

# Arranging Barbershop Harmony

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# Contents

Introduction .....	6
Foundations of Arranging .....	7
Characteristics of Barbershop .....	7
Theory Basics.....	10
Barbershop Chord Vocabulary .....	17
Triads.....	18
Seventh Chords .....	22
Ninth Chords .....	29
Sixth Chords.....	31
Voicing and Voice Leading .....	33
Barbershop Music Notation .....	35
Putting It Together: The Arranging Process.....	39
The Arranging Process, Step by Step .....	39
Key Changes .....	57
Intros and Tags .....	59
"Barber-Pop": Arranging Today's Popular Songs.....	61
Contestability and the Music Category.....	64
Done With Dixie: Inclusion and Music Selection .....	67
The Business of Arranging .....	69
Copyright and Clearance .....	69
Where to Find Sheet Music and Recordings.....	74
Working with Songwriters.....	76
Marketing and Promotion.....	78

Collected Wisdom from the Best Arrangers in Barbershop .....	81
Resources .....	87

# Introduction

The only thing more fun than singing four-part harmony, barbershop style is creating four-part harmony, barbershop style. This book is an introduction to arranging of barbershop harmony for women's voices. The intended audience is beginners just starting out in arranging and intermediate arrangers looking to take their music to the next level. It has grown out of my own studies in arranging, my experience as a scholarship recipient in the former Sweet Adelines International Music Arrangers Program, and teaching many beginning and intermediate Sweet Adeline arrangers in the US, Canada, Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand. In writing it I wanted to:

- Incorporate the best current teaching from both BHS and Sweet Adelines, including new learning about the African American origins of the barbershop style and the arranger's role in furthering diversity and inclusion in our organizations.
- Incorporate material on the judging systems from both Sweet Adelines and the Barbershop Harmony Society
- Discuss arranging current popular songs, in addition to arranging for the contest stage.
- Discuss not just the craft of arranging but the business of arranging – copyright, working with songwriters, marketing and promotion.
- Tap into the power of the Internet. Online resources now exist for sheet music, for performances of virtually any song or artist, for ear training and for music theory. The popularity of mobile devices has given us apps for any aspect of music learning. Social media allows arrangers all over the world to have ongoing discussions about the craft of arranging. You'll find links to a variety of online resources; in addition, the wisdom of some of barbershop's best arrangers, gleaned from social media can be found in these pages.

While the book is intended for those just starting out in arranging, it does assume that the reader has note reading skills in both clefs and is familiar with chord symbols. In September 2019, Sweet Adelines will launch a new Arranger Certification Program (ACP). The material in this book will help in preparing for the 10 tests which make up the beginning level of the ACP.

I hope these pages help you in your own journey as a barbershop arranger. Please let me know how it works for you: what works, what doesn't, any additional material that you would like to see.

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# Foundations of Arranging

This chapter will discuss the building blocks for barbershop arranging: some basics of music theory, the chords which make up the vocabulary of barbershop harmony, and an introduction to voicing and voice leading. Let's begin by discussing the characteristics of the barbershop style.

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## Characteristics of Barbershop

- Four parts, known as tenor, lead, baritone, and bass, with melody in an inner voice – the lead part
- Unaccompanied
- Consonance
- Overtones (or “lock and ring”)
- Tri-Tone Energy
- Harmonic movement around the Circle of Fifths.
- Distinct use of creative devices

These things are the basis for everything we do in barbershop: why we sing certain chords and not others, how and why we voice chords in the way we do, the creative devices we use in our arrangements, how and why we balance our sound in the way we do, why certain songs work better than others as barbershop songs. Let's take a closer look at each one.

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### Four parts, unaccompanied

The basic fact of four parts with no accompaniments means that the singers have to provide all the forward motion. In barbershop there's no rhythm section or instrumental backing to fill in white spaces and keep the music moving. Often, the embellishments in our songs are there to provide that musical and rhythmic propellant.

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### Consonance

Put simply, consonance refers to sounds which are pleasing to the ear. The strongest barbershop chords have a strong sense of consonance; the weakest ones do not.

## Overtones

Any time you play or sing a tone, you are in fact producing more than one sound. First, there's a fundamental tone, vibrating at a specific frequency. In addition to that fundamental sound, the pitch A has a series of overtones, also known as the harmonic series. The tones of the harmonic series are mathematically related to the fundamental frequency. When overtones produced by the lowest tone (usually in the bass part) are reinforced by notes and overtones produced in the upper parts, the result is an audible overtone, also known as ring.

