this exercise, and to steer the conversation away from assigning individual blame for problems (i.e. “The tuning on the third chord did not work as well as it could have” instead of “James, the tenor, was out of tune.”).

Barbershop tags are uniquely suited to this task, because they often contain difficult-to-tune harmonies and require intensely focused coordination on the part of the performers, but only take approximately ten seconds to perform – they represent a

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microcosm of many of the same issues brought about by performing popular music, but only take a fraction of the time to perform. This benefits a conductor with a large ensemble, who can hear mini-performances from several small groups without spending too much rehearsal time doing so.

However, barbershop tags do not have to be the only source material for quartets or octets; a conductor can also have these small groups perform sections of the popular music that the choir is rehearsing. This kind of activity offers students an outsider perspective on music that they rarely get otherwise. Listening to music that the ensemble is presently rehearsing in the role of an audience member can improve an ensemble’s self-awareness, blend, and tuning.

One of the cursory benefits of using barbershop to teach popular music is that both are American-born genres of music. A simple discussion of the origins and cultural contexts of barbershop music as they relate to popular music effectively fulfills the ninth NAfME standard: “Understanding music in relation to history and culture.”¹¹ The next technique, vocal percussion, was also invented in the United States.

**Vocal Percussion**

Vocal percussion is the act of producing drum-like sounds with only one’s mouth. It is alternatively called mouthdrumming or beatboxing, but in the context of academia “vocal percussion” is the most appropriate term. Including vocal percussion in a performance of popular music is authentic to the style, and offers a sense of the rhythmic drive essential to much popular music that is otherwise difficult to recreate. It does not

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¹¹ Ibid.
have to be included in every rendition – there are songs (typically with slow tempi or with originally non-dominant percussion parts) that benefit from the absence of vocal percussion. However, it is an important tool in the conductor’s arsenal and should not be neglected.

There are many benefits to teaching vocal percussion in an educational context. Pedagogically, it strengthens students’ sense of pulse and rhythmic accuracy and reinforces mouth coordination and awareness. Also, much like solo-style popular singing, vocal percussion can be damaging if not done properly. Due to its popularity among students, chances are that there are several students in many high school ensembles who have already experimented with vocal percussion. It is therefore important to provide an educational framework to the process, so that students do not injure or needlessly tire their voices.

There are also practical benefits to teaching vocal percussion to choral students. If there are able vocal percussionists within the choir, the conductor never has to hire or coordinate with an actual drummer. Furthermore, adding vocal percussion to an *a cappella* arrangement of popular music allows it to be performed anywhere. Popular music is especially useful in “run-out” concerts – brief concerts that are typically in some kind of service, whether it be community support or even recruitment or fundraising for the choir itself. The flexibility afforded by having vocal percussionists instead of actual drummers allows the choir to perform run-out concerts under many different circumstances: outside, in small rooms, or even in the increasingly popular style of a flash mob.
Vocal percussion also represents another way to provide opportunities for otherwise musical students who are in choir but who do not have the best vocal skills, a situation that often occurs in single-sex collegiate choirs. In his lecture on collegiate men’s choir at the 2012 Western American Choral Directors Association conference, Dr. Cameron LaBarr related his experience while working with an un-auditioned men’s choir at the University of North Texas. He described the problem of having several percussionists who were placed into his men’s choir because they needed an ensemble credit. These students had excellent rhythm, but generally poor conceptions of vocal tone and production.\textsuperscript{12} Conductors can solve this common problem by programming popular music and having such a student (or more) perform vocal percussion. This solution maximizes the ensemble’s individual talents: the vocal percussionist gets to contribute his or her rhythmic skills in an important way while not diminishing the overall vocal ability of the group. Even if one’s students do not know how to produce vocal percussion, it is an easily teachable skill.

One of the many valid ways to teach vocal percussion is the “boots and cats” method. This method asks students to repeat the words “boots and cats and” over a string of consecutive eighth notes. Gradually, the students should remove the vowels (and the “d” from “and”) from those words, leaving only [b tsn k tsn], as in Figure 4.16.

\textsuperscript{12} Cameron LaBarr, "Men's Chorus Lecture" (Reno, NV, February, 2012, 2012).
This sequence of consonants mimics a common drumming pattern. The [k] sound should be more accented than the [b] sound, as this is what produces the backbeat. Alternatively, the words “dukes and cats and” may be used to produce a less-bassy hit on beats one and three. With practice, students can produce more complicated patterns and effects than this stream of eighth notes, but the basic framework provided by “boots (dukes) and cats and” can be successfully applied to a majority of popular songs.

