Spring 2023

Jazz Choir Arranging: Tips and Best Practices

Connor Bennion
Western Washington University, connor.bennion@gmail.com

Jazz Choir Arranging: Tips and Best Practices

By

Connor Bennion

Accepted in Partial Completion
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Music

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Dr. Patricia Bourne, Chair

Dr. Angela Kasper

Professor Tim Fitzpatrick

GRADUATE SCHOOL

David L. Patrick, Dean

Master's Thesis

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a master's degree at Western Washington University, I grant to Western Washington University the non-exclusive royalty-free right to archive, reproduce, distribute, and display the thesis in any and all forms, including electronic format, via any digital library mechanisms maintained by WWU.

I represent and warrant this is my original work, and does not infringe or violate any rights of others. I warrant that I have obtained written permissions from the owner of any third party copyrighted material included in these files.

I acknowledge that I retain ownership rights to the copyright of this work, including but not limited to the right to use all or part of this work in future works, such as articles or books.

Library users are granted permission for individual, research and non-commercial reproduction of this work for educational purposes only. Any further digital posting of this document requires specific permission from the author.

Any copying or publication of this thesis for commercial purposes, or for financial gain, is not allowed without my written permission.

Connor Bennion

5/5/22

Jazz Choir Arranging: Tips and Best Practices

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of
Western Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Music

by
Connor Bennion
May 2023

<u>Abstract</u>

Countless available arrangements exist for jazz bands and traditional choirs, but the field of publicly available vocal jazz ensemble arrangements is still emerging. Educators directing vocal jazz ensembles may be drawn to creating their own arrangements when they want their ensembles to perform songs for which there are no publicly available arrangements, or when published arrangements do not fit the needs of their ensemble. However, educators without a background in arranging may be at a loss for where, or how, to begin. Scholarship on arranging music for jazz choirs is limited, leaving educators wishing to improve their arranging skills scant resources.

The purpose of this thesis is to introduce concepts and considerations for arranging music for vocal jazz ensembles, with specific attention to the process itself and the needs of the ensemble that will perform the chart. Chapters two and three include strategies for arranging, from both print sources and interviews with experts in the field of vocal jazz arranging. This thesis culminates with recommendations for educators new to this field to begin writing their own arrangements, while seeking guidance from experienced arrangers and sources found in this document.

Acknowledgements

An enormous thank you to Dr. Patricia Bourne, Dr. Angela Kasper, and Professor Timothy Fitzpatrick for their assistance in the creation of this document. The three of you have been tremendously kind and patient mentors since before I even arrived at WWU, and the combination of unceasing support and tough love that you have given me has helped me immeasurably.

Thank you to all the expert arrangers who responded to my thesis so thoughtfully. I hope that I can someday be as immediately helpful to a student-educator as you were to me.

This thesis would not be possible without Mike Scott, who helped immensely by providing contact information and insight for his fellow experts. Mike opened the door for me to enter the jazz world, and provided essential advice once I was there. Thank you, Mike.

I am endlessly indebted to Joseph Crnko, my first and most impactful musical mentor. Words cannot ever fully express my gratitude, but: thank you for encouraging me to take a leadership role in choir when I was too young to realize that was a possibility, and for nudging me into my first accompanying role. These two actions set me down the path of music education to where I am today.

To the members of the 2007-2011 Lakeside Acafellas, 2011-2018 Wesleyan Spirits, and 2015-2018 Vineyard Sound: your endless shenanigans aside, you were all willing to be guinea pigs as I honed my arranging abilities. I will be forever grateful not only for that, but for the bonds we formed through singing together.

To Owen: I still blame you for getting me into the whole acapella "mess." But I have a hard time imagining my life without it, or without you as my lifelong best friend. Thank you for example that you've set throughout my life, and for being as kind an older brother as anyone could hope for.

A final thank you to my endlessly supportive parents, who started me on piano lessons at age two, and who have (after age two) always encouraged me to follow whatever life path I choose for myself.

Table of Contents

List of Tables and Figures

Chapter 1 – Introduction

For as long as there has been composed music, musicians, educators, and directors around the world have arranged existing musical material to better suit their ensemble's needs. Richard Sussman and Michael Abene stated: "It is our responsibility as composers, arrangers, and players to discover the true, optimum potential of a musical idea and to nurture it to fruition" (Sussman and Abene 2012, 3). This reworking of musical ideas is especially common in jazz spaces, where rearranging songs is a standard part of the creative process, and in educational spaces, where the learning needs of an ensemble often necessitate adjusting various elements of a song.

Today, there are countless available arrangements for jazz bands and traditional choirs, but the field of publicly available vocal jazz ensemble arrangements is still emerging. Noted jazz choir arranger Dave Cazier reminds us that any availability of quality arrangements is still relatively new: "In the 80's and 90's, there was a huge lack of quality literature for jazz choirs being published." Cazier began arranging as a means of providing repertoire for his vocal jazz ensembles.

Educators directing vocal jazz ensembles in schools may find themselves drawn to arranging whenever they want their ensembles to perform songs for which there are no publicly available arrangements, or when published arrangements do not fit the needs of their ensemble. However, educators without a background in arranging may find themselves at a loss for where, or how, to begin. This thesis is intended to be an introductory guide to arranging for vocal jazz ensembles, written with vocal jazz educators new to the arranging world in mind.

I have met many musician-educators interested in arranging but intimidated by the process and who, consequently, never begin learning how to arrange. My hope is that this thesis

can provide prospective arrangers with general tools to make the task of arranging for vocal jazz ensembles more accessible.

Methodology of research and interviews

I began the research process for this thesis by searching for print sources related to arranging for vocal jazz ensembles. While I discovered many sources on jazz arranging and choral arranging, books on these subjects lacked sufficient information on vocal jazz ensembles specifically. This revealed gaps in scholarly writing on arranging, mostly on the "less technical" side: primarily, subjective considerations about which all arrangers should have working knowledge.

While my own personal knowledge on this topic helps fill some of these gaps, it is limited compared to others in this arena. In order to expand resources on the topic of jazz choir arranging, I decided to interview accomplished arrangers in the field with a fixed set of open-ended questions. This adheres to Andrew J. Hobson and Andrew Townsend's stated "preference…for approaches to interviewing which maximize the scope for participants to explore their perceptions and beliefs" in *Educational Research and Inquiry* (Hobson 2010, 235).

With recommendations from arranger-educator Mike Scott of Columbia Basin College (Pasco, WA), I reached out to eleven arrangers with a Google Form questionnaire, and received eight responses. Some are renowned arrangers on the national scale, and others have their background and livelihood in the rich vocal jazz environment of the Pacific Northwest. All eight not only responded to the interview, but agreed to be identified in this document. Their current institution and (when applicable) a link to where one can find some of their published arrangements are listed below. The respondents were:

Dave Cazier – formerly Columbia Basin College

Matt Falker – MiraCosta College and Anchor Music Publications (https://anchormusic.com/artists/matt-falker/)

Dr. Jeremy Fox – The School for Music Vocations and Foxtrot Publishing (http://www.jeremyfox.net/about)

Jeff Horenstein – Meadowdale High School (https://anchormusic.com/artists/jeff-horenstein/)

Kelly Kunz – Bellevue College, Pierce College and Pacific Lutheran University (https://anchormusic.com/artists/kelly-kunz/)

Kerry Marsh – formerly University of North Colorado (https://kerrymarshvocaljazz.myshopify.com/collections/vendors?q=Kerry%20Marsh)

Mike Scott – Columbia Basin College

Vijay Singh – Central Washington University (https://anchormusic.com/artists/vijay-singh/)

Quotes and summaries from their interview responses are interspersed throughout the body of this document (primarily in Chapter 3); the full text of interview questions and answers can be found in Appendix A.

About the author

I began arranging vocal music during my freshman year of high school, when I assumed the directorship of Lakeside School's Tenor/Bass a cappella group, The Acafellas. On-the-job learning led to quite a bit of trial and error in arranging during my high school years, with significant guidance also coming from my older brother Owen, who was directing two collegiate a cappella groups.

3

During my undergraduate years at Wesleyan University, I directed the Wesleyan Spirits (another a cappella group), and arranged many songs for that ensemble. I also sang in and directed the Vineyard Sound, a professional a cappella ensemble. Directing this ensemble required extensive arranging, as well as analysis of hundreds of arrangements from past directors. These experiences significantly honed my arranging and pedagogical skills, and with hundreds of rehearsals and performances every year, I developed a strong sense of what aspects of arrangements and the arranging process worked well for me.

I continued to arrange for a cappella ensembles in my free time and into my time here at Western Washington University, where I contributed arrangements to the a cappella group on campus, Pacific Note West. I have had the tremendous opportunity and honor in the past year to direct WWU's Vocal Jazz Ensemble, which has allowed me to expand my arranging into the vocal jazz field. I have arranged several songs for the ensemble, thus sparking my current interest in vocal jazz arranging.

