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# Choosing A Song To Sing

You can guarantee the success of each new song you select for your chorus by following a few simple steps

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*by Bill Biffle, Chair, Society Chorus Director Development Committee*

You can guarantee the success of each new song you select for your chorus by following a few simple steps:

## The song

- Will the song be familiar to your audience?
- When we sing songs our audience will recognize, the audience is allowed to participate in the making of music with us. They will be part of the show and will tap their toe, sing along in their heads, remember the time they first heard the song, and generally have a good time.
- Is it an up-tune or easy rhythm song?  
We have to look for good rhythm songs, barbershop ballads will find us. Make at least six out of ten songs in your repertoire rhythm songs, either up-tunes or easy rhythm toe-tappers. Audiences will thank you with their hands and the looks on their faces.
- The third rule is the exception to the other two. If it's a novelty or comedic song, or a song with of special significance to your area, town, or chorus, it needn't fit the first two rules. Your repertoire can handle one or two of these.
- Check out the melody. Can you sing the melody line in tune without difficulty? Are you in the proper key at the end? Will your leads be able to do the same?

## The arrangement

- Is the bass part too low or high for your basses to handle with comfort and good vocal quality?
- Does the baritone part lie out of your baritone's quality range?
- Is the tenor part within the comfortable range of your tenors?
- Are there awkward leaps in any part?
- Are there sudden shifts in the tonal center (key feeling) which will be hard for your guys to hear and, consequently to learn and perform well?

- If there are key changes, can each part sing easily through them? Can your section leaders sing through the key change backwards? Yes, backwards!
- Can your section leaders read the arrangement and get 75% of it right the first time?
- Is the story and emotion of the lyric easy to understand and communicate?
- Is it a good song? Do you like it? Will your guys like it?

If the song satisfies all the above criteria, and you and your music team really like it, try it out on the guys. Have a demonstration quartet learn it and sing it for your chorus. Have the chorus read through it. Did they get most of it the first time through? Did they like it? Do they want to sing it? If so, put it in!

Contest songs should be the most musically interesting songs you can find that satisfy the above criteria. In addition, the emotional message should be especially strong, simple, and easy for you and your singers to relate to. This will allow you to communicate with your audience at the highest level possible and will result in a musical moment on stage that will satisfy you, your chorus, and your audience (including those pesky judges!).

A song that is well within the capabilities of your chorus will be quicker to learn, easier to sing well, and get higher marks from all of your judges, the ones in the audience at the show and the ones in the pit at the contest, too.

It takes time and effort to teach a song to your chorus. Make sure the song and arrangement you choose is worth it. Use a logical system when you select music for your chorus. It works. I guarantee it!

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