If a student has capabilities beyond the basic pattern, the conductor might ask him or her to perform the group rhythmic pattern on percussion. In the case of “Save Tonight,” this would require the following pattern, reproduced in Figure 4.17. The author has supplied potential syllables that are based on the “dukes and cats and” word group, and has inserted the sounds [d] and [f] on the sixteenth notes. This pattern does not have to be repeated throughout the entire song – an experienced and skilled vocal percussionist will change the pattern from section to section or even measure to measure to add variety to the arrangement.

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13 There are many resources to help students produce more complicated patterns and sounds. The authoritative source is “Mouthdrumming,” a video produced by Wes Carroll, vocal percussionist for the world-famous *a cappella* style popular groups *Five O’Clock Shadow* and *The House Jacks*. There are also many fine online sources such as www.humanbeatbox.com, a site that provides forums, blogs, video demonstrations, and even instructions on how to create vocal percussion.
When selecting group rhythmic patterns to perform with a vocal percussionist, beware of what the author terms the “breath issue.” Some group rhythmic patterns are quite active. Consider the following hypothetical group rhythmic pattern in Figure 4.18.

If the vocal percussionist performs this exact rhythm every measure, he or she will quickly run out of breath and will have to interrupt the pattern to take a catch breath. This kind of overly active vocal percussion that lacks proper time to breathe can be difficult at best and damaging at worst – it can even cause hyperventilation.

There are two potential solutions to this problem. The first is to reduce the activity of the group rhythmic pattern and provide at least one breath per measure for the vocal percussionist. Figure 4.19 contains two potential reductions.
These reductions are difficult, but not untenable. If however the conductor feels that every single note of the group rhythmic pattern is important and should be left intact, the second solution – using two or more vocal percussionists – may present the best option. In much the same way that the bass line was divided into three treble parts in the previous chapter, the group rhythmic pattern can be divided amongst several percussionists. An important aspect of dividing the group rhythmic pattern is to accent the backbeat or otherwise naturally accented notes by having more than one percussionist produce them. Figure 4.20 showcases this technique.
This method is generally preferable, especially with a larger choir. Having two vocal percussionists will balance better with a large ensemble, and will enable both vocal percussionists to produce healthy and accurate sounds with an adequate breath stream. Another issue that arises during the performance of popular music and affects the use of breath is choreography.

**Choreography**

Movement and dance are important elements of popular music, and they should not be neglected when performing songs in this genre. Choreography is an important element of many *a cappella*-style competitions, such as the ICCAs. Returning to the aforementioned ICCA judging form from Figure 4.10, “visual performance” counts for almost one third of the total score. Figure 4.21 displays this section of the judging form.

![Figure 4.21. Visual Performance Section of ICCA Judging Form.](image)

This rubric does not mean that every second of every popular song has to be professionally choreographed. Rather, the overall movement of the group should be coordinated and blocked in a creative and cohesive way. This kind of reduced

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14 *Varsity Vocals*
choreography represents a unique opportunity for student involvement and ownership. By assigning students the task of coordinating overall movement and blocking (with appropriate limitations), the conductor can foster a sense of buy-in and ownership amongst his or her students.

Even if the popular song is not meant for competition and will not be premeditatedly staged, some movement is still authentic to the style. At this level of coordination, the movement should be small-scale and individualized. Singers should be encouraged to move freely as they wish, as long as it is relatable to musical events in their part. In the author’s experience, this kind of free (but still localized and contained) movement emboldens the singer and creates a more enjoyable visual aesthetic for the audience. However, it is important as a choral educator not to let movement detract from singing – in a traditional choir, vocal production must come before dance. Be particularly aware of bending-at-the-waist motions that limit air capacity and misalign the vocal tract. The conductor should encourage students engaged in such movements to find alternatives.

**Conclusion**

Performing popular music requires a slightly different rehearsal methodology than rehearsing standard classical music. Some techniques, such as the use of *solfege*, rhythmic exercises, conducting, modeling and layering, and tactics for memorization are already familiar to the classically-trained choral educator. The same conductor might be less acquainted with other helpful tricks, such as exercises that work on blend, the use of
barbershop tags, vocal percussion, and choreography. Regardless of their origin, both sets of techniques are useful; their use will result in efficient, productive, and pedagogically sound rehearsals that hopefully culminate in a fulfilling and successful performance.
Creative Control in The Classroom – Who Chooses the Music?