Chapter Layout

Information in this thesis is presented in four chapters: Chapter 1: Introduction, Chapter 2: First Steps and General Considerations, Chapter 3: The Toolbox, and Chapter 4: Conclusion and Recommendations. Chapter two explores abstract and difficult to quantify concepts that should be considered before and throughout the arranging process, as well as preliminary steps required before an arrangement is truly started, while Chapter three is a collection of introductory tips and tools for use throughout an arrangement. It is ordered in a similar way to Chuck Israels' *Exploring Jazz Arranging*:

> The information in this book is arranged sequentially, and the first reading of the material is probably best accomplished in that sequence. But the information wasn't acquired in that way, doesn't exist that way in the writer's mind, and won't be used that way by the

reader after it has been learned and integrated. We learn things best by immersion…There is no substitute for learning the language of music by writing it, and hearing it played. (Israels 2011, 1)

Like Chuck Israels, I have organized the information in Chapter three in a sequential order that aligns with my thought process while I arrange (as much as any fixed order can). All arrangers' creative processes differ slightly, and some concepts in this document will make more sense at different points in a process for different arrangers. This is why Chapter three is titled "The Toolbox," to encourage readers to acquire concepts as they need them rather than rigidly following a procedural recipe.

A note on copyright

This document is intended specifically as a set of tools for vocal jazz educators new to arranging who wish to arrange for their own ensembles, and focuses only on the process of arranging within an educational setting. If an arranger intends to publish an arrangement or to make money from it in any way (including ticket sales to concerts), they should obtain permission from the copyright holder. This is a separate process about which there are resources on websites such as NafME.org (Brown 2008).[1] As copyright issues are complex, it behooves any arranger to consult NafME guidelines, as arranging from within an educational setting is *not* a guarantee of legality.

Final Thought

Ultimately, my desire is that this thesis will serve as a helpful resource for emerging vocal jazz educators. While I sincerely hope that this will be true, it is also true that best practices for arranging differ slightly from person to person, and the concept of a successful arrangement is a subjective one. There is no single unified and standardized correct method for arranging, and

---

[1] https://nafme.org/my-classroom/copyright/copyright-arranging-adapting-transcribing/.

as Jimmy Joyce wrote in *Scoring for Voice:* "In arranging for voices, the result is what is important. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to do things!" (Joyce 2002, 3). This document contains tools that I hope will allow new arrangers to find their own "right" way to arrange.

Chapter 2 – First Steps and General Considerations

This chapter examines abstract considerations for the arranging process, most of which need to be examined before putting notes on a page, and can be revisited throughout the arranging process. "Abstract," in this case, means concepts and considerations that are difficult to neatly quantify, but which on examination can greatly impact the efficacy of any arrangement.

Abstract Concepts

In *Jazz Composition and Arranging in the Digital Age,* Richard Sussman and Mike Abene discussed six abstract concepts that should always be considered before beginning an arrangement and during the arranging process (Sussman and Abene 2012, 33). I have summarized them below:

Balance, which can be applied to melody, harmony, rhythm, form, and timbre/tone;

Economy, meaning being as efficient as possible in one's arrangement in conveying the musical message;

Focus, referring to where the listener's ear is drawn at any given time;

Contrast & Variety, which can be applied to all of the same concepts as balance;

Tension & Release, which refer to the flow of energy and emotion throughout a piece of music; and

Unity, the idea that there must be some unifying elements throughout a musical experience to convey a coherent musical message.

Where to begin

All arrangements are drawn from existing musical material. What initial form that material is in can vary. A common source of material in jazz music is a lead sheet, which contains the simplest version of the melody and chords. Online versions of lead sheets are easily

obtained for many popular songs, sometimes with only lyrics and chords. Lead sheets are an excellent starting point for arrangements, as they provide central information for the song's structure. Leslie Sabina pointed out their main drawback in *Jazz Arranging & Orchestration*:

> Because a lead sheet typically contains only the melody, the chord progression, and sometimes the lyrics, it does not explicitly provide all of the musical information that an arranger will need in order to write a good-sounding jazz arrangement. (Sabina 2002, 1)

This does not mean that lead sheets are not recommended sources; merely that they often should not be the *only* source from which an arrangement is drawn. As lead sheets do not generally contain material for introductions and endings, I recommend Paul E. Rinzler's first and second chapters in *Jazz Arranging and Performance Practice: A Guide for Small Ensembles* for some adaptable forms. Jimmy Joyce's *Scoring For Voice* also has forms for introductions and endings in its third chapter.

For many songs, more detailed sheet music may exist, providing a more exact harmonic and melodic outline. While this is certainly useful, arrangers should always be careful to check bylines; if the sheet music is of a specific arrangement of the song (rather than the original song material), arrangers should make substantial changes if they aren't intending to simply use the sheet music in question.

Many arrangements are based on an audio version of a song. The process of transcribing can be lengthy and difficult for anyone not already experienced. Doug Anderson's *Jazz and Show Choir Handbook II* contains a brief outline for the transcription process, which I have paraphrased to remove elements no longer relevant in the digital age:

1. Use a lead sheet to get basic melodic and harmonic information, and transpose to the key of the recording.[2]

2. Write out the bass line first, either melodically or simply establishing the chord progression.

3. Write out the melodic lines, starting with outer voices and moving inwards. This gives additional information for the chord structure.

4. Sing or play what has been transcribed while listening to the recording to ensure that they match. (Anderson 1993, 87).

Arrangers may need to adjust this process to fit their own specific needs, or the sonic environment of the song being transcribed. For example, while writing out the bass line first usually provides a framework upon which a transcriber can build the harmonic structure, many (especially older) recordings have bass lines that are difficult to hear, necessitating the transcription of other material first to provide a basis for building harmonies.

Know the Ensemble

An arranger should examine what they know about their vocal jazz ensemble before beginning any arrangement. With increasing amounts of information, one can better tailor any arrangement to the specific needs of their ensemble. In *Scoring for Voice,* Jimmy Joyce posed a series of questions every arranger should ask themselves about their singers: "What are their range limitations? In what musical styles are they well versed? Do they read music?" (Joyce 2002, 10). I think these are a good place to start. These questions, as well as some of my own, are addressed below.

---

[2] I consider this step optional, as not all songs have available lead sheets. It is, however, important to know the key of the song one is transcribing, and to transcribe in that key to avoid missteps.

It is important to know the general range of the singers in one's ensemble; at the early planning stage, I view the number of voice parts available and the range of each as the most important aspect of this concept. For instance, if an arranger has access only to a few tenors and basses, creating an SAB arrangement would make more sense than SATB. While in some rare situations, educator-arrangers have the option of auditioning voice parts to fit their arrangement rather than the other way around; I view these circumstances as the exception that proves the inverse as the rule.

An ensemble's music reading and music learning abilities are crucial data points for any arranger. At every point of the arranging process, an arranger should be trying to ensure that the melodies, harmonies, and rhythms of the emerging piece of music are within the grasp of their ensemble's abilities. This is not to say that all arrangements should feel easy to an ensemble; my experience is that a mixture of easier and more difficult pieces leads to the greatest engagement.[3]

An additional important factor is the ensemble members' vocal abilities and limitations. This consideration can help an educator-arranger expand on the previous questions about range limitations and music learning abilities. Vocal agility, tone, blending ability, and onset accuracy are examples of variables unique in every singer, and as with the previous questions should be approached through a combination of planning *around* said abilities and moving to *improve* those abilities.

In conjunction with an ensemble's abilities, arrangers for their own vocal group should consider the musical skills they want to build with the ensemble. This allows for stretching an arrangement's difficulty in one regard, while focusing musical material on specific skills.

---

[3] Finding the "sweet spot" of various difficulties for an ensemble may take some time and experimentation, but this leads into a much larger discussion of programming and educational praxis, neither of which are this document's focus.

Examples can include: unison blend, parallel interval movement, group scatting, solo/background engagement; interval tuning; the list is effectively endless.

Considering the desired musical skill-building for an ensemble links to Joyce's question "In what musical styles are they [the ensemble] well-versed?" Jazz choir music educators know that expanding the knowledge base and insight of their students' experience with multiple genres and styles (big band swing, bossa nova, etc.) is pedagogically imperative. With that said, one might interpret Joyce's inquiry as a reminder to set the ensemble up for success by recognizing the genres that lead to more immediate success. Educators should balance twin priorities: keeping the ensemble within genres where they have proven they can succeed, and expanding the ensemble's portfolio of successful genres.

A final consideration is the soloing capabilities of the ensemble members. This ties in closely with the consideration of vocal abilities, but extends to questions of physical stage presence and general confidence. Whether or not to include a difficult solo line is a crucial consideration for many arrangements of songs by popular artists possessing fabulous vocal skills.

