

A close-up photograph of two hands, one from a person with lighter skin and one from a person with darker skin, gently holding each other. The hands are positioned diagonally across the frame, with the fingers interlaced. The background is a soft, out-of-focus white.

Custom-Written Show Choir Music

GET EXACTLY WHAT YOU WANT

by Anita Cracauer





Photo of In Sync by Charles Rodriguez

Are you tired of searching for a song that fits your show theme, communicates your particular message, has enough musical interest for the needs of show choir, and is the exact style/sound you need for that moment in your show?

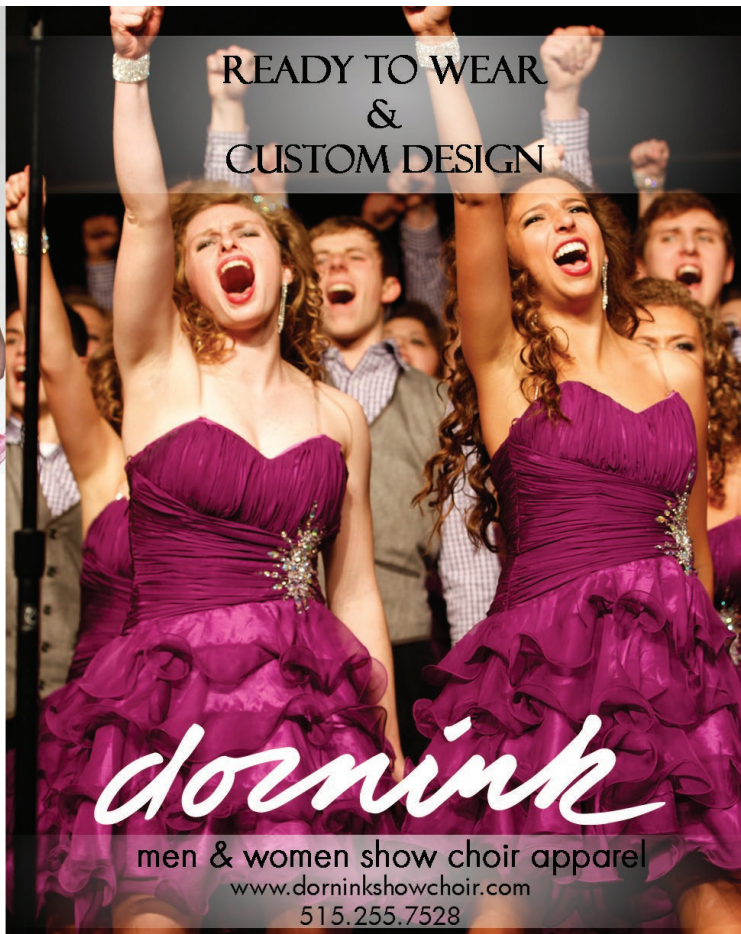
Are you sick of the ever-increasing fees associated with licensing a copyrighted song, not to mention the small fortune it takes to license a medley of more than one song? Or maybe you were denied permission to arrange a particular song but still have your heart set on something just like it for your show?

I've got the answer for you—custom-written, original music.

Save Time and Money by Eliminating Licensing Fees

Stop trying to find the perfect song to fit your needs and have it written for you. This way you will get exactly what you want musically and lyrically—and you get a finished product that has been custom-designed to highlight your group's strengths and downplay any potential weaknesses.

Best of all, the price of a custom-written original song is LESS than the average price



of a show choir arrangement of a copyrighted song in today's market. You can't beat the fact that there are no licensing fees and no potential hassle about the change of a note in a score which could incur more licensing fees.

A Simple Process

The process is simple: You contact the songwriter—an arranger who has experience in the show choir format who is also capable of writing original music—and let them know about your show concept, the role/function this song will play, the lyrical message you are trying to communicate, and the style of music you are looking for.

If you have a song that you have in mind you'd like it to sound similar to, that is even more helpful. The right songwriter will brainstorm and send you some lyrical ideas first to make sure they are on the right track with your vision. At this point if you'd like to get involved with writing the lyrics, or even give your students an opportunity to be involved, many songwriters are totally open to that and feel it heightens the educational experience and investment in the show for the kids.