The traditional secondary choral education model dictates that the teacher/conductor preselects the pieces that each ensemble will perform. There are many educational benefits to this system: the teacher knows the vocal and technical ability of the ensemble and will therefore be able to select appropriate repertoire, the teacher has a broad knowledge of the standard repertoire and can plan a diverse and functional concert program, and the teacher can select pieces that will challenge and develop students’ skills. However, this system is not perfect. Students may experience a disconnect with the music the teacher has selected even if it serves a valid educational purpose. Performing popular music serves as a way to proffer some democratization into the music selection process.

If planned carefully, some creative control over the selection of a popular song can and should be given to the students. This is not to say that the process should be entirely democratic. As stated in chapter three, there are many popular songs that are not suitable for academic singing or that do not easily lend themselves to a vocal arrangement. However, one way to incorporate some student input is for the teacher to prescreen several popular songs, and come up with a list of two to three choices on which
the students may vote. Even handing over this small amount of control over repertoire
gives students’ a sense of empowerment and ownership, and often results in a more
fulfilling musical experience for singer and audience member alike.

This voting system is not without dangers. Some popular songs can be incredibly
polarizing, especially to adolescent singers. A song by a popular “boy band” might
appeal to female singers (who often outnumber male singers in secondary ensembles and
could outvote them), but be seen as completely uncool and un-performable by male
singers. The author has witnessed this kind of cultural divide, and has seen adolescent
male singers emotionally rebel, visually shut down, and vehemently protest singing this
particular subgenre of popular music. This kind of divide is not good for group morale
and should be avoided.

Another problem with the voting system arises if the teacher presents three
potential songs. If the vote is split fairly evenly, approximately 60% of the ensemble will
not have voted for the winning song. This situation can cause the same kind of problems
as performing a song from a polarizing genre. The author highly recommends
prescreening two similar songs from the same subgenre of popular music (i.e. two
alternative rock songs, two R&B songs, etc), playing them in class, and asking the
students to vote for the one they would most like to perform “for their peers.” This last
part is crucial, because if students want to perform a song for their friends, they will be
excited about it throughout the rehearsal process and the concert itself.
Two Approaches: Everyone-Sing-Everything vs. The Pop Ensemble

There are two different ways to incorporate popular music into an existing choral structure at a secondary or collegiate school whose groups do not already perform this kind of music. The first is to include popular music as a small portion of a larger selection of repertoire for an existing choral ensemble, henceforth called the everyone-sing-everything method. Under this method, a hypothetical traditional choir of sixty members might perform a tripartite concert about love that includes some Renaissance motets, selections from the Brahms *Liebeslieder Waltzer*, and a set of popular love songs. Depending on the concert theme and performing forces, the number of popular songs on any given program might vary from none to two or three. Importantly, popular songs form only a small portion of the overall repertoire for the ensemble.

The other way to incorporate popular music into a choral department is to create a group that only performs popular music, henceforth called a pop ensemble. A pop ensemble should be chamber-sized, consisting of no more than twenty singers. A hypothetical pop ensemble would perform concerts of varying styles of popular music throughout the year, and would not perform more traditional choral repertoire.

Each model has benefits and pitfalls. One of the primary pros of incorporating popular music into a traditional choral structure is that it gives all students exposure to a wide variety of repertoire. If a student is a member of a pop ensemble and no other group, he or she would not get the educational benefits of discovering and performing other genres and styles of choral music. Learning different musical styles enhances awareness in all musical styles. Furthermore, if the traditional concert choir performs all kinds of repertoire, there is no potential for resentment between ensembles. Having
everyone perform every style removes the potential for students to think, “I only want to sing that kind of music, I wish I was in that group,” or “Well, that group only performs popular music, they must not be good enough to perform the classics.”

The biggest problem with performing popular music with a traditional concert choir results from the typically large size of the group. Vocal arrangements of popular music tend to sound best with chamber-sized performing forces because of the dramatic and dynamic balance between the solo and the ensemble. A group of sixty or more will often overpower and overshadow any soloist without adequate amplification. This problem can be solved by creative arrangements (or by incorporating the solo into the background parts so that there is no soloist at all), but it is a daunting task to try to produce an arrangement for a large ensemble in concert with one soloist. It is not authentic to popular style to have such a large group perform. This inauthenticity leads to another potential drawback of the everyone-sings-everything method, which is that by performing multiple styles, students dabble in many but become masters of none. This argument carries less weight in a secondary school situation, where the primary focus should be exposure to lots of different kinds of repertoire, but is not an invalid concern in a collegiate setting. Students will feel especially discouraged if they do not perform popular music well, because it is the genre with which students most readily make emotional and personal connections.