All of the above considerations can be asked throughout the arranging process to ensure that the final product meets the needs of the ensemble. Additionally, these questions can play an important role in selecting a song to arrange; for example, a song with a complex and difficult to follow chord structure is likely to flummox singers without strong music learning abilities, and a simpler song could be a more secure choice.

What elements of songs/arrangements do you prefer?

It is impossible to arrange effectively without some knowledge of arrangements from others. As Chuck Israels wrote,

> As long as the composer's [or arranger's] intention is to achieve results that are recognizable as being in the jazz style, it's essential to have some listening background in the history of jazz arranging, so that elements of existing styles can be used as building blocks for the development of new music. (Israels 2011, 1)

Not everyone loves every song they've ever heard, and knowing what styles, themes, and arranging elements one likes leads directly to developing a unique arranging style. As such, I believe that if an arranger feels they do not already have opinions on a variety of styles and techniques, active research in and around the genre is crucial to developing those opinions. My journey on this path began with developing likes and dislikes for specific songs and arrangements, and finding the ability to articulate *why* I liked or did not like a song formed a bridge to deciding what elements I would include in future arrangements.

Identification of what elements in a song an arranger finds compelling can be another useful tool in choosing a song to arrange. My most successful arrangements have always used songs where I can clearly state what elements in a song's construction I find appealing. These can range from the lyrics to chord structure to general groove, or even a specific moment of energy in the song. Any aspect of the song can be enough, though the more the better. I prefer to retain these "cool" aspects of a song throughout an arrangement – my logic has always been that changing the best aspects of a song will only make the arrangement less effective. Ensuring that the arrangement retains that specific element(s) allows for the original song's strengths to shine through while allowing for significant creative expression in other aspects of the arrangement.

In situations where it is difficult to find appealing elements of a song (e.g., a commission for another ensemble, or a request from members of one's own ensemble), my best advice is for arrangers to try and find *something (anything!)* that they enjoy about a piece. Failing this, I acknowledge that a lack of truly compelling features signals that it should be easier to change more and larger musical concepts within the arrangement. It can also be worth considering what *audiences* will enjoy about a song, as this will sometimes have a different answer than what the *arranger* enjoys about this song.

Final reminder

I find it important to have as many specific ideas as possible for how an arrangement will sound *before* I begin writing. While many musical ideas will emerge during the arranging process, having some solid ideas before starting provides a framework within which one can work. These ideas can be anything – form, melodic or harmonic variation, one specific moment – and for me, often revolve around the specific elements of a song to which I am originally drawn. Beginning the process by writing down these ideas allows one to quickly get music onto the page, which removes the sometimes-terrifying obstacle of a blank score. This is useful even if these ideas are later changed or removed in the process of polishing the arrangement.

Once general considerations have been carefully thought through and initial ideas have solidified, an arranger is ready to dig into the "nuts and bolts" of arranging. An introduction to these specifics is included in Chapter 3: The Toolbox.

Chapter 3 – The Toolbox

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce various specific factors to consider while arranging for a vocal jazz ensemble. Admittedly, there are myriad considerations for arranging a song, from harmonies and voice leading to song form, key signature, melodic modifications, and genre/style (to name a few). Richard Sussman and Michael Abene helpfully stated that:

> The list can seem endless and daunting to the beginner and seasoned professional alike. Very often, the hardest part is just getting started. Our best advice is to learn to trust your instincts, pick a direction, and just jump in and start writing!" (Sussman and Abene 2012, 132)

I completely concur; as much as planning beforehand is helpful for streamlining the arranging process, I never know if an arrangement will work or not until I start putting notes on a page.

Interspersed within this chapter are tools recommended by published authors, including Leslie Sabina, Jimmy Joyce, Richard Sussman, Mike Abene, and others; select interview responses from prominent jazz arrangers; and strategies I have employed in my own arrangements. The musical examples (Figures 1-8) included in this chapter are from arrangements for jazz choir I have completed in the last 18 months. The title of each selection, as well as the purpose of the sample, is included in the figure caption.

As stated in Chapter 1, these tools are arranged in an order that works for my personal process of arranging. Rather than prescribing this specific order, I encourage readers to apply the recommended tools in whatever formula makes the most sense to them.

Forms

     As one begins the process of arranging, it helps to have some ideas for the form that one's arrangement will take. This is a particularly crucial consideration when arranging from simple source material; lead sheets will only show once through the form of the song (often AABA), which is rarely sufficient for a complete arrangement. An extended look at planning out a song form can be found in Chapter 11 of *Jazz Composition and Arranging in the Digital,* by Sussman & Abene. Some extended form templates can be found in Leslie Sabina's *Jazz Arranging & Orchestration,* on pages 118-121 (Sabina 2002, 118).[4]

     Some source material (e.g, sheet music or a recording) will do much of the work for an arranger; for example, if arranging from an existing popular song, its form (usually Verse-Chorus-Verse-Chorus-Bridge-Chorus, or something to that effect) may be easily replicated. Even then, it's perfectly acceptable to add an introduction, solo section(s), group scat sections, shout choruses, codas, or even just additional repeats. I frequently add solo sections to Verse-Chorus songs by simply adding another verse and chorus when it feels right to do so. As far as knowing whether doing so 'feels right,' a few factors must be considered, such as whether the ensemble has had sufficient solo opportunities.

     On a larger scale, it is worth reexamining some of the "abstract concepts" laid out by Sussman and Abene (See Chapter 2). Good questions to ask while considering adding length to a form include "is the arrangement **varied** enough?" and "will adding material make the song too long or bloat the **economy** of the music?" (Sussman and Abene 2012, 34).

---

[4] Note that these resources, as with so many printed resources on jazz arranging, focus on instrumental work. Luckily, the topic of song form is universal across vocal and instrumental music; but be aware that sometimes instrumental forms run significantly longer than vocal forms.

As an arranger, knowing the form as I begin helps me stick to a plan, and informs how I try to build and release **energy** and **tension** in the arrangement. That said, copy-pasting material is both extremely easy and extremely useful, and what is written for one section of an arrangement may work better at a different point: if that section is well-written but would fit better elsewhere, it should be moved rather than deleted. An arranger shouldn't feel too trapped by a predetermined form if a different form might work better. Sometimes, it's necessary to change the form of an arrangement after it is "complete;" listening to the supposedly finished product can be very enlightening.

Vocal Textures

Going hand in hand with form is texture: in what way will voices layer in listeners' ears? Texture shifts will often line up with form shifts, for instance, transitioning from an A section to a B section will often correspond with moving from one type of texture to another. Lining up these shifts can help keep the arrangement unified in the way it shifts energy. It's a good idea to have some vague ideas of what textures might be used in the arrangement before starting. Examples of common vocal textures in vocal jazz ensembles include *tutti* singing in parts or unison (also referred to as a "shout chorus"), solo singing, melody and countermelody (between treble voices and lower voices, for example), or a soloist singing with different background vocal textures. Jimmy Joyce's *Scoring for Voice* includes great examples of countermelody and two common background textures: referred to as "pads" and "fills" (Joyce 2002, 33). Pads are block

chords held by non-solo singers to provide consistent harmonic structure, often on single vowels like "ooh."

Figure 1: an example of pad background texture from "Sir Duke."

Fills line up closely with the other primary use of background vocals in popular music: "filling" musical gaps in the soloist's melody. Sussman and Abene add rhythmic comping and riffs as additional background textures (Sussman and Abene 2012, 144). Both rely on more rhythmically active structures, with comping relying on asymmetrical "hits" and riffs acting as a specialized, fast-moving counter-melody. When adapting an instrumental arrangement, I find it often makes sense to analyze the textures of that arrangement to see if there's something useful there. For instance, I used the trumpet parts from Billy May's arrangement of "Come Fly With Me" (for Frank Sinatra) to form the rhythmic comping found in the soprano and alto parts (See Figure 3).

Figure 2: a dual example of both riff texture and fill texture from "Just a-Sittin' and a-Rockin."
Note the repetitive structure, and how the background vocals fill in the holes left by the soloist's
melody.

Figure 3: The soprano and alto parts (from "Come Fly With Me") are an example of rhythmic
comping.

All of these tools link to the technique of instrumental imitation. A cappella arrangers are

intimately familiar with the concept of imitating instruments with voices; this technique can be

employed in vocal jazz arrangements as a form of group scatting. Many instruments can be

differentiated in a vocal arrangement by using varied syllables (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Instrumental imitation in "Come Fly With Me." Note the transition from full "big band" texture to only "trombones" in the fourth measure, indicated by a shift in rhythmic structure, range, and "bwa" syllables.

