

## **Song Selection: So What's the Bottom Line?**

In an e-conversation with a skilled quartet singer in my chorus, the issue of music selection came up. At a recent coaching session, her quartet was given advice that made them seriously reconsider their contest ballad "What'll I Do". She told me that they were now considering "Each Time I Fall in Love."

I responded to this email by telling her that "Each Time I fall in Love," although a lovely chart, was yet another song with "issues" for the Music Judge because it's through-composed.

Her response was then: "Does this mean 'Each Time I Fall in Love' is not contest-worthy?" Good question.

Now I'll just give you my verbatim email response to this question:

"It's probably as contest-worthy as "What'll I Do," which, by the way, was one of the 4 songs that Scottsdale won the International Chorus Contest with a few years ago (as well as more than one regional championship).

There is more than one thing going on here. While neither of these songs is (on paper) an ideal choice for contest...neither is "Berkeley Square." I've wanted RT to do that chart for many years, but I knew that it wouldn't be smart to use it (no matter how well-arranged) based on the weights of the Music Category at that time. Several years ago the weights in that category were changed. Now more importance is given to the delivery of the arrangement than the composition/arrangement itself. So, at that point I called Joni Bescos and asked if we could sing "Berkeley Square." She responded by saying "yes," but only if I let her arrange it. (You gotta be kidding. Like I would ask anyone else...)

"Swanee," a song RT has used to win International, has "too much" minor and "too many" tempo changes.

"Rockabye My Baby...", a song RT has used to win International has "too many" tempo changes.

Overcoming the “weaknesses” of the above two up tunes meant that we had to be really good at ringing the minor chords (we also removed one of the minor sections) and get really good at tempo changes.

Contest has always been and continues to be about strategy. It IS a contest, after all. Therefore, the final decision (read: strategy) still rests with the competitor. That decision includes a number of things:

\*\*\*Is the song itself structurally sound for BBS (read the Music Category for the explanation of the requirements for form, etc.)?

\*\*\*Is the arrangement structurally strong contest BBS (now we’re talking chords, voicings, etc.; some songs don’t lend themselves well to contest BBS)?

\*\*\*Does it suit our voices (range, tessitura, voicing, etc.), or will our voices suit it by the time we perform it?

\*\*\*Is it a “match” for the personality/age/performing image, etc., of the ensemble?

\*\*\*Do we (the ensemble) love the song? This changes your ability to sing it passionately.

\*\*\*Is the ensemble working to win, place or simply enjoy/survive the contest experience?

\*\*\*ULTIMATELY, all requirements being met (or sometimes not...), can the ensemble produce the lock and ring characteristic of good BBS while singing this song?

So, you see, it’s not as simple as just saying that a chart is not good for contest. It’s obvious to me that you are more than ready to deal with the mature decision-making that comes with experience and success in contest.

It is YOUR decision...everything else is just advice.”

Dale