The main benefit of the inclusion of the pop ensemble is that it can serve as a reward for skilled and positive students. A pop ensemble can and should be a flagship chamber ensemble in a secondary choral structure reserved only for the best and brightest singers. The author strongly recommends making membership in the pop ensemble
contingent upon having membership in one other singing ensemble. This avoids one of the potential pitfalls of the pop ensemble, which is the all-too-common student who only wants to perform popular music. By making pop ensemble membership contingent upon being a member of the traditional concert or chamber choir, the teacher can ensure that his or her students are exposed to multiple styles while keeping his or her best singers from abandoning the classical ensembles.

Another benefit of the formation of a pop ensemble is that students can gain a more thorough understanding of popular style and tone, and can perform more difficult and specialized repertoire. The chamber-sized pop ensemble will be more faithful to popular style than a concert choir, and will likely have more success in performance. The small size also means there is a greater potential for run-out concerts and community performances that can promote recruitment and relationship building, both within the ensemble and society at large.

Within the music education community, there are many advocates for the inclusion of pop ensembles in traditional education structures. Bennett Reimer writes,

> The key to our continuing relevance to the musical interests of those who choose to learn to be performers is not to abandon the excellent opportunities we have made available in bands, orchestras, and choruses, but to encourage and hasten the already existent movement toward adding a greater diversity of performance opportunities reflecting a more accurate representation of the musics thriving in contemporary American culture.¹

The logical result of Reimer’s argument is not a disbanding of the traditional musical ensemble structure, but rather its expansion to include pop and other ensembles. Former president of NAfME (then MENC) Will Schmid writes, “Chamber music, in the most

liberal interpretation of the word, can provide a good deal of the change needed with [music] programs…We must, however, see chamber music as style neutral.”

Emmons elaborates on Schmid’s thought: “These chamber ensembles, especially those that favor popular music, will truly allow students to make creative decisions and be active in every aspect of the musical world, from conception to performance.”

The inclusion of a pop ensemble within a choral curriculum also affords teachers the opportunity to make the repertoire selection process even more democratic. Because of the smaller ensemble size and its select nature, students can and should have a larger say in the repertoire they perform. Fewer members result in fewer opinions, and thus it is safer to open the process to more student involvement. As a potential plan, before summer vacation require each student to come up with one song they would like to sing next year (of course, it must meet certain parameters set by the teacher such as no swearing, etc). Then ask each member of the pop ensemble to listen to the songs that everyone proposed. Require the students to anonymously vote for the six songs they would most like to perform for their peers, and then compile (and if necessary, tweak to meet concert and programming needs) the list and announce the repertoire for the group’s upcoming fall concert. If you have advanced student arrangers, you can even assign arranging projects to be completed over the summer. This plan will foster in students an active sense of engagement in the group and create excitement for the upcoming year.

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Cultivating and Coaching Student Arrangers

One of the most important educational benefits of performing popular music is that it allows students a chance to arrange, compose, and hear their work performed in concert (a rarity for a high-school-aged composer). Emmons argues that, “The most effective education in popular music is achieved by actually creating and performing popular music.”\(^4\) Emmons goes on to say that the most successful way to incorporate popular music into education is to “allow students to make as many decisions as possible. Our role as music teachers in this environment becomes that of a facilitator or coach.”\(^5\)

In order to give students a chance at succeeding in this endeavor, the teacher must be willing to give extra one-on-one time to students. This is no small commitment – George Boespflug, director of the Biola University Conservatory of Music, writes,

[In a pop ensemble] group members are responsible for creating new compositions, or at least original arrangements of preexisting compositions. Teachers must evaluate and critique work in each phase of the creative process, evaluating the quality of the lyrics, the effectiveness of chord progressions, or the appropriateness of individual parts, such as a bass line or background vocals...Assessing a composition or performance rests on the shoulders of the ensemble director.\(^6\)

Often, the success of a student’s arrangement is dependent on the knowledge base and coaching ability of the teacher.

Practically, the teacher and student arranger need to have access to a computer and speakers or headphones. Notation software and MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) playback is a necessity for young arrangers, as it forces them to focus their

\(^4\) Ibid, 170.