Vocal Ranges

When arranging, it is always important to consider the varying vocal ranges and tessituras accessible within the ensemble. The ranges of sections within a typical SATB vocal jazz ensemble do not really differ from the ranges of an SATB (non-jazz) choir, but there are some additional nuances to consider. As stated in Chapter 2, a critical tool for arranging with vocal ranges in mind is to *know the ensemble*. Once a group's members' specific ranges are known, one can arrange more specifically to their abilities and limitations. If the vocal ranges of the ensemble are unknown at the time of starting an arrangement, diagrams exist showing typical ranges for each voice part, though they all tend to differ slightly. For instance, Anita Kerr's diagram shows a typical soprano voice reaching a high G, while Jimmy Joyce's indicates a high F (Joyce 2002, 5; Kerr 1972, 2). Given that every singer is unique, diagrams should only be a starting point. I recommend arrangers for younger ensembles (i.e., younger than high school

singers) consult *Contemporary Choral Arranging* by Ostrander & Wilson, which contains a brief guide to those voice ranges (Ostrander and Wilson 1986, 4).

Vocal jazz, as with most popular music, utilizes more chest voice mix for treble voices than typical choral music. Irene Bartlett and Marisa Lee Naismith specify that this chest voice mix in popular music is typically maintained between F3 and C5 (Barlett and Naismith 2020, 276). This shifts the useful tessituras of some singers down, and often means that soprano and alto parts will sit at the lower end of their range. Tone also shifts as singers move through different registers of their range, which can affect their utility in parts of their range. In many cases, this can change a singer's useful range: for example, an alto may have a strong tone in chest voice but a weaker tone in their head voice, limiting their useful range to their chest voice alone. These limitations in vocal ability should be kept in an arranger's mind throughout the arranging process.

Generally, a higher pitch within a singer's range will mean a louder note. This is not to say that dynamics are entirely controlled by tessitura, but a more inexperienced ensemble is more likely to utilize what I call "pitch-based dynamics." Differences in tone between voice parts (e.g., sopranos are generally brighter than altos) will also change volume; while (ideally) we'd have uniform tone across our ensembles, that is extremely rare (Joyce 2002, 5). Anita Kerr stated that it is ideal to have all voice parts in similar areas of vocal strength simultaneously (low notes with low notes and high notes with high notes), but it is very rare to see this accomplished throughout an entire arrangement (Kerr 1972, 88). Chord voicings rarely allow this; close voicings will usually lead to tenors and basses singing in a higher part of their range than sopranos and altos. For the most part, I believe that this is something that arrangers should be *aware* of and work *with,* rather than attempting to forever avoid all imbalance between voice parts. In addition,

when using microphones, a competent sound technician can adjust the balance, allowing for more flexibility in voicings.

Voice Leading

Writing logical vocal lines that all "make sense" is a challenge that plagues even some experienced arrangers, and can take years of practice to perfect. Here, most of the basic rules that show up in general music theory courses apply: voices should be spaced without gigantic gaps between them, avoid melodic lines that involve lots of large jumps, etc. It is therefore worth refreshing one's memory on these basic rules. However, it is also worth remembering that songs outside the theory classroom are not neatly written Bach-style chorales, and jazz breaks the "rules" even more than art music; for example, parallel motion is far more common.

Kirby Shaw stated that, as a general rule, one should sing through all parts before finalizing an arrangement (Anderson 1993, 86). Notation software makes this process easy, as it is possible to sing one part while the software plays the others, allowing an arranger to hear the line they are singing in its harmonic context as well.

In an ideal world, every voice part will have a vocal line that is as interesting as the song's primary melody (Joyce 2002, 19). This is in my experience impossible to accomplish 100% of the time, but it is a good goal. There is often a balancing act between writing excellent horizontal melodies and writing excellent vertical chord voicings, as it is very difficult to always accomplish both. I have sung many arrangements where every vertical sonority is effective, but each individual line is extremely difficult; the inverse is also true. Some arrangers find melody writing easier than lining up vertical sonorities – others, like Mike Scott, say that "Voice leading has always been a struggle for me." Every emerging arranger should examine which skill they find comes more easily, as it is the other to which they should devote more attention.

When writing parts, it is recommended to begin with the main melody then build harmonies around it. If working from a lead sheet or sheet music, the essential chords of the song will already be revealed, and therefore can be used as a framework for balancing voice leading and chord voicings. If adapting an existing arrangement or recording of song, it might be wise to do some harmonic analysis to be absolutely sure of the chords, as lead sheets and online sources often simplify chords that have complicated extensions. A common tool for building harmonies out from the melody is "hanging" harmonies from the soprano line, which leads us to the matter of how to voice chords (Pease and Pullig 2001, 24).

Jazz Voicings

Chords used in jazz are often more complicated to voice than chords from music of other genres, since they often have more pitches in the chord than simple triads. Thanks to extensions, jazz chords almost always have at least four unique pitches, which provides additional opportunities while generally making the process more difficult.

A great many tools exist for instrumental jazz arranging. I recommend the entirety of Leslie Sabina's *Jazz Arranging & Orchestration,* Sussman & Abene's *Jazz Composition and Arranging in the Digital Age,* and Ted Pease & Ken Pullig's *Modern Jazz Voicings.* There is, however, a limitation unique to vocal jazz that these books do not address: the human voice is not the same as other instruments. It has its own limitations and capabilities, which impact the applicability of vocal arrangements. Many vocal jazz arrangers transcribe their parts directly from instrumental jazz arrangements; while this can be a useful source of material, this can lead to individual parts that are extremely difficult to sing. Therefore, this strategy should always be accompanied with a willingness to significantly edit parts. As such, I find it crucial to emphasize the integrity of individual lines over trying to find the perfect chord voicing.

It should be noted that it is not always necessary to include all the notes of a chord in the vocal parts. This is especially true in arrangements that will be accompanied by a rhythm section, as the instruments of a rhythm section (e.g., piano and guitar) will provide an entire harmonic landscape over which the vocalists can sing anything from dense chords to unisons. Doubling notes in the chord to keep a voicing from becoming too dense is common, acceptable, and encouraged.

A cappella arrangements need to provide more of the chordal structure in the voice parts, but it is still appropriate to omit certain notes of complex chords in these arrangements. Chuck Israels' *Exploring Jazz Arranging* has some guidelines for omitting specific notes in chords at the complexity of five notes or more – most commonly, voicings using the 9th will omit the root, unless the root is part of the melody (Israels 2011, 94).

As previously mentioned, one can build harmonic structures by "hanging" harmonies from the soprano line. This technique is accomplished by writing out the melody in the soprano then filling in the remaining notes of the chord in the lower parts. This often leads to inversions of chords (which is not itself an issue), which in turn leads to very "crunchy" chord voicings involving voice parts only a second apart. This can be changed by "dropping" one of the clashing notes down an octave into a different voice part. This creates a more open voicing, which could be easier for singers to tune.[5] Drop-2 voicing involves dropping the second-highest note, Drop-3 drops the third-highest, and so on. A more detailed explanation of drop voicings can be found in *Jazz Arranging* by Norman David (David 1998, 101).

---

[5] My experience in a cappella music has been that open voicings are *harder* to tune when chords are simple triads, and drop voicings should be avoided when possible for these simpler chords.
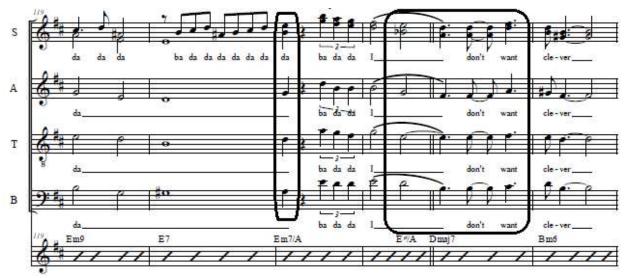
Figure 5: The circled sections of "Just the Way You Are" are examples of Drop-2 and Drop-3 voicings.

When writing harmonies, one must consider the tessituras that work for auditory purposes and those that do not. It is important to employ what Leslie Sabina refers to as "Safe Low Limits" for intervals (Sabina 2002, 45). If an interval between two notes in a chord is too low, the human ear will simply interpret the sound as muddy, rather than clearly hearing the tones. Figure 6 shows safe low limits for common intervals. This is an important guideline for tenor and bass parts, but also for any written accompaniment charts that include the bass octave (usually piano and bass).
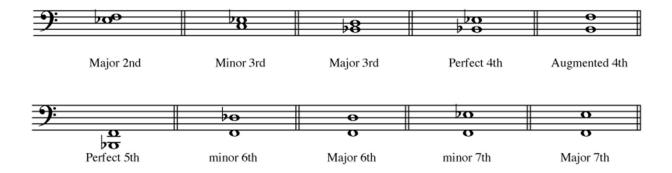
Figure 6: Safe low limits, below which intervals are usually not clearly heard. Source: HiroHonshuko.com.

New Material in Arrangements: How Much

How much new material is required in an arrangement? How does one create that new material? These questions can be nerve-wracking for new arrangers, and there are no universal answers to either of them. Most experienced arrangers I interviewed stated that these questions are situational and dependent on the context of the arrangement (see Appendix A for full interview responses). Jeff Horenstein, Kelly Kunz, and Kerry Marsh all drew a distinction between "arranging," which includes mostly new material, and "adapting," or directly interpreting existing material.

