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# Creating music in a quartet

**The reason you're together is to make music. Find out which music fits you well, and fits together as a whole.**

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## Developing a repertoire

Start to plan your repertoire when the quartet is first organized. There are a number of factors to consider in determining what arrangements are to be included in the basic repertoire.

First, what is the goal and personality of the quartet? Your quartet might lean toward contest achievement, entertainment, comedy or a combination of the above.

Second, what are the musical capabilities of the quartet members? An honest evaluation here will help you to determine the degree of difficulty and types of arrangements to be used. Avoid the pitfall of singing an arrangement because you enjoyed hearing an international champion quartet perform it. Consider, rather, what your quartet can best handle.

Third, plan to present a well-balanced program. Types of songs to consider are: uptunes, easy-beat, ballads, novelty, comedy, solo, patriotic and inspirational.

The average quartet repertoire might consist of 15 to 20 numbers. From this total, the quartet can build two shows, regular and afterglow, with a few songs left over, in case of duplication on a show by a preceding quartet. For more information about putting together a strong, entertaining package, consult *Successful Performance for the Quartet and Chorus* (Stock No. 4055). This indispensable manual covers topics from song selection to pacing, effective use of humor, tips for your quartet spokesmen and much more. It may well be the best investment your quartet will make.

## Selecting good music

Two questions are frequently asked in relation to song selection. One, where do quartets get arrangements? Two, what are some of the guidelines for choosing songs?

The SPEBSQSA music publishing program is the best single source for good, singable arrangements. A large number of excellent arrangements are available, a list of which may be obtained from the Society office. It is suggested that quartets subscribe to the Music Premiere Program. For a fee of \$14.95 U.S. funds, all subscribers receive 12 new arrangements and two cassettes, as they are published.

Lou Perry, well-known arranger, judge, coach and barbershop sage, offered the following suggestions for selecting competition songs. These are also good points to consider when choosing songs for any purpose.

- A good barbershop song will have an easy-to-sing, mostly diatonic melody with a reasonable range.
- The melody will be symmetrical in form and will lend itself, without undue engineering, to the harmonic vocabulary of the barbershop style.
- The lyric will be easy to sing and will develop a composer's concept to a logical conclusion. The sentiment will be simple, universal and unsophisticated. Most of all, it must be tasteful by any standard.
- A strong song will have something definite to sell. It might be joy, sorrow, humor, sentiment, fun or rhythm, or a combination of these, but the development will be in a straight line toward the song's musical and lyrical climax.
- A well-written song will afford opportunities for the display of our abilities to create sound, with shading and appropriate tension and release.
- The arrangement of the song must be in the barbershop style. It is the arranger's obligation to understand and develop the composer's concept to the best of his ability. When he is successful in doing this, with a good vehicle, performers have a better opportunity to communicate with the audience.

Perry continued, "It has been my experience that the greatest difficulty arises from not understanding the song. Most of the quartet's time at the beginning might best be spent in this effort. Unison singing of the song, as written by the composer, brings an awareness of melodic content and form, rhythm of the melody, natural pulsation of the meter, direction and development of the lyric, natural phrasing, and consolidation of vowel utterance. If all this does not consummate a greater understanding of where the song should, at least, begin, then help should be sought outside the quartet. In every instance that a member has been impressed with what he designates 'a great arrangement,' an analysis has proved that it was not the arrangement as such, but the presentation of the arrangement of the song with understanding of what the song had to sell."

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