\(^5\) Ibid, 160.

thoughts in a practical and legible way and allows them to hear MIDI approximations of their work. Digital keyboards, while not a necessity, are an important tool as they make it easier to input music into notation programs. As an added bonus, the use of digital keyboards also teaches and reinforces rudimentary piano skills. Student licenses are available for most notation software programs, and educational discounts are sometimes offered for keyboards.

Before working with a student arranger, the teacher should be personally familiar with arranging and should have produced several arrangements. This background knowledge will give the teacher some idea as to what will work and what will not work vocally and aurally. Here is a potential plan for coaching student arrangers over the course of the year:

Your large choral ensemble will be performing a popular song in their spring concert, and you would like it to be a student arrangement. Before Thanksgiving break, assign two students the task of listening to the original version of the song and doing a formal analysis as described in chapter three. In the beginning stages of their development, having two students work on an arrangement together is preferable to having one tackle it by him- or herself. Two heads are better than one, and they will hear and perceive different things about the song. Having two arrangers also lends an added sense of accountability – it will force students to schedule meeting times devoted to working on the arrangement, instead of leaving it up to the whims of one person’s schedule. It is the author’s experience that an arrangement produced by two people is much more likely to be completed by an assigned due date than an arrangement produced by one person alone.
After Thanksgiving, meet with the students to discuss their formal analyses. Ask them questions like, “What part of the song is the most musically interesting to you?” “What did you notice about the third chorus that is different from the first two?” “What is the loudest/quietest part of this song?” “Is it a happy or sad song?” Discuss what noteworthy features of the song they would like to incorporate into their arrangement. At the end of this meeting, give them a date (preferably about two weeks) by which you would like to see a draft of the first verse and first chorus. Breaking up the arrangement into small manageable pieces like this removes some of the daunting task of tackling an entire song.

At the second meeting, examine the students’ work and give them lots of positive feedback. At this early stage of their and the arrangement’s development, it is easy for them to become frustrated and overwhelmed. Remember – the students have probably put a lot of work into these sixteen or thirty-two measures, and are typically proud of this work. Discuss things like their harmonic progression, their selected voicings, and other fundamental musical items that garner your attention (refer to chapter three). Make sure they are thinking about potential syllables (if they haven’t already written them in) and how their arrangement fits with the solo.

If this draft is somewhat satisfactory and performable, bring it to class and have your group sing through it before winter break (what a great way to incorporate fun sight-reading during a time that is usually stressful and focused solely on concert preparation). Giving your arrangers this kind of live feedback is invaluable at this stage of their development. MIDI is useful, but is much better at imitating instruments than it is at imitating humans – there is no substitute for hearing how something will actually sound
with voices. Upon hearing a small chunk of their arrangement the arrangers often will be full of ideas and will want to make many alterations. After this rehearsal, tell them you would like to see a complete draft (or, if it did not go well, a reworking of the existing material) by the time you return in January.

When you meet in January, review the arrangement. Focus on things like overall scope, dynamics, and phrasing. Ask them to sing several of the lines – not only will this make them better singers and sightreaders, but it also reinforces the importance of the arrangers’ ability to sing everything while he or she arranges. If the arrangement is of a suitable quality, ask them to proofread it and produce a score that they would feel comfortable handing to a professional pop group. This last bit is important, because students will often cut corners or produce difficult-to-read scores that cause confusion during sightreading and cut into your rehearsal time.

It is important to start this process early in the year, so that your students have plenty of time to produce the arrangement. Encourage multiple drafts and much editing – there is almost always a direct and positive correlation between the amount of time spent on an arrangement and its quality. Over time, as your students become more skilled arrangers, you can gradually remove yourself from the process.

The aforementioned calendar was for a traditional large choral ensemble. When starting a new pop ensemble group, do all your arrangements first. This limitation is for practical purposes – this group will have to perform an entire set or concert of popular songs, and there is probably not enough talent or interest amongst students to immediately produce that many arrangements for a new group. Producing one’s own
arrangements also means that the ensemble will have music to rehearse from the first day of class, which is critical to the success of a new pop ensemble.

Over time, introduce one or two student arrangements via the aforementioned process. The long-term goal should be to gradually hand over control of most of the arranging to your students over a several year process. One of the best ways to achieve buy-in in a pop ensemble is to have most or all of the music be eventually produced by the students themselves. The teacher can also eventually remove him or herself from the coaching process by introducing a mentorship program that pairs a senior arranger with an underclassman on each new arrangement.

