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## Chapter One

# VOCAL FUNDAMENTALS

### Philosophy and Approach

The human voice, properly used, can produce beautiful sound. Add the soul and training of the musician and it becomes a beautiful musical sound. Combining the various qualities, textures, and ranges of sound in such a way as to make beautiful music is the role of the choral arranger.

In arranging for voices, the result is what is important. There is no “right” or “wrong” way to do things! One arranger may choose to use the piano when writing, while others may not. Some very fine arrangers have little use for the keyboard, translating their musical ideas directly to the score page. This is the ideal, in that one step has been eliminated, but this does not make the arranger who uses a piano or guitar “wrong.” It is true, however, that some ways are easier than others.

It is possible for the arranger to form his ideas mentally and teach the vocal parts to the singers directly. This method may prove to be time-consuming and tedious, but it cannot be considered “wrong.” However, this is not to say that he shouldn't carefully analyze his method with a view to improving it.

It has been said that one of the intriguing things about painting is that each stroke of the brush is unique, never again to be duplicated by any other human being. Different, like thumb prints, brush strokes are an extension of the person who creates them.

The arranger should think of himself in the same way. He takes a musical idea, molds it into form, colors it with sound, and injects something of himself into it—making it a worthwhile contribution. Remember, it is the artistic result that counts!

With the proliferation of home multitrack studios and the variety and sophistication of today's recording equipment, we can turn every session into an opportunity to experiment. One voice recorded a few times or a small group of voices can create an infinite variety of sound and color. Arrangers and producers are turning to the “hunt and peck” method of vocal arranging: they are doing more exploring with vocal arrangements, and have consequently enriched the variety of styles used in contemporary music. Like making soup, they add an ingredient or a part at a time until it sounds just right.

## Chapter Two

# DISTRIBUTION OF VOICES

### Doubling

If there is a key principle in writing for voices, it is doubling! There is the doubling of tones in the chord structure, usually in octaves, by female and male voices. There is the doubling of identical parts by recording with multiple tracks. The accompaniment is often used to double the chorus. But the most important kind of doubling is the *number of voices on a part*.

If you are writing for five voices you could provide five separate harmonic parts. But the way to make those five voices sound like more people is to distribute them over two or three parts, or have them sing in unison. The more singers on a part, the bigger the sound will be.

The complete harmony can be provided by the accompaniment. The larger the chorus the more you may deviate from this idea, but the principle of doubling still applies, even in large groups. Naturally, when singing a cappella, the basic harmonic structure should be fully expressed, but the principle of doubling or distributing your singers over as few harmonic parts as possible still applies.

### Unison

Unison singing is the simplest and most effective way of conveying melody and it is the best expression of the principle of doubling. All the singers share one part or sing in octaves. Unison may be the simplest way for the arranger to express the melody. Knowing when to use unison and how to use it effectively is comparable to a good comedian's sense of timing.

When simple quietness is called for, unison is almost always the best answer. The tessitura, or general range of the majority of notes in a melody, should be placed just above the middle range of the voices used. Although the males cannot be expected to sing quietly at the top of their range, it is possible to sing high but softly by using falsetto. Knowledge of where the voices sound will aid you in making these decisions. Consult the range chart in Chapter One.

## Two or More Parts

The principle of doubling, or putting as many singers as possible on a part, dictates that the harmonization of voices be simple. Resist the feeling that you are “wasting” singers when they are doubling. Don't feel that because there are eight singers, for instance, you are “wasting” them if you don't have eight separate parts. Simplify the harmony to two or three parts and let the accompaniment take up the slack. See Example 6.

Ex. 6

The score consists of four vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The music is divided into two sections, A and B, separated by a double bar line. Section A is marked with a box 'A' and '(strong)'. Section B is marked with a box 'B' and '(stronger)'. The lyrics 'Just say the word' are written under the vocal staves. The piano accompaniment is written in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and includes dynamic markings such as *f* and *(unis.) f*. Chord symbols 'D/C' are placed above the vocal staves in both sections.

Two-part writing is probably the most common method of harmonizing a melody. The second part's emphasis should be on melodic line rather than harmonic structure. Strive to make that line as melodic as possible. If the second line expresses the harmonic structure *in addition to* being a good melodic line, this is ideal—but your main concern should be the melodic content. If the piece is sung a cappella, take care in establishing the basic chord structure. Even then, the harmony line should be like a “second melody.”

When you strive for a good melody line without regard to the harmony, it is important to have the accompaniment state the chord structure completely. With the chord structure completely stated, you have more freedom to experiment