The harmonic series for a single pitch is: 1-1-5-1-3-5-b7-1-2.

Starting from a single pitch of C, the tones are C-C-G-C-E-G-Bb-C-D

## Tri-Tone Energy and Harmonic Movement Around the Circle of Fifths

We noted that consonance is a characteristic of the barbershop style. Does that mean dissonance has no place in barbershop? Not at all. First, what is a tri-tone? The tri-tone is the interval between the perfect fourth and the perfect fifth. In the key of C, the interval of C to F makes a perfect fourth. The interval of C to G makes a perfect fifth. The interval between the two, C to F# (augmented 4th) or C to Gb (diminished 5th), is the tri-tone. It's called a tri-tone because it's made up of 3 whole-step intervals. Start on C and go up one whole step (D), then another one (E), then another one (F#/Gb). C to F#/Gb is a tri-tone. Sung as a melodic interval (melodic = one note at a time, like a melody), the tri-tone is very difficult to execute. Sung harmonically (harmonic=both notes together, like a harmony), it is highly dissonant. By itself the tri-tone does not, and cannot ring. However, the tri-tone interval is found in a number of places within the barbershop chord vocabulary, especially in 7th chords.

Chord	Spelling (tri-tone interval in red)
Barbershop 7th	C7 = C, E, G, Bb
Barbershop 9th with omitted root	C7(9) = C (omitted), E, G, Bb, D
Half-Diminished 7th chord	C half-dim7 = C, Eb, Gb, Bb
(Fully) Diminished 7th chord	This chord has two tri-tones Cdim7 = C, Eb, Gb, Bbb C and Gb = tri-tone Bbb = A on the keyboard. Eb and A = tri-tone
Minor 6th chord	Cm6: C, Eb, G, A

We sing them in chords all the time. Consider one of our classic vocal warmups.

The musical notation shows a vocal warmup in 4/4 time. The Tenor Lead part has a melody with lyrics: "me may my moh moo". The Bari Bass part provides harmonic support. Chords are indicated above the Tenor staff: F, F7, Bb, C7, and F. Red arrows point to the tri-tone intervals in the F7 and C7 chords. In the F7 chord, the tri-tone is between E (Tenor) and Bb (Bari). In the C7 chord, the tri-tone is between E (Tenor) and Bb (Bari). The lyrics "me may my moh moo" are aligned with the notes.

The "may" chord has Eb in baritone and A in tenor. The "moh" chord has E in lead and Bb in tenor. Both of these are tri-tones. In both cases, the tri-tones lead to a major triad, which does not have tri-tones. That "pull", from the tension found in the tri-tone to the resolution in the chord that comes after is what makes the barbershop style. Tension and release is not unique to barbershop, but barbershop exploits it to a large degree.

## Barbershop Chord Vocabulary

There are 11 chords common to the chord vocabulary of Sweet Adelines and the Barbershop Harmony Society. These are indicated as (BHS/SAI). There are four additional chords which BHS accepts but Sweet Adelines does not; they are indicated as (BHS only). The chords we'll be discussing are these:

- **Triads**
  - Major Triad (BHS/SAI)
  - Minor Triad (BHS/SAI)
  - Augmented Triad (BHS/SAI)
  - Diminished Triad (BHS only)
- **Seventh Chords**
  - Dominant (Barbershop) 7th (BHS/SAI)
  - Major 7th (BHS/SAI)
  - Minor 7th (BHS/SAI)
  - Diminished 7th (BHS/SAI)
  - Half-Diminished 7th (BHS only)
  - Augmented 7th (BHS only)
  - Dominant 7th with flatted 5th (BHS only)
- **Ninth Chords**
  - Dominant (Barbershop) 9th (BHS/SAI)
  - Major 9th (BHS/SAI)
- **Sixth Chords**
  - Major 6th (BHS/SAI)
  - Minor 6th (BHS/SAI)

Construction, voicing, doubling, and spelling for these chords are summarized below.