Conclusion

Incorporating popular music into an existing choral curriculum and structure requires careful planning on the part of the conductor. He or she must consider what kinds of ensembles are necessary, how to decide what music to program, and how to coach student arrangers to produce that music. Ultimately the success of any choral performance of popular music depends upon thoughtful consideration of these questions.
CHAPTER 6
COPYRIGHT LAW AND THE PERFORMANCE OF POPULAR MUSIC

One of the major stumbling blocks to conductors wishing to arrange popular music is the general confusion about what exactly is legal and what is not. The short answer is that it is indeed legal to produce arrangements of popular songs to which the arranger does not own the original copyright. The long answer is that the situation is much more complicated, and involves many limitations and exceptions. A large amount of material has been written about music copyright law in general, and the author could not hope to cover every possible nuance of this weighty topic. For information of this nature, attorney and professor David Moser’s book *Music Copyright Law* will be referenced in this chapter. This chapter seeks to present legal issues as they specifically pertain to performing popular songs in a choral setting, and will conclude with a specific list of what the choral educator can and cannot do with an arrangement of popular music.

Copyright Law in Relation to Choral Music

The Copyright Act of 1976 enumerates the rights of music copyright owners, and many of its edicts are still in effect today. Under section 106 of the Copyright Act of 1976,

The owner of copyright under this title [17 USCS Sects. 101 et seq.] has the exclusive rights to do and to authorize any of the following:

1. to reproduce the copyrighted work in copies or phonorecords;
2. to prepare derivative works based upon the copyrighted work;
(3) to distribute copies or phonorecords of the copyrighted work to the public by sale or other transfer of ownership, or by rental, lease, or lending; 
(4) in the case of literary, musical, dramatic, and choreographic works, pantomimes, and motion pictures and other audiovisual works, to perform the copyrighted work publicly; and 
(5) in the case of literary, musical, dramatic, and choreographic works, pantomimes, and pictorial, graphic, or sculptural works, including the individual images of a motion picture or other audiovisual work, to display the copyrighted work publicly.¹

This subsection seems pretty definitive. However, an important exception/limitation on these rights is explained in Section 114(b):

b) The exclusive right of the owner of copyright in a sound recording under clause (1) of section 106 is limited to the right to duplicate the sound recording in the form of phonorecords or copies that directly or indirectly recapture the actual sounds fixed in the recording. The exclusive right of the owner of copyright in a sound recording under clause (2) of section 106 is limited to the right to prepare a derivative work in which the actual sounds fixed in the sound recording are rearranged, remixed, or otherwise altered in sequence or quality. The exclusive rights of the owner of copyright in a sound recording under clauses (1) and (2) of section 106 do not extend to the making or duplication of another sound recording that consists entirely of an independent fixation of other sounds, even though such sounds imitate or simulate those in the copyrighted sound recording.²

This exception is called the “dubbing limitation,” and it enables conductors to produce imitative arrangements without obtaining permission from the copyright holder under certain circumstances. By producing an imitative arrangement that does not include the original recorded sounds themselves, the conductor effectively prevents the owner of the copyright of the sound recording from claiming infringement. However even with the benefit of the dubbing limitation, the conductor is still limited in options when it comes to public performance of an arrangement of popular music.

¹ The Copyright Act of 1976, (1976), Section 106.
² Ibid, Section 114(b).
The Performance Right

A spot of legal difficulty arises from public concerts, which are integral components of choral education. Under most circumstances, Section 106(4) grants copyright owners the exclusive right to perform their copyrighted works in public. However, there are two key exceptions that allow choral educators to arrange and perform copyrighted material in public. The first is that the law does not extend to sound recordings. Moser elaborates,

…the performance right of Section 106(4) does not apply to sound recordings. The Digital Performance Right In Sound Recordings Act of 1995 was enacted to provide a public performance right for sound recordings to remedy this gap. However, the law distinguished between the two performance rights to make it clear that Section 106(4) does not apply to sound recordings.3

This exemption is what enables radio stations to broadcast copyrighted songs in analog without paying royalties to the owner of the copyright of the sound recording itself, typically a recording company (the radio stations still have to pay royalties to the songwriter and the copyright owner of the song itself). In terms of the choral conductor, this means that sound recordings have less legal protection than “compositions.”