How much new material is needed to qualify as an *arrangement* is extremely vague and subjective. My personal opinion is that if I am transcribing an existing version and making only small edits, I should not claim the title of "arranger." Transcriptions and adaptations of this sort may not fall under acceptable practices according to copyright law, and arrangers should use caution and consult authorities or resources on copyright infringement law.

The most direct information regarding arranging vs. adapting emerged from my interviews. Regarding the addition of new material, Matt Falkner stated:

The more sophisticated the source material is (e.g. a fully fleshed out Laurence Hobgood arrangement for Kurt Elling), the less original material is needed. If it's a blank slate and not tied to a specific existing recording, then I have room for a lot more of my concepts. Charts for higher level choirs usually have more original material.

Jeremy Fox responded: "It depends if it was a more current original song or not. If it is, I usually try not to supercede the song itself by adding too much new material. If it is an old jazz standard for instance, I might write more original material." Kerry Marsh offered:

If left to my own devices, if I absolutely love the original for all its modern hipness or swinging qualities, I'll leave much of the harmonic and rhythmic material intact and essentially write a "setting" or "adaptation" of the original that lets the vocal jazz group perform the song mostly like people may know it. Often this is the case for less popular songs, though, so in that case, the average audience member will still find it unique. It's in the case of much more popular songs, and especially simpler songs (possibly ones that I don't especially like) that I'll do the most creative work with harmony and groove concepts, trying to reinvent the song to make it fit a new creative vision and to bring it up to date.

Dave Cazier took a less flexible stance on the topic: "I don't write an arrangement unless I have something new to say. If someone else has a chart similar to what I'm thinking, it should be used." I think this is a valid sentiment (even if this isn't my personal philosophy), for two reasons. It is generally best to support fellow arrangers around the world, for whom this may be their primary livelihood; additionally, being able to use an existing arrangement is a *huge* time saving measure. However, sometimes written versions of an arrangement don't exist, or what is published strays significantly from the recorded version one seeks to emulate, or the arranger may have a few ideas for changes that could be made to better suit the arrangement to their ensemble.

I do not believe that all written versions of songs must be entirely new; transcriptions and adaptations are valuable and worth doing – especially as one is starting to arrange. Much of my early arranging experience came from transcribing recordings of existing arrangements, and this gave me a much deeper understanding of what I liked and disliked in various songs. Jeff Horenstein pointed to adapting/transcribing as "an important facet of vocal jazz, [especially] in educational settings. It has exposed many people, myself included, to a wide array of artists and their songs (or versions of songs)."

New Material in Arrangements: How to add

In an *ideal* world, all arrangers would have infinite ideas for amazing new interpretations of every phrase in a song. I tend to have several solid ideas for some specific sections of a song, but find myself needing to dig deeper for the rest. Some specific compositional arranging concepts (including melodic and harmonic variation) can be found in Part IV of Leslie Sabina's *Jazz Arranging and Orchestration* (Sabina 2002, 123).

Beyond exploring specific concepts, my best advice for arrangers is to experiment and draw from other material with which they are familiar. Is there a specific way another song handles a chord progression that is enjoyable to listen to? Perhaps analyzing what that arrangement inserts or alters will provide clues for including "new" material. I particularly enjoy inserting a secondary dominant between a I chord and a vi chord (see Figure 7). I also recommend experimenting with modified melodies and new harmonies by singing them, or by playing them on guitar or piano.

Figure 7: an example of harmonic variation in "All My Loving."

Figure 8: An example of melodic variation in "Just the Way You Are." In the second measure, the melody sung by the sopranos differs significantly from the original melody, but the harmonic and rhythmic structures remain the same.

Another common strategy in helping arrangements feel new and original is simply changing the genre or style of part, or all, of the arrangement. Chapter IV of Paul E. Rinzler's *Jazz Arranging and Performance Practice: A Guide for Small Ensembles* outlined some

examples of this technique (Rinzler 1989, 43). Some good examples on the internet include ensembles like *Post-Modern Jukebox* and *The 8-bit Big Band,* both of which specialize in re-arranging songs into the jazz idiom.

Be aware that sometimes changing style mid-song can feel jarring to the listener, even if it is done well, so use caution. Not every style or genre change will work perfectly, so this is another circumstance where preemptively having a solid idea of how the arrangement might sound is advisable. Researching and listening extensively is crucial when considering a change of style or genre. I recommend Fred Sturm's *Changes over Time: the Evolution of Jazz Arranging* for those seeking guidance in a variety of jazz styles.

New material does not always have to add significant complexity to the arrangement; complexity should be tailored to the needs of the ensemble. A common pitfall for new arrangers is writing overly complex music beyond their ensemble's capabilities. Jeremy Fox and Mike Scott both cited "too many ideas" as past struggles in their arranging careers, pointing to an early tendency to overcomplicate. When considering adding additional complexity, it is worth remembering Sussman & Abene's concept of **economy** (See chapter 2)**:** would adding new, denser sections allow the arrangement's musical message to be conveyed efficiently?

A Cappella Arrangements

Deciding whether an arrangement should be a cappella or accompanied by rhythm section should be done before the process of arranging begins, as there are a few important structural differences to consider. As was mentioned earlier in this document, in a cappella arrangements, the entire harmonic structure must exist in the voice parts. Depending on the experience level of the ensemble, an a cappella arrangement will usually limit the complexity of

chords used, as it is more important to prioritize the notes central to a chord's definition than to add extensions.

Further, a cappella arrangements inherently change the nature of the bass part, from merely the lowest sung harmony to replicating the function of the bass *instrument.* In many cases, this means replicating the *sound* of the bass instrument, using rhythmic syllables like "dm" to sound like an upright or electric bass.

Even when direct imitation of a bass instrument is not used, the bass part must adhere as much as possible to the root of each chord in order to effectively communicate to listeners the structure of those chords. I have found that a cappella bass parts tend to stay closer to the low end of a bass range, in contrast to many accompanied bass parts, which sit in a more baritone tessitura to stay closer to the tenor part.

Neutral Syllables

Sung syllables that are not words (also called neutral syllables or vocables) are extremely common in vocal jazz. They can allow for the scatting (and group scatting), imitation of instrumental parts, and variety in background vocal parts behind a soloist. The strong consensus among my interview subjects was that simplicity is key.

Neutral syllables like *da, va, daht, vahp, doo, ba,* etc., are all good options. A common practice mentioned by Matt Falker is using t's and p's at the end of syllables to make shorter, sharper articulations (dat, bap, etc.). Kerry Marsh stated:

> I focus on the articulation needed for the line rather than any particular color. Consonants can be the thing that leads to corniness or awkwardness in scat syllables, and generally it's best to keep them simple, even if fairly repetitive. Doo bah, dah bah, "way" for brighter colors and sometimes for a more contemporary sound...ghosted notes when appropriate in bebop style ("n"). That all accounts for 95% of my syllable writing. Backgrounds often start with "oo" vowels and crescendo through a section using the "oo, oh, ah" progression for gradually brightening of colors.

The use of vowels to help shape dynamics was echoed by Kelly Kunz. Vijay Singh, Matt Falker, and Kelly Kunz recommend singing through syllables to make sure they feel natural. Mike Scott and Kelly Kunz both mentioned using syllables that imitate instruments effectively, with harder consonants like b's and d's often indicating brass instruments and softer ones (v's, for example) imitating saxophones.

Figure 4, printed again below for the reader's convenience, shows a transition from trumpet imitation to trombone imitation by moving from the sharper "trumpet" hits of "ba" and "da" to the more diffuse "bwa" to imitate trombones. Syllables that multiple interviewed experts encourage all arrangers to avoid include "dwee," "shwee," "frop," "sqwee," and "sqwiddly" – "My line of thinking is that, if I as a listener are [sic] distracted by the syllable choices, the music isn't prevailing in the way that it should" (Horenstein 2023). Finally, as with so many topics in this document, Dave Cazier encourages arrangers to use "what [you] hear other artists use."

Figure 4: Instrumental imitation in "Come Fly With Me." Note the transition from full "big band" texture to only "trombones" in the fourth measure, indicated by a shift in rhythmic structure, range, and "bwa" syllables.

Writing for a Rhythm Section

Information on how to write rhythm section charts can be found in *Jazz Arranging* by Norman David and *Jazz Arranging and Performance Practice: A Guide for Small Ensembles* by Paul E. Rinzler (David 1998, 64; Rinzler 1989, 74, 126). That said, there are many levels of acceptable detail in rhythm section charts, ranging from fully notated parts for all instruments to barely more than a list of chords.