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## Seventh Chords

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### Dominant (Barbershop) 7th (BHS/SAI)

- **Construction:** Root, Major 3rd, Perfect 5th, Minor 7th
- **Voicing:** Strongest with bass on root or 5th
- **Doubling:** None – all four tones must be present

### Spellings - Dominant 7th

# = sharp   b = flat   bb = double flat   x = double sharp

Chord	Root	Major 3rd	Perfect 5th	Minor 7th
<b>C7</b>	C	E	G	Bb
<b>C#7</b>	C#	E#	G#	B
<b>Db7</b>	Db	F	Ab	Cb
<b>D7</b>	D	F#	A	C
<b>D#7</b>	D#	Fx	A#	C#
<b>Eb7</b>	Eb	G	Bb	Db
<b>E7</b>	E	G#	B	D
<b>F7</b>	F	A	C	Eb
<b>F#7</b>	F#	A#	C#	E
<b>Gb7</b>	Gb	Bb	Db	Fb
<b>G7</b>	G	B	D	F
<b>G#7</b>	G#	B#	D#	F#
<b>Ab7</b>	Ab	C	Eb	Gb
<b>A7</b>	A	C#	E	G
<b>Bb7</b>	Bb	D	F	Ab
<b>B7</b>	B	D#	F#	A

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## Selecting Contest Music

- Chords
    - Is the song primarily in a major key?
    - Does the song use chords that fall within the barbershop vocabulary? A strong song either has, or suggests the barbershop 7th and barbershop 9th – the more the better. Songs can have minor chords, but the song shouldn't have an overall feel of the minor mode.
    - Does the harmonic movement follow the Circle of Fifths?
  - Melody line should fall within the range of the average female lead singer, with few awkward skips or leaps.
  - Form – Does the song have a 32 bar-chorus with a regular rhyme pattern such as AABA? This is a requirement in the SAI music category; less so in BHS music category.
  - Lyrics
    - Do they tell an interesting story?
    - Are they appropriate for a modern audience? Are there dated lyrics which may need to be re-written? Is the subject matter appropriate for today's singers and audiences?
    - Does the song have climactic moments, or will you need to build in a climax?
    - Does the verse work as an intro or will you need to write an intro?
- 

## Done With Dixie: Inclusion and Music Selection

Barbershop harmony takes much of its repertoire, especially its contest repertoire from the Great American Songbook, the American popular song hits of the first half of the 20th century. While this repertoire has many great songs, with harmonies that work especially well for barbershop, it is also true that some songs from this era have lyrics which reflect prejudiced attitudes toward African Americans and other racial and ethnic minorities.

Both the Barbershop Harmony Society and Sweet Adelines have exclusion of African Americans as part of their history. While the formal exclusion of African Americans no longer exists in BHS or Sweet Adelines our repertoire has been slow to change in some respects. In particular, we've hung onto "Dixie" songs – songs such as Swanee, which are about longing to go back to Dixie where "mammy, mammy's waitin' for me prayin' for me down by the Swanee". One reason for the popularity of Dixie songs was that they were seen as the epitome of the barbershop style. From a purely musical standpoint, it's hard to disagree – the chords, harmonic movement, and singable melody lines, are all strong examples of the barbershop. However, many songs from the era of Tin Pan Alley were written at a time in America when it was considered acceptable to see blackface on the covers of sheet music, on stage, and on screen and for song lyrics to include racial and ethnic stereotypes that would be considered highly offensive today. The idealized picture of the South painted in songs like Swanee is both false and very painful for African Americans who have slavery as part of their heritage.

In recent years the Barbershop Harmony Society and Sweet Adelines have taken, and continue to take, broad organizational steps to address the issue of diversity within barbershop. Sweet Adelines has formally recognized, and apologized for, the formal exclusion of African Americans which took place prior to the mid-1960s. The International Board of Directors has appointed a Diversity Task Force to assist them in leading the organization's efforts toward greater diversity and inclusion. In June of 2019, the Board adopted a new mission statement and set of guiding principles. Among them was a statement on diversity which reads:

# Resources

Websites are current as of September 2019

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## Books, Articles, and Blogs

