

ANALYZING AN ARRANGEMENT

by Jim Kasen

The reason we analyze is to get into the arranger's mind and heart AND to learn techniques that we can employ in writing our own arrangements.

- Read through everything on each page to become familiar with the geography. If you can play through it, do so. Plan to go through the arrangement multiple times. You'll find more and more information as you do.
- Do some research. Be curious.
 - What does the original setting (hymn, folksong, popular song) consist of?
 - Who wrote the text? What's their history?
 - Who wrote the melody? What's their history?
 - Who is the arranger? What's their history?
- THE MELODY
 - What is the melody like? Simple?
 - Does it lend itself to harmonic interest?
 - Repetitious vs. through composed?
 - How is the melody being treated?
For example, is the arrangement set in the same key as the original piece?
- THE TEXT
 - Carefully digest the text.
Review the treatment of it.
 - Were all of the verses used?
 - Are there deviations from the original text?
 - How is the text being treated?
 - How does the arranger use dynamics, harmony, keys, etc. to treat the text?
- THE TEXTURE
 - Explore the textures – vocally and accompaniment-wise.
 - What methods are being used to present the melody (e.g., homophonic, contrapuntal)?
- THE SETTINGS
 - Analyze the broader scope of the setting (e.g., intro, interludes, modulations, ending).
- Look for sections that are similar.
- Go to a deeper level and analyze the arrangement from a more detailed approach.
 - Look for motifs, motivic development, harmonic progression, modulation preparation, types and placement of modulations, repeated material.
 - Answer the question, "What is holding this piece together?"

You will find other details as you invest yourself in the piece. Some pieces will be simple and easy to analyze. Others will be more difficult. Just keep asking the questions, "What was the arranger trying to express?" and "Why did they do what they did?"

- Remember the difference between "critical thinking" and "judgmental thinking."



Don't succumb to the temptation to say, "I don't like it" without knowing "why" you don't like it.



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