Several of my interviewees indicated a preference for using less detail in their rhythm section charts, as it emulates the world of professional jazz and encourages the improvement of instrumentalists, but all of them indicated that the specific needs of an ensemble outweigh this preference. Jeff Horenstein summarized this preference:

> I pretty much only have time to write for my own ensembles, so it depends on their needs. If I have players that can play from chord changes and hits, then I don't have to write out parts. Often there will be some specific figures I notate to be played as written, but the less the better.

Dave Cazier specified what some of those "specific figures" might be:

> I write out lines that are integral to the chart, such as themes [in] the rhythm section that should be played in unison. Rhythmic punches that need to be played, dynamic markings and any solo lines that they need to see, such as when it's rubato piano and soloist.

Rather than preferring less detail, Kerry Marsh always uses more consistent precision:

> I fully notate the piano and bass parts, but this is because I'm publishing for a wide range of schools with varying levels of skill in rhythm sections. Drums get slashes, hits, occasional drum notation for specific figures or suggested grooves, and rhythmic notation when they need to stop playing time and play hits with the rest of the rhythm section/choir.

This is essentially a question of ability and experience: more experienced rhythm section instrumentalists will be able to make sense of very vague instructions, but less experienced instrumentalists will need significantly more detail. As always, the rule of "know the ensemble" remains critical. If the ability level is unknown, it seems safest to heed Kerry Marsh's advice and fully notate as much as possible. Do not leave things to chance.

Before hitting "Print"

There are two more points to consider while finishing an arrangement: sing through every voice part and polish the layout. As mentioned previously, taking Kirby Shaw's advice to sing through every part allows an arranger to make sure that each part is singable and at the appropriate level of difficulty for their ensemble. It also allows one to double check any neutral syllables, ensuring that they flow smoothly and organically.

The use of digital notation allows for a finished score or chart that is clear and free of error. As Dave Cazier states, "the days of sketchy hand written charts are over" (Cazier 2023). As Matt Falker stated, "The whole point of music notation is the capture previously created sounds and make them translatable to another human being. Why communicate that information in a haphazard manner?" An agreed-upon requirement from Jeff Horenstein and Kerry Marsh is the inclusion of chord markings in vocal scores – even when rhythm section parts aren't involved, singers benefit from understanding the harmonic structure of the song.

Final Thoughts

Finally, there is only so much one can accomplish on one's own. Many books exist on subjects surrounding vocal jazz arranging (if not directly written on the subject), and seeking the expert opinion of other musicians, especially experienced arrangers, is invaluable as one begins their arranging career. To paraphrase Chuck Israels, there is no substitute for the knowledge

gained from learning through experience, and as I learned through the interview process for this thesis, many arrangers are eager to share their thoughts. This is true not only as one finishes an arrangement, but at any point during the process.

Jimmy Joyce wrote, "Don't make judgments about your arrangement until you have had the opportunity to hear it after it has been well rehearsed, and with reasonable listening conditions." (Joyce 2002, 61). It can take many iterations of this process, with many different arrangements, to build true confidence and comfort in one's arranging abilities. My hope is that this document serves as a useful resource in moving arrangers more quickly towards that confidence.

Chapter 4 – Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of this thesis was to introduce concepts and considerations for arranging music for vocal jazz ensembles, with specific attention to the process itself and the needs of the ensemble who will perform the chart. Upon consultation of available resources, interview responses from highly regarded vocal jazz arrangers, and my own experience as an arranger, a "toolbox" was presented (Chapter 3) with an invitation for novice arrangers to take steps forward in learning to arrange.

Learning to arrange music can be a long and difficult process, with significant growing pains. Many of my first attempts at arranging were either never completed (I felt that I had exhausted my ideas), or never sounded the way I had originally envisioned. However, I knew that I was always learning more about what techniques worked for translating my ideas onto the page. I also quickly learned that my ensembles' needs were far more important than any of my specific ideas. What good is a "cool," complicated melody if the ensemble can never sing it well? The speed at which I learned had everything to do with how much feedback I received from others, especially from experienced arrangers and my own ensemble members. I now view my early arrangements as important learning tools on my path to creating more successful arrangements.

I hope that this thesis can be a helpful tool to anyone feeling tentative about starting to arrange, or any new arrangers feeling stuck partway through their process. I encourage readers of this thesis to reach out to any experienced arrangers for help, and while it is always easier to contact experts that one knows well, there is no downside to contacting experts outside one's immediate circle of contacts. The world of music is made richer by the sharing of ideas, and we all benefit from new music being made. My best advice to aspiring arrangers is to get as much

feedback as possible, and that requires simply jumping in and beginning to arrange. Jimmy Joyce

stated it best at the end of *Scoring for Voice:*

> WRITE! Write arrangements. …the best teacher is the actual experience gained from writing. You'll make some mistakes, but you will write some nice things, too. Get in there and arrange, and give it your all,–or simply stated, **Do it!** (Joyce 2002, 61)

Works Cited

Anderson, Douglas. 1993. *Doug Anderson's Jazz and Show Choir Handbook II*. Chapel Hill, NC: Hinshaw Music.

Bartlett, Irene and Marisa Lee Naismith. 2020. "An Investigation of Contemporary Commercial Music (CCM) Voice Pedagogy: A Class of its Own?" *Journal of Singing* 76, no. 3 (Jan, 2020): 273-282. https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/investigation-contemporary-commercial-music-ccm/docview/2339845199/se-2.

Brown, Linda. 2008. "Copyright: Arranging, Adapting, Transcribing." NAfME. Accessed April 24, 2023. https://nafme.org/my-classroom/copyright/copyright-arranging-adapting-transcribing/.

Cazier, Dave. Interview by Connor Bennion. Google Form questionnaire interview. April 2023.

David, Norman. 1998. *Jazz Arranging*. New York, NY: Ardsley.

"Fair Use Doctrine - Top 10 Misconceptions." LegalFlip.com. Accessed April 27, 2023. http://www.legalflip.com/Article.aspx?id=27&pageid=139#:~:text=If%20you%20use%20another's%20copyrighted,money%20off%20the%20copyrighted%20work.

Falker, Matt. Interview by Connor Bennion. Google Form questionnaire interview. April 2023.

Fox, Jeremy. Interview by Connor Bennion. Google Form questionnaire interview. April 2023.

Horenstein, Jeff. Interview by Connor Bennion. Google Form questionnaire interview. April 2023.

Israels, Chuck. 2011. *Exploring Jazz Arranging: An Interactive Guide to the Techniques and Aesthetics*. Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard.

Joyce, Jimmy. 2002. *Scoring for Voice: A Guide to Writing Vocal Arrangements*. Los Angeles, CA: Alfred Publishing.

Kerr, Anita. 1972. *Voices*. New York, NY: MCA Music.

Kunz, Kelly. Interview by Connor Bennion. Google Form questionnaire interview. April 2023.

Madflute. 2017. "Low Interval Limit." HiroHonshuku.com. Accessed April 26, 2023. https://hirohonshuku.com/en/jazz-theory/low-interval-limit/.

Marsh, Kerry. Interview by Connor Bennion. Google Form questionnaire interview. April 2023.

Ostrander, Arthur E., and Dana Wilson. 1986. *Contemporary Choral Arranging*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Pease, Ted, and Ken Pullig. 2001. *Modern Jazz Voicings: Arranging for Small and Medium Ensembles*. Edited by Michael Gold. Boston, MA: Berklee Press.

Rinzler, Paul E. 1989. *Jazz Arranging and Performance Practice: A Guide for Small Ensembles*. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press.

Sabina, Leslie M. 2002. *Jazz Arranging and Orchestration: A Concise Introduction with Interactive CD-ROM*. Stamford, CT: Schirmer/Thomson Learning.

Scott, Mike. Interview by Connor Bennion. Google Form questionnaire interview. April 2023.

Singh, Vijay. Interview by Connor Bennion. Google Form questionnaire interview. April 2023.

Sturm, Fred. 1995. *Changes over Time: The Evolution of Jazz Arranging*. Mainz, Germany: Advance Music.

Sussman, Richard, and Mike Abene. 2012. *Jazz Composition and Arranging in the Digital Age*. New York: Oxford University Press.

"Use by Educators." 2021. NAfME. Accessed April 27, 2023. https://nafme.org/my-classroom/use-by-educators/.

Appendix A

A note on the first question: some of the respondents seem to have answered the question with *when* instead of *why*.

Why did you start arranging for vocal jazz ensembles?

MIKE SCOTT: Senior year of high school, terribly.

VIJAY SINGH: 1985

KERRY MARSH: I was interested in writing advanced and modern-sounding arrangements for the college jazz choir I was singing in, because my director complained that there wasn't enough interesting and forward-looking literature in the genre. I had been writing songs since I was age 10 and had dabbled in some choral and big band writing, and had organically put together lots of small group music with an a cappella group I sang with in high school, but it was in college that I really started figuring out vocal jazz writing.

JEFF HORENSTEIN: In college. I was encouraged by my professors (Vijay Singh, Dave Barduhn) to give it a try.