- Lynn Abbott, "Play That Barber Shop Chord": A Case for the African-American Origin of Barbershop Harmony. *American Music* Vol. 10, No. 3 (Autumn, 1992), pp. 289-325. Available online at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3051597> Read online for free; there is a charge to download a copy of the article. You can get it either in hard copy or as a PDF.
- Barbershop Harmony Society, *Music Fundamentals for Barbershoppers*. Purchase from Harmony Marketplace: <https://shop.barbershop.org>
- Barbershop Harmony Society, *Theory of Barbershop Harmony*. Purchase from Harmony Marketplace: <http://shop.barbershop.org/>
- Matthew Beales, "Honoring the Grand Central Red Caps" *The Harmonizer*, November-December 2017, p.18-23. Available on BHS website members area.
- Jason Blume, *This Business of Songwriting* (Revised 2nd edition, VNU Business Media Inc., 2013)
- Dear Rich: An Intellectual Property Blog: <http://dearrichblog.blogspot.com/> - Excellent blog on copyright, patent, and trademark law, with questions from users answered by a practicing attorney. See below for Richard Stim's books on copyright law.
- Diane Clark and Billy J. Biffle, *So You Want to Sing Barbershop: A Guide for Performers* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2017)
- Jeffrey Evans, *Exploring Theory With Practica Musica* (Ars Nova Software 2013). Free download from iBooks, for Apple devices. Can be used either alongside the Practica Musica software (see "Software and Apps" below) or by itself. An excellent introduction to music, with or without the software.
- Stephen Fishman, *The Copyright Handbook: What Every Writer Needs to Know* (Nolo Press 2017)
- Stephen Fishman, *The Public Domain: Find and Use Free Content for Your Website, Book, App, Music, Video, Art, and More* (Nolo Press 2017)
- Jim Fleser, *The Chord Wheel: The Ultimate Tool for All Musicians*. Print version is distributed by Hal Leonard; available for purchase from Amazon or the author's website (<http://www.chordwheel.com/>). Also available as an iPhone app (iPhone only, not iPad or Android)
- Liz Garnett, *Helping You Harmonise* <http://www.helpingyouharmonise.com/blog/arranging> Informative blog from a barbershop arranger, coach, and scholar in Great Britain
- Tom Gerou and Linda Lusk, *Alfred's Essentials of Music Notation: A Practical Dictionary* (Alfred Publishing Company 2009).
- Jim Henry, *The Origins of Barbershop Harmony : A Study of Barbershop's Musical Link to Other African American Musics as Evidenced Through Recordings and Arrangements of Early Black And White Quartets* (Ph.D. dissertation, Washington University in St. Louis, 2000). Purchase from ProQuest Dissertations <http://www.proquest.com/products-services/dissertations/> . Purchase of the dissertation will not include the audio CD that was included with the original manuscript. The musical examples are transcribed in the text and fully cited in the bibliography. Purchase will cost around \$40US. If you live near a university library or large public library, ask if they subscribe to ProQuest dissertations and whether you can get access through them.

- Jim Henry, "The Historical Roots of Barbershop Harmony". *The Harmonizer*, July/August 2001. Available on BHS website members area. Jim Henry summarizes the major findings of his doctoral dissertation on the African-American roots of barbershop harmony.
- Kevin Keller, "The Hallmark 7th Chord". *The Harmonizer*, July-August 2009, p.24-25. Available on BHS website members area.
- M. William Krasilovsky, Sydney Shemel, John Gross, and Jonathan Feinstein, *This Business of Music: The Definitive Guide to the Business and Legal Issues of the Music Industry* (10th edition, Random House, 2007).
- David Kusek and Gerd Leonhard, *The Future of Music: Manifesto for the Digital Music Revolution* (Berklee Press, 2005)
- Willard Palmer, Morton Manus, and Amanda Vick Lethco, *The Complete Book of Scales, Chords, Appoggios, & Cadences* (Alfred Publishing, 1994)
- ScoringNotes.com <https://www.scoringnotes.com/> Breaking news, tips, and tutorials in the world of music notation programs and music notation practices; also a good source for developments in music apps for mobile devices. Operated by NYC Music Services, a music preparation company based in New York City.
- Jim Richards, *The Physics of Barbershop Sound*. Purchase from Harmony Marketplace <http://shop.barbershop.org/>
- Deke Sharon and Dylan Bell, *A Cappella Arranging* (Hal Leonard Books 2012)
- Richard Stim, *Getting Permission: Using & Licensing Copyright-Protected Materials Online & Off* (Nolo Press 2016)
- Richard Stim, *Music Law: How to Run Your Band's Business* (Nolo Press 2018). The chapter on copyright is an excellent basic discussion of copyright matters. Richard Stim is the author of the "Dear Rich" blog cited above.
- Richard Stim, *Patent, Copyright & Trademark: An Intellectual Property Desk Reference* (Nolo Press, 2018)
- David Wright, "The African-American Roots of Barbershop (and Why It Matters)". *The Harmonizer*, January-February 2015, p.10-15. Available on BHS website members area.

## Software and Apps

There are many software packages and apps, for any aspect of music training. In putting this list together, I focused on applications which are available for a wide variety of platforms and a variety of price ranges.

