Contemporary A Cappella Arranging in 10 Easy Steps

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1. Choose a song
basic considerations

- Suitability for your group & soloist
- Try to choose something different!
- Choose a song you like
artists

- Sting
- Michael Jackson
- The Jackson 5
- Stevie Wonder
- Justin Timberlake
- Beatles
- Maroon 5
- Queen
public domain songs

- Traditional songs
- Hymns
- Folk songs

The Idea of North: Sweet Sweet Spirit
or an arrangement of.....

• ......an arrangement

Got To Get You Into My Life:

• The Beatles
• Earth Wind and Fire
• Firedrill!
keeping track of ideas

- Make use of iTunes
- Playlist for each style, soloist or theme
2. Listen to the song....
....a lot
3. Decide basic parameters
overall decisions

- Number of parts
- Solo
- Song structure
musical style

• change key
• change tempo
• change “feeling”
• or remain faithful to the original?

Tears for Fears: Mad World
Gary Jules: Mad World
Jackson 5: I Want You Back
Sonos: I Want You Back
4. Gather materials
I'm sorry but the two things I'm thinking of the right words to say are (it's) the way I know they'd sound. I wonder if you... don't sound the way I imagined them to sound. But if you wait around for a while, I'll make you feel for you. I promise you, I will...
5. Consider how you’ll “record” song and how group will learn song
Summertime

Solo

Alto solo: Summer-time and the living is easy.

Fish are jumpin'.
6. Get the melody down
melody

• Write out melody for entire song
• Provides structure/form to work with
• If writing/recording digitally, can move melody to an alternative part later

The Real Group: I’m With You
transcribing tips

• Find a quiet place

• Use headphones

• Learn playback shortcuts in iTunes

• Find CD player with responsive controls

• Technology can help: try Audacity
7. Create a strong bassline
melody + strong bassline

= good arrangement

The Real Group: I’m With You
8. Add interesting backing parts
backing parts

- Rhythmically interesting
- Different texture
- Imitate instruments
- Use words from melody
- Use imaginative syllables

The Real Group: I’m With You
SoCal VoCals: Falling Slowly
Firedrill!: My Yard
9. Make a good arrangement outstanding
contrast

• Unison section into many parts
• Sparse arrangement vs full
• Contrasting texture
• Different tempos
• Add vocal percussion

Cluster: One Note Samba
10. Share your arrangement
notated arrangements

• print scores
• email PDF versions
• upload a playable/printable version to a website (Sibelius: Scorch; Finale: Finale Viewer)
• create audio file - backing track
MIDI sequencing

• print scores (sometimes...not so sophisticated)

• create audio file - backing track

audio recording

• create audio file - backing track
Other tips
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