MATT FALKER: I was in a top level university vocal jazz ensemble, and we were encouraged to try writing for the group, with the guarantee that if we finished, the group would read and record it.

JEREMY FOX: It was part of my education at the School for Music Vocations, but I also quickly learned that vocal jazz arranging was a passion.

KELLY KUNZ: In HS

DAVE CAZIER: Because especially in the 80s and 90s there was a huge lack of quality literature for jazz choirs being published. There were also creative ideas that I wanted to express through writing. Finally, I wanted my groups to be unique because they had music that no one else was doing.

In as much detail as you'd like, what does your arranging process look like?

MIKE SCOTT: I find a cool song I like and sketch out ideas for what I think might work within an arrangement. I then transfer those to Sibelius and I write until I vomit. Rinse and repeat as desired.

VIJAY SINGH: If the arrangement is based on a professional recording (Ex: solo vocalist with rhythm section) I start by transcribing the recording first; if it is a big band tune/chart I do the same or try to get a copy of the conductor's score from the band score and use it as a starting point based on the recording. If it is not based on a recording, I decide what style (Straight ahead swing, bebop, samba, afro-cuban, jazz waltz, balls, etc.) and groove, choose an appropriate key based on the melody range and tessitura, and decide how to set the text....if there are no lyrics, then you have to either write/invent some or decide if you want it to be a "syllable chart" (common for certain bebop tunes, for example..). I also will improvise on the changes using piano for creative ideas. I usually have a pretty good idea how I want to build the chart using various compositional/arranging techniques (Ex:

start with unison/unison octaves, spread out to 2-4 part divisi harmony, countermelody, call-n-response, 4-6 part shout chorus, etc.) and I experiment with lots of contrasts in texture and dynamics to create peaks and valleys of intensity. I usually let it "ferment" for a few days before revisiting the chart a week or so later.......if I decide to change anything, I will...the ink is NEVER dry! I also sing every part to make sure it is functional and not boring for the singers. I will write rhythm section parts if necessary but I rarely do because I teach my players how to play off lead sheets/chord changes and be creative in how they contribute to the chart/performance.

KERRY MARSH: About 75% of the arrangements I write are done on commission, so many of the decisions are made by the directors when they ask me to write for them. Generally, though, I'll start by laying out a score in Sibelius, then I give myself a skeleton of the arrangement with the melody line written in as well as any form details I can come up with through audiating (imagining the arrangement in real time), then I'll write out the bass part (instrumental or vocal in the case of a cappella), making decisions about any potential reharmonization I'll use (and so I'll then also include the chord symbols). I'll then make decisions about when the melody should be sung by a soloist vs. the ensemble, and I'll move things around. Next I'd usually write the vocal parts, potentially leaving out syllables for wordless spots. Then I'll write the piano part, fully notated, to support the ensemble effectively and help pianists who don't read chord symbols. Next, I'll write out the drums, making sure they have cues and any text information to help them play supportively, and then it's time for adding all dynamic markings that I didn't add in earlier parts of the process, then laying out the score and all the parts. After that, I'll record a demo in my DAW, with my wife singing the S/A parts. I program the bass and piano parts and then send a scratch file and a click file to my friend who plays the drums part and sends me back stems to add to my recording project. I mix down the demo and all of the part learning tracks and send off to the director (or add it to my site for sale). This is all not including the licensing details, but I won't get into that here.

JEFF HORENSTEIN: I'll usually start with the form. I think through how I want my arrangement to flow in terms of sections and textures (solo, thin or think ensemble singing, close or spread voicings, dynamics, rhythm section textures, etc.) Then once I have a road map I flesh it out in terms of the actual part writing.

MATT FALKER: If I'm choosing the arrangement, I start by securing the rights with the appropriate composer or publishing company. No point in arranging something that I can't legally distribute. I then sketch out the form of each chorus of the chart, considering whether or not there will be lyric solos, improvised solos, soli sections, etc. The first section I write is usually the one where I had the inspiration along the lines of 'this would be a cool chart to arrange'. I have a Finale template that already has my formatting the way I like it, so I write the notes directly into notation. Often in the process, I will also build a Logic demo file, where I start playing in a scratch piano track & vocal parts, so that I can hear how what I'm writing is shaping up. I try to avoid using the piano when I

am writing each individual vocal line, I really want to sing and feel it, so that it is as natural as possible. Often, I try it in Logic, then transfer it back into Finale. My Finale template has a master score linked to each individual part, so once I enter everything in, then I can edit/tweak each part. Lastly, I flesh out the demo and/or have a group read it, so that I can make the necessary edits before finalizing it.

JEREMY FOX: Usually, I take a lead sheet and sit and just "play" on the piano for awhile, in at least a few different sessions, finding either harmonic/melodic/textural changes that seem to be fitting. Then I write a plan for the arrangement with words and these musical "gems" I found, putting them in the approximate places. Then I begin arranging using what I have as a basis. Almost always, I arrange at the piano.

KELLY KUNZ: It changes with each song. Sometimes I try to totally re-imagine it, sometimes just "jazz it up", change the groove, meter, harmonic structure, stuff like that... I do try to keep the parts as linear as possible (with some exceptions). One of the main things is to make sure that there are peaks and valleys within the arrangement so that it has an overall direction and doesn't just drone on. I try not to use "yeah" on the last chord. haha. Not always successful with that. I am very attentive to proper word stress built into the rhythms of a phrase so that folks don't have to work too hard to achieve that. This is especially true on ballads, but certainly not limited to them. Lastly, I try to put enough meat into an arrangement that makes it worthy of the time it takes to learn it and so that the process remains enjoyable. (This last thing is subjective, but to me, important).

DAVE CAZIER: 1. A tune that inspires me either because of theme or musical content. 2. I look for a lead sheet so I know whether I'll have to create/lift one myself 3. I do a lot of listening to formulate my approach to groove, form, style; unless I already have a super clear idea of what I want to do. I make sure a really know the tune. 4. I decide who is best to tell the story, the whole ensemble or soloist(s). 5. Based on all above I choose the key. 6. I sketch out a map: intro & endings, sections of unisons vs parts, where solos will happen, solis or shout choruses and such 7. I do any required lifting from recordings. 8. I start inking it out, nowadays using my computer. 9. Wrote rhythm section parts 10. Computerize double check.

Do your arrangements typically have a lot of original material? How much "new stuff" do you feel that you need in an arrangement?

MIKE SCOTT: For me, no. Although I'm always evolving and trying new things. I try to be "'Mike Scott" in my arrangements, which usually has some sort of vamp or riff I like.

VIJAY SINGH: Yes......I like using the source material as a starting point and then expanding using my own creativity and original ideas. The only time I I don't do that is when I am doing a strict transcription or "lift" for a specific tune or group.

KERRY MARSH: Varies wildly depending on the commission request, but if left to my own devices, if I absolutely love the original for all its modern hipness or swinging qualities, I'll leave much of the harmonic and rhythmic material intact and essentially write a

"setting" or "adaptation" of the original that lets the vocal jazz group perform the song mostly like people may know it. Often this is the case for less popular songs, though, so in that case, the average audience member will still find it unique. It's in the case of much more popular songs, and especially simpler songs (possibly ones that I don't especially like) that I'll do the most creative work with harmony and groove concepts, trying to reinvent the song to make it fit a new creative vision and to bring it up to date.

JEFF HORENSTEIN: I view arranging and adapting as two separate things (both valid) that sometimes overlap. If I'm starting wtih an existing recording, I consider that adapting. This has been an important facet of vocal jazz, expecially in educational settings. It has exposed many people, myself included, to a wide array of artists and their songs (or versions of songs). Arranging is more creative, trying to put to paper original ideas, approaches, and takes on a tune, not necessarily based on a recording. I have some of each. And sometimes they overlap.

MATT FALKER: Totally context dependent. However, the more sophisticated the source material is (e.g. a fully fleshed out Laurence Hobgood arrangement for Kurt Elling), the less original material is needed. If it's a blank slate and not tied to a specific existing recording, then I have room for a lot more of my concepts. Charts for higher level choirs usually have more original material. I often think of a chart as "70-30" or "20-80" original material.

JEREMY FOX: It depends if it was a more current original song or not. If it is, I usually try not to supercede the song itself by adding too much new material. If it is an old jazz standard for instance, I might write more original material.

KELLY KUNZ: This is situational. There is always some level of original material, otherwise, it's not much of an arrangement, which is fine, again (more like an adaptation), just depends on what "feels best" for the tune, the arrangement and the ability level for the group I'm arranging for.

DAVE CAZIER: I don't write an arrangement unless I have something new to say. If someone else has a chart similar to what I'm thinking, it should be used.

What have consistent stumbling blocks been for you in arranging for contemporary vocal ensembles? Were there challenges that you have since overcome?

MIKE SCOTT: Voice leading has always been a struggle for me. I've figured it out though. I also have too many ideas sometimes and it's hard to pare it down.