- Auralia <https://www.risingsoftware.com/auralia/> Ear Training - Windows, Mac, and Apple devices
- Dorico <https://www.steinberg.net/en/products/dorico/start.html> Notation – Windows and Mac
- EarMaster <https://www.earmaster.com/> Theory – Windows, Mac, and iPad
- Finale <https://www.finalemusic.com> Notation – Windows and Mac. Sweet Adelines members qualify for an educational discount (50% off) if they purchase from Sweet Adelines International Sales. Not available from BHS Harmony Marketplace
- IGrandPiano and IGrandPiano Free <http://www.ikmultimedia.com/products/igrandiphone/> Lots of apps will put a keyboard on your mobile device. This is one I especially like, available for iPhone, iPad, and Android. IGrandPiano Free gives a few basic piano sounds, including a grand piano. Paid version gives access to lots of additional piano sounds. Both the free version and the paid version are available in the app stores.
- MusicTheory.net <https://www.musictheory.net/> Free online theory course and paid apps for iPhone and iPad: Tenuto and Theory Lessons
- Musica Touch Theory apps for iPad, from the makers of Practica Musca. Has a free and a paid version
- Musition <https://www.risingsoftware.com/musition/> Theory – Window, Mac, and Apple devices

- MuseScore <https://musescore.org/en> Notation – Windows, Mac, Apple devices, Android, and Kindle Fire. Free and open source.
- Notion <https://www.presonus.com/products/Notation-Software> Notation – Windows, Mac, iPad
- Noteflight <https://www.noteflight.com/> Notation -- Web-based; for all platforms.
- Politonus - Ear Training app for iPhone and iPad (paid app, no free version).
- Practica Musica <http://www.ars-nova.com/practica6.html> - Theory – Windows, Mac, and Linux
- Sibelius <http://www.sibelius.com> Notation – Windows and Mac
- Staffpad <https://www.staffpad.net> Notation – Takes your handwriting and converts it to music notation. Designed for the Microsoft Surface platform; not available for any Apple device.
- Suggester Theory app for iPhone and iPad – Lays out many different chord options for a given key, play them by selecting. Especially good for learning about secondary dominants. Basic level is free; small charge to fully unlock the app.
- Theta Music Trainer <https://trainer.thetamusic.com/> Music Theory – Web based courses and apps for IOS, Android, and Kindle Fire

## Websites

### Theory and Ear Training

- BHS Online Music Theory Course – Available on BHS website members area
- Basic Music Theory <https://www.basicmusictheory.com/>
- MusicTheory.net <https://www.musictheory.net/> - has free online content and two companion apps for Apple devices, called Tenuto and Theory Lessons
- Teoria <http://www.teoria.com/en/tutorials/>

### Historic Recordings

- Cylinder Audio Archive <http://cylinders.library.ucsb.edu/index.php> From Davidson Library, University of California, Santa Barbara. Many pre-1938 barbershop quartets are here, digitized and freely available.
- The Great 78 Project. <http://great78.archive.org/> . Community project for preservation, research, and discovery of 78rpm records. Part of the Internet Archive.
- The Shellac Stack – Podcast hosted by Bryan Wright. Features 78rpm recordings from the first half of the 20th century. Not limited to barbershop. [http://www.bryanswright.com/wkdir/?page\\_id=62](http://www.bryanswright.com/wkdir/?page_id=62)

### Selected Sheet Music Collections

- Sheet Music Consortium <http://digital2.library.ucla.edu/sheetmusic/> Hosted by the UCLA Library; provides access to sheet music collections at more than 30 libraries all over the world
- Duke University, Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library – Historic American Sheet Music <https://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/hasm/>
- IN Harmony: Sheet Music from Indiana – Created by Indiana University; includes collections from Indiana University Lilly Library, Indiana State Library, Indiana State Museum, and Indiana Historical Society <http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/inharmony/welcome.do>
- Johns Hopkins University Library – Lester Levy Sheet Music Collection <http://levysheetmusic.mse.jhu.edu/>
- Library of Congress – World War I Sheet Music <https://www.loc.gov/collections/world-war-i-sheet-music/>
- UCLA Library – Archive of Popular American Music <http://digital.library.ucla.edu/apam/index.html>

- University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign – Historic U.S. Sheet Music Collection  
<https://www.library.illinois.edu/mpal/about/collections/specialcollections/uiucsheetmusic/>
- University of Maine, Fogler Library – Maine Music Box <http://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mmb/>
- University of Tennessee, Knoxville – Sheet Music Collection <https://diglib.lib.utk.edu/utsmc/main.php>
- Barbershop Harmony Society, Old Songs Library – not available online; BHS members can contact BHS and request a title search.

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## Copyright

- Cornell University, Copyright Information Center <https://copyright.cornell.edu/>
- Public Domain Information Project <https://www.pdinfo.com>
- Stanford University Library, Copyright and Fair Use: <https://fairuse.stanford.edu/>