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Scoring the Vocals

As soon as a final lyric is completed, the songwriter gets to work scoring out the vocals. Again, the right songwriter should send you the piano/vocal score for your feedback and final approval before they complete the rest of the score.

The songwriter should send you samples of the piano/vocal score at least once or twice as it is in process so that you get a feel for the melody and the overall structure of the piece. This is important: if at any point along the way you feel the song is going in the wrong direction, make sure to speak up so that the finished product is exactly what you envisioned, and no one's time or money is wasted. Communication is vital—both the director and songwriter should feel like they are able to be completely honest with each other! Once the completed piano/vocal is submitted, you can give your final feedback and approval before the rest of the score is completed. In addition to all the instrumental scores for your band, you should get a recording with fully sung vocals as well as an instrumental recording that you can use for choreography practice.

As anyone who has worked with me for custom music in the past knows, turnaround time is key. You need a songwriter who can work extremely fast and never considers a piece finished until you are 100%

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It all begins with a song...

satisfied. You also need an songwriter who holds no “personal attachment” to the music they write and is happy to change the score to make it better fit the needs of your group at any time.

The Benefit to Directors

Many show choir directors have already learned firsthand the benefits that come from commissioning their own original songs. Director Brett Carroll of Burbank’s “In Sync” needed a specific “moment” in his show and described thematically what was required. He believed the lyrics created “fit perfectly,” describing the product as a “masterpiece.” Carroll spoke to what a simple process it was for him as a director as well, where he could have something tailored for his group’s vocal style in a fashion that “made use of our singers in such a magical way.”

John Parezo, Director of Sioux Falls Roosevelt’s “Capitol Harmony,” wasn’t able to secure copyright permission for a tune he planned to use for his women’s show choir, so he worked with me to create their own original song. Parezo explains, “I was nervous about it at first, but the process was actually very easy and totally worth it.”

He told me he wanted a “jazzy second number that had a similar feel to the song we originally wanted,” so I came up with some lyrics. Parezo made tweaks and sent them back by email. He states, “Within just



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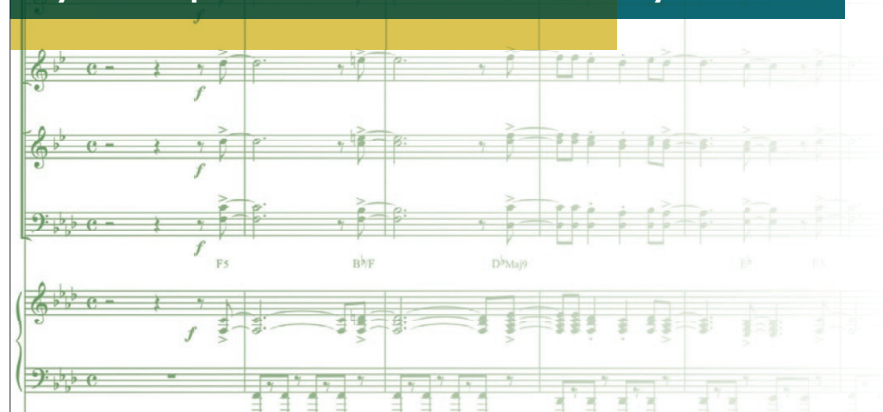




Photo of In Sync by Charles Rodriguez

a few weeks we had a draft of a piano/vocal score to 'Get Away, Joe!' I printed it out and had my girls sing through it that afternoon. They loved it and we knew it would be a hit."

After the first sing-through, Parezo decided to have me lower the key and adjust the range, as he had an alto-heavy group that year. He also wanted to make some cuts to better fit the timing of their show. In addition to being delighted by the piece, he was happy with the price. He states, "I was shocked when I got the invoice—it was way less expensive than having someone arrange a piece from the radio and pay the copyright fees! I will certainly be doing more of these originals in the future to help save on costs!"

Own Your Performances

Here is perhaps the best benefit to all of this: You and your students will be able to freely post or distribute videos of your performance to your heart's content with no worries whatsoever about harassment or threats of legal action. The song belongs to your school's library forever.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Anita Cracauer is the founder of Show ChoirStock.com, an online catalog of show choir arrangements. She has worked as a freelance arranger, songwriter, and publisher in the show choir industry since 2001. In addition to writing and publishing, she judges competitions across the country and educates others on the topics of arranging, songwriting, and copyright licensing/publishing.

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