The second and more pertinent exception can be found in Section 110(4). This subsection allows for some nonprofit performances of musical works to which the performers do not own the copyright and do not have a mechanical license (mechanical licenses will be explained later). This clause is especially relevant to choral conductors wishing to perform popular music, because it allows for a non-profit educational exception to the normal exclusivity of the public performance right. Interestingly, the law does not clearly distinguish a live choir performing a copyrighted work from playing

the actual recorded song in a public performance, and this is why choral performances of copyrighted works can fall under this exemption. In order to qualify for this exception, the performance must meet four conditions. Moser enumerates them well:

1) “The exemption does not include transmissions of performances and is therefore limited to performances made directly in the presence of an audience.”

2) “The performance must be for nonprofit purposes.”

3) “The performers, promoters, and organizers of the performance cannot receive any compensation.”

4) “There cannot be any direct or indirect admission charge unless the proceeds go solely to education, religious, or charitable purposes.”

This exception allows choral conductors to perform arrangements of works to which they do not own the original copyright in public concert so long as these four conditions are met. Fortunately, most school choral concerts meet these requirements already, and educators are thus free to give concerts that feature their own arrangements of popular music. The conductor may not, however, produce a CD of that concert or of his arrangement with intent to distribute it to the public without first obtaining a compulsory mechanical license.

The Compulsory Mechanical License

Up until this point, this chapter has focused on what the conductor can do without providing remuneration to original copyright holders. However, if a conductor wishes to sell CD recordings of his or her ensemble that include arrangements of popular music, or

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4 Ibid, 117.
works with a for-profit professional choir that needs to make money to stay in business, action must be taken to appropriately compensate the original copyright holders. This action is called a compulsory mechanical license.

The purchase of a compulsory mechanical license takes two steps. The first step is to file a Notice of Intention to Obtain Compulsory License with the copyright owner, or, if they are unreachable or unable to be tracked down, with the Copyright Office itself. The second step is to pay 9.1 cents per song or 1.75 cents per minute, whichever is greater, to the owner of the copyright for every CD produced and distributed. This does not mean that the conductor owes 9.1 cents per song on the CD, but only 9.1 cents per song of which he or she does not own the copyright. For example, consider the following scenario: a conductor wishes to produce a CD of an upcoming concert that includes nine folk songs in the public domain and one popular song with a duration of three minutes that is not in the public domain. He or she should file a Notice of Intention to Obtain Compulsory License before or within thirty days of the concert, and will be required to pay 9.1 cents per CD that is produced. If the conductor (or ensemble, or school) sets the price of CDs at ten dollars, if all are sold, each one produces a post-license-fee revenue of $9.909.

Included within a compulsory mechanical license is the ability to produce an arrangement, although what the conductor may do with that arrangement is limited. Section 115a(2) reads:

A compulsory license includes the privilege of making a musical arrangement of the work to the extent necessary to conform it to the style or manner of interpretation of the performance involved, but the arrangement shall not change the basic melody or fundamental character of the work, and shall not be subject to
This is not to say that the arrangement must be a transcription method arrangement and that the conductor should be scared of making any changes. Rather, it is more a guideline to make sure the song is still aurally recognizable, which is one of the tenets of the creative method. Even with a compulsory mechanical license, the arrangement does not have “protection as a derivative work,” meaning that the conductor does not own any kind of copyright on the arrangement and it cannot be distributed.

**Summary: Legal Allowances and Constraints on the Conductor**

Consider the following basic situation: a conductor who teaches at a public (or nonprofit private – the key is working for a nonprofit institution) high school would like to program a piece of popular music with his or her advanced mixed choir in an upcoming concert at the school where he or she works. After hearing a specific song on the radio, he or she decides that this song would be a perfect fit in this upcoming program. He or she searches for published arrangements of the song, and cannot find one as the song is relatively new. The conductor decides to arrange the song by him- or herself. In this scenario, copyright law allows a conductor to do the following things:

1) Have a public concert that includes the arranged song in the school that does not charge admission.

2) Charge admission to the same concert as long as the proceeds go to the school or the school’s music program. The proceeds may not go to the conductor, the students, or the organizers of the concert (such as a parents’ association or booster club).

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5 *The Copyright Act of 1976*, Section 115a (2).
3) Make and sell CD recordings of the concert, so long as the conductor or school pays the mechanical licensing fee of 9.1 cents per copyrighted song or 1.75 cents per minute, whichever is greater. In this case, since the recording would only have one copyrighted song on it, the conductor would have to pay 9.1 cents per every CD produced.