VIJAY SINGH: Initially I was not a vocalist (I was an instrumentalist who played piano, clarinet, saxophone, and drums/percussion) so I was somewhat limited in my knowledge of voice and vocal techniques. I overcame this by singing more and studying voice, vocal techniques, and great vocal writers and emulating what they were doing......I also was blessed to have some great mentors who took me under their wings and patiently taught me how to get better at writing for vocal ensembles.

KERRY MARSH: Really just licensing, and I've learned how to work with the big publishers and individual songwriters to properly license my arrangements for sale (and commission). That's been the biggest headache over the years, and caused much frustration for the first half of my career. I've always been comfortable writing for vocal jazz ensembles, although I've gotten much faster at coming up with the ideas and implementing them over the years. Leaning jazz piano was the most important thing for me to do to be able to quickly write.

JEFF HORENSTEIN: Not being a piano player. It took me a while to have a functional understanding of jazz harmony and how it can be used. Now that I understand it, the challenge is to not be boxed in by it.

MATT FALKER: Not too many at this point. However, whenever I write a soli section, I inevitably end up changing the scat syllables after other humans have sung them. What I come up works for me personally, but other people usually find something different that works for them. I think writing a lyric solo is very challenging, because choosing the notes and the rhythms is a balancing act between following the original lead sheet-like version of the melody (sanitized), or inserting something more stylized (potential to limit vocal creativity). So many directors won't push their students beyond the exact notes/rhythms written, so those choices have big consequences in the fell of the solo.

JEREMY FOX: I used to write 1000 ideas in the same chart, with every voicing being as dense as possible. Now, I have learned to say more with less.

KELLY KUNZ: Fortunately, I'm not sure I've experienced much of this. Phew! Mostly, for me, it comes down to avoiding the temptation to give into "the art aspect of the arrangement" without worrying about how difficult or easy it is. This is a difficult line to straddle. Although, ultimately this opens up a huge discussion on teaching, ear training, etc...

DAVE CAZIER: Whether to write out rhythm parts or not. Mostly I have always written to the needs of my choirs, and I know how to teach players to create jazz from chord charts. When others want to use my charts, that's a challenge if that teachers skills require written parts. There are a lot more directors nowadays who only want written out rhythm parts. Frankly, I think that makes a clear statement about what an inadequate education we're giving new teachers.

How do you select syllables for group scatting (or any situation without lyrics)? Are there common syllables you always use or always avoid?

MIKE SCOTT: I don't reinvent the wheel. I use syllables that make sense instrumentally and that aren't "noticeable". If I pay attention to the syllables instead of the melody I feel it's wrong.

VIJAY SINGH: I experiment with different syllables by singing them myself...if it sounds/feels awkward or un-natural I will change them to something more vocal friendly. I favor neutral syllables and various open vs. closed vowels. I dislike hokey cheesy syllables that

draw more attention to the syllable than the actual musical line being created (Ex: Shwee do-bee wop a frop)!

KERRY MARSH: I have pretty solid intuition about organic syllables to use that will flow well with the musical line at hand, and I focus on the articulation needed for the line rather than any particular color. Consonants can be the thing that leads to corniness or awkwardness in scat syllables, and generally it's best to keep them simple, even if fairly repetitive. Doo bah, dah bah, "way" for brighter colors and sometimes for a more contemporary sound...ghosted notes when appropriate in bebop style ("n"). That all accounts for 95% of my syllable writing. Backgrounds often start with "oo" vowels and crescendo through a section using the "oo, oh, ah" progression for gradually brightening of colors.

JEFF HORENSTEIN: I always try to keep my syllables as neutral as possible. My line of thinking is that, if I as a listener are distracted by the syllable choices, the music isn't prevailing in the way that it should.

MATT FALKER: I sing it and write whatever is natural. I make sure the syllables are consistent with the articulation (dat/bap for shorter notes for example). I sometimes sub out DAH and BAT with DUH and BUHT, because choral directors tend to have their students over-open the 'ah' vowel

JEREMY FOX: Usually neutral syllables – da va daht vahp doo ba doo ba, etc... Avoiding sqwee and sqwiddly at all costs.

KELLY KUNZ: There are some "no-no's", such as "dwee". Otherwise, I try to get the articulations to feel smooth and often instrumental in nature. I sing the lines or the ideas to myself to determine what feels good and natural and flow easily for the singer. As a side note, I am careful about what vowels I use (not so much for group scatting, etc., but for general ensemble parts that are wordless). The vowels naturally help shape dynamics and dynamic moments.

DAVE CAZIER: I use what I would scat or what I hear other artists use. Choices need to facilitate good linear motion, rhythmic accuracy and not overshadow the melodic content (unless that's desired and a humorous technique)

How much detail do you use while writing out rhythm section parts?

MIKE SCOTT: Notated bass and piano usually. And for drums I write "drum speak" in my arrangement. Or I do my own demo playing drums.

VIJAY SINGH: Minimal (like I said earlier) for my own university groups because I teach them how to read changes/leadsheets like real jazz players prefer and encourage them to be part of the creative process (as opposed to re-creating someone's written parts). I will write specific parts if the chart depends on it or needs it to be performed correctly.

KERRY MARSH: I fully notate the piano and bass parts, but this is because I'm publishing for a wide range of schools with varying levels of skill in rhythm sections. Drums get slashes, hits, occasional drum notation for specific figures or suggested grooves, and rhythmic

notation when they need to stop playing time and play hits with the rest of the rhythm section/choir.

JEFF HORENSTEIN: I pretty much only have time to write for my own ensembles, so it depends on their needs. If I have players that can play from chord changes and hits, then I don't have to write out parts. Often there will be some specific figures I notate to be played as written, but the less the better.

MATT FALKER: In general, I start with a master rhythm score. When I publish charts on my company, I always write out a piano and bass part, and usually a drum part (unless it's Level 4+ to 5 where that's not necessary), and require other arrangers to do the same.

JEREMY FOX: Usually a good amount of detail, since I'm a drummer and pianist, and I know what I enjoy reading.

KELLY KUNZ: I'd like to use less as it lets the players be more creative, however, that is not possible for a lot of HS type groups, so most folks insist on Piano parts and written bass parts, which I wish wasn't the case, although I do understand why. I do indicate macro-dynamics, accents, comments when needed. Of course I do end up writing out the parts mentioned above, but when I don't have to do that, I largely use chord symbols with suggestions on piano voicings & rhythms at times (when reinforcing vocal parts), basic bass and drum groove patterns, etc. This is an important aspect of chart writing. Of course all tutti stuff is noted as well as is anything that needs to be specific such as a repeating piano riff.

DAVE CAZIER: I prefer to use chord symbols as much as possible (because that's promoting REAL jazz playing and training players). I write out lines that are integral to the chart, such as themes i the rhythm section that should be played in unison. Rhythmic punches that need to be played, dynamic markings and any solo lines that they need to see, such as when it's rubato piano and soloist.

How important is visual layout/polish to you? (Please remember that this is for non-published arrangements that you would just be using for educational purposes.)

MIKE SCOTT: Not at all. I usually revise my arrangements as I teach them anyway.

VIJAY SINGH: I grew up taking great pride in being able to read and write music in clear legible manuscript so I still write every chart with pen and paper; nowadays people expect computer generated charts so I frequently will use notation software or pay my students/former students to engrave my manuscripts....I prefer to make my student groups at CWU read original manuscripts of all charts I give them from various writers and eras.....it forces them to appreciate how it was in the "old days" when we all used our ears, pencils, paper, minds, creativity, and the ability to focus on non-standardized/everything looks the same scores!

KERRY MARSH: It's very important to me to that everything is readable, large enough that people don't have to work too hard to read the chart, and with non-jazz-fonts for maximum clarity. Rhythmic notations like the "invisible bar line rule" are important to make sure

singers aren't having to do musical "math" while reading the chart, and appropriate use of ties and dotted rhythms are essential. Charts must have the chord changes included above the top line of the vocal chart to be fully useful to the director and choir. Otherwise the ensemble members don't know which scale degree they're currently singing at a given time, and I feel it's important for singers to have that information if they have the ability to utilize it. I also believe in writing specific dynamics throughout.

JEFF HORENSTEIN: Clean and clear is what matters. And please put chord changes over the vocal parts :)

MATT FALKER: I want it PERFECT right out of the gate. The whole point of music notation is to capture previously created sounds and make them translatable to another human being. Why communicate that information in a haphazard manner?

JEREMY FOX: It is still very important, because visual layout determines legibility and ease-of-reading. For instance, I generally start each new section of a chart on the left side of the page – and I try whenever possible to write 4 bars per system.

KELLY KUNZ: I try to be pretty careful about this. I want it to look professional and eye pleasing. Easy to read.

DAVE CAZIER: It's important nowadays, especially since it's easy to computerize music, you should make an effort to not put hand written scores out there. The days of sketchy hand written charts are over.