





COLLABORATION & COMMUNICATION

WITH YOUR MUSIC ARRANGER

by Garrett Breeze



Arrangers are so much more than music vendors. Because arrangers are not physically present—for the most part—when people create a show, however, that relationship is often overlooked or underutilized. No matter the situation—whether one arranger or several are on the team, whether the show features all custom charts or a combination of stock and previously arranged titles—making each arranger involved a true part of the creative team will pay massive dividends.

Know How YOU Like to Collaborate

The first step to any good collaboration is knowing how you personally like to collaborate. To figure out the most productive collaborative style for your situation, ask yourself questions like the following:

- ❓ Do you work better in groups or one-on-one?
- ❓ How comfortable are you delegating creative decisions?
- ❓ Do you have a specific vision you're trying to execute, or are you looking for suggestions?

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Arrangers typically work with multiple groups at the same time, so if you want things to happen in a certain way, you should let them know up front. While this first step may sound elementary, most of the friction in creative relationships comes from one person not understanding—or not communicating—how they want to work together.

Establish Good Lines of Communication

This habit goes hand in hand with the previous point, but a big part of figuring out how to *collaborate* is figuring out how to

communicate. When a lot of back and forth is required, communicating in real time via phone or video call is usually better. Some information, though, is easier to keep track of in a written form like e-mail or Google doc. A time sensitive or simple question can often be answered quickly by text. Remember to consider the personalities of your creative team—a quick conversation to discuss preferences can go a long way.

Communication with your arranger should continue after charts have been delivered. If something isn't working, make sure to ask their advice on how to fix it. There are ALWAYS things that need to be changed after choreography is added to the arrangement. It's not a question of "right" or "wrong"; it's the simple fact that every layer added to a show—music, visuals, costuming, band, effects—changes what came before. Maybe the band isn't what you expected them to be;

maybe the tenors didn't mature like you thought they would; maybe the choreographer had a cool new idea. Giving your arranger useful feedback is crucial to building a successful creative partnership.

Involve the Arranger in Your Show Design

It can be easy for directors and choreographers to make all the creative decisions first and then bring the arranger up to speed when everything is done, but including the arranger at the design stage can give them the chance to spot potential problems in the music that are much easier to fix early on. Even if they're not involved

in creating the theme or choosing songs, they can still provide valuable suggestions in terms of cuts, tempo, transitions, band moments, and other elements relating to the execution of the idea.

Share Lots of Details

This approach is a big one when collaborating with a new arranger. The more information they have, the more likely they are to be successful. Here are some common things directors and arrangers should discuss:

- ❓ How many singers are there on each voice part? What are their “safe” ranges? Where do your sopranos and tenors top out?
- ❓ Do you want divisi? If so, which sections will handle it best?
- ❓ What is the instrumentation of your band? How experienced are the players?
- ❓ How many strong soloists do you have? What are their comfortable ranges? What style of singers are they?
- ❓ What does the arrangement need to do to fit in with the overall show?
- ❓ What is happening before and after? How long does it need to be?
- ❓ Do you want the music to be challenging?
- ❓ Do you want the arranger to be creative or do you want them to give you specifically what you asked for?

Make Arrangers a Part of Your Program

Finally, do everything you can to make the arranger a part of your program, no matter how remote they are. Acknowledge

them in your group bios and published programs, add them to your social media groups and posts, hire them to come work with the choir—after all, it’s a rare for students to have the chance to collaborate with a real-life composer. Seeing that you are committed to the relationship will inspire your arrangers to work harder; getting to know your students and see how the show progresses throughout the season will help them be more effective in future work.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: With more than 1,000 show choir arrangements in circulation, Garrett Breeze is a sought-after clinician and adjudicator whose credits include film and television, Broadway stars, and Grammy-winning classical artists. His show choir music is available at breetunes.com and he recently launched a new catalog of music for concert and church choirs at holidaychoirmusic.com.

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