Even with the leeway granted in the above scenario, with or without a mechanical license one is still limited in several important ways. The conductor cannot under any circumstance:

1) Sell or even distribute the printed arrangement to people outside his or her ensemble, because he or she does not own the print rights to the original song.

2) Make a DVD or video of the concert.

3) Stream the concert online.

4) Make and distribute CDs without obtaining a mechanical license or post audio recordings online.

This guide is meant only as a restatement of copyright law as it stands in 2012, but the conductor should be aware that these laws are subject to change. Copyright law has not entirely caught up with the collegiate *a cappella* phenomenon and the digital age in general, and forthcoming changes to the law would not be a surprise. The conductor wishing to program and arrange popular music should be cognizant of up-to-date copyright law.
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION AND ADVOCACY

Ultimately this essay is about empowerment. It strives to give teachers an understanding of why popular music is educationally valuable, tools to arrange popular songs themselves, rehearsal techniques and practical considerations to perfect those arrangements, and a legal foundation to understand copyright as it pertains to popular music. Mired in the Great Recession, secondary music education in the United States is facing extreme budget cuts. In order to meet this and other challenges, music teachers can no longer solely be teachers; they must also be advocates, accountants, cheerleaders, theorists, politicians, and arrangers. A 21st century musician is one who can successfully embrace many roles, and yet a traditional collegiate education in music often only prepares one to fulfill one or two of these functions. The author’s hope is that this document can provide teachers with the tools required to successfully tackle more of these roles.

Furthermore, in order to combat the outdated but persistent notion that musical talent is innate and therefore selective and not worthy of being taught in public schools, teachers should strive to make choral programs more inclusive and robust. One of the easiest ways to recruit new students into choral programs is through the performance of popular music. By performing music that is already embraced, adored, and memorized
by students, teachers can achieve instant student buy-in and engagement. The recent increase of popular style group singing in this country is profound and should be useful to choral educators. It would be a shame not to capitalize on this trend, especially if doing so could save a few struggling choral programs from losing funding.
Glossary of Terms Relating to Popular Music and the Arranging of Popular Music

Arrange-ability: an inexact measurement of how well the fundamental musical aspects of a given popular song will translate to an all-vocal arrangement

Barbershop Tag: short, texted, four-voice homophonic phrases, originally sung only by men

Bridge: the section of a popular song that introduces new musical material and serves as a link between the second chorus and either the third verse or the third chorus

Cascade: a choral arpeggio – dividing a multi-voice chord amongst several voice parts pitch-wise and rhythmically

Cascade-Suspension Hybrid: a cascade that uses suspensions

Chord Voicings: how the members of a given chord are divided amongst choral voice parts

Chorus: alternatively called the refrain, it is the section of a popular song that repeats both text and musical content – it typically follows the verse.

Compulsory Mechanical License: the official legal name of the act of compensation required to make and sell recordings of works under copyright

Creative Method: the style of arranging that does not seek to reproduce the sound of the original song exactly, but instead uses the musical materials of the original song as raw material subject to artistic interpretation

Extended Chords: chords that include the 9th and notes above it

Everyone-Sing-Everything Ensemble: a curricular model of a choral ensemble that sings a varied repertoire of many kinds of music, including popular music
Gender Drop-Out: an arranging technique that momentarily removes either sopranos and altos or tenors and basses, leaving the other gender temporarily exposed for dramatic effect

Group Rhythmic Pattern: the amalgamation or summation of each background instrument’s individual rhythm

Intro: the optional first section of a popular song; may or may not be related musically to the verse

Momentary Choir: an arranging technique that suddenly gives homophonic material on the text of the solo to background parts

Outro: the last section of a popular song, akin to a classical coda

Pop Ensemble: a curricular model of a choral ensemble that sings only popular music

Popular Music: for the purposes of this discussion, popular music is music that has occupied the American Top-40 charts over the past forty years

Power Chord: a two-note chord that only contains the first and fifth

Repeat Reset: the idea that because popular music contains so many repeats, the arranger must factor in the voice leading that occurs “through” the repeat signs

Sing Back Layering: a rehearsal technique taken from the gospel tradition where vocal parts are added one at a time in succession in a vamp

Splicing: an arranging technique that combines two separate songs into one

Syllabification: the process of applying syllables to background voice parts

Transcription Method: the style of arranging that seeks to reproduce as closely as possible the actual sounds, pitches, and rhythms of the original song
Verse: the section of a popular song that repeats musical content but changes the text; typically coupled with the chorus.

Vocal Percussion: the act of making percussion sounds and noises vocally.
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