

• African Diaspora Music Project  
<https://africandiasporamusicproject.org/search-pieces>

• Song Helix – A Database for Art Song Research and Discovery  
<https://www.songhelix.com/>

I am so honored to work with one of the most creative, talented, diligent and passionate choral experts on the national R&R team. I cannot express my gratitude adequately. Below is the link to their combined genius in the form of the post-conference reading sessions

produced by the national chairs.

<https://acda.org/archives/events/2025-national-rr-virtual-reading-sessions>

Please reach out to me or any of the national/region/state chairs with questions. Also, follow our Facebook Page “ACDA Collective: A Gathering Place for Repertoire and Resources,” or any of the other Facebook pages or groups related to R&R. Enjoy the empowerment. Your search for repertoire, position, and purpose is just beginning!

## Repertoire & Resources in the Archives

National Repertoire & Resources Chairs contribute content to *Choral Journal* on a rotating basis.

### May 2025

“Building Resilience: Sustainability Considerations for Nonprofit Music Organizations” by Jack A. Cleghorn, Lifelong Choirs Coordinator

“Choral Connections: Building Community Among Conductors” by Matt Hill, Community Choirs Chair

## Contemporary A Cappella



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### How to Choose Repertoire for Contemporary A Cappella

by Robert Dietz

You’re a director who has just started a new contemporary a cappella group as part of your program (congrats!). You’ve auditioned your singers, you’ve gone through lists of musical puns to choose your group’s name, and your first rehearsal is quickly approaching. At this point you may be asking yourself: “Wait ...what

are we actually going to sing?”

It’s a simple question, yet the answer can be surprisingly complex when it comes to selecting repertoire for a pop a cappella group. Which songs you choose, how you choose them, and where you look for your arrangements can have a big impact on your group’s identity and eventual success. In this article, we will look at each part of the selection process and discuss some of the best practices for picking repertoire for your group.

### What Songs Should I Choose?

One of the hallmarks of contemporary a cappella is covering popular songs that your audience will recognize. Twenty years ago, that often meant “whatever pop arrangements we can get our hands on.” Arrange-



## Repertoire & Resources - Contemporary A Cappella

ment scarcity in the early days of a cappella led to some truly odd and eclectic set lists (my high school group performed songs by artists as varied as Stevie Wonder, Eric Clapton, and They Might Be Giants). Thankfully, contemporary a cappella arrangements are much easier to find these days.

Now that we're free to be more strategic about our song choices, how can we give our repertoire search some direction? Here are some important factors to consider:

- 1) Popularity: Does the group like the song? Will your audience recognize the song?
- 2) Achievability: Does the song lend itself well to the group's strengths (or can it be arranged so that it does)? Do you have a soloist that can carry the song?
- 3) Identity: Does the song fit the group's vibe? Does it fit in well with the other songs you are considering?

Sometimes answering these questions may lead you as the director to simply choose the songs yourself. However, the process can be more collaborative.

### How Should I Choose Songs?

Some groups find success by employing more democratic methods of song selection. In order to assess popularity, it can be effective to simply ask your group what they want to do. This may seem like an obvious approach, but the trick is in designing a process that allows for group feedback without hurt feelings (if members feel they are being ignored) or a deluge of suggestions (if there is a lack of structure to how ideas are shared).

Consider a song vote method where group members are allowed a certain number of song submissions (perhaps three songs per member). Members are given a due date to submit their ideas, after which time all of the ideas are aggregated into a playlist. Members then have a certain amount of time to listen and vote on their favorites (this can be purely top choice, or allow for a few top choices—say, a top three). The director can then view the results of the vote and see which songs the group feels most passionate about. This sys-

tem helps everyone feel heard and gives a clear structure to the process.

While a director may choose to go with the popular vote, consider the benefits of the “benevolent dictator” approach, where the director makes the final call based on the top vote winners. This allows for the director to take the group's desires into account while still injecting their own expertise into the proceedings.

To assess achievability, consider a song pitch method, where members are tasked with finding songs that they want to sing (perhaps based on the results of a song vote), and performing those songs for the group and/or the director. This approach lets you see clearly whether you have soloists capable of executing the songs you are considering. It also allows individuals to bring their own personal style to the song, which may be valuable information for an arranger if you are hiring someone to do custom work. Once you have your songs decided, it's time to move to the final phase: finding arrangements.

### Where Do I Get My Arrangements?

If you are a new group, I recommend starting your journey with stock arrangements (meaning non-custom arrangements). Custom arrangements are more expensive, and it's best to save that investment for when your group's sound and style are more established. The process of performing stock charts will also help you discover which arrangers you like best, and thus, who you might want to hire for custom work.

While major publishers do have more contemporary a cappella material than they used to, if you want to find the most current popular songs, you've got to look for indie published arrangers! Your first stop should be Sheet Music Plus or Sheet Music Direct to find charts that have been uploaded by arrangers using Hal Leonard's ArrangeMe website. ArrangeMe is a burgeoning site that has pre-cleared the rights to millions of popular songs and allows arrangers to make their work available within days. It's also a great way to publish any arrangements that you do for your own group!

The catch when it comes to sheet music sites is that they can be difficult to navigate. So, how can you find what you're looking for? Find arrangers you like and search them by name! I maintain this document of

contemporary a cappella arrangers, which is a useful place to start looking for names.

Consider some keywords to help narrow your search, such as: “A cappella,” “contemporary a cappella,” or “pop a cappella” + [Song Title] or [Artist]. You need the song title/artists, as any of those terms alone will give you way too many results to sort through.

In addition, you can use filters to help narrow your search: try “pop” under Genre and “school and community” under Usages.

## Conclusion

Selecting repertoire for a pop a cappella group can feel overwhelming, but it doesn't have to be. Hopefully you now feel more confident in knowing which songs to choose and how to choose them. Using all these tools together will help you find great, current arrangements for your group that both they and your audience will love!

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## Tenor-Bass Choirs



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### Teaching and Leading with TLC: An Interview with Dr. Tim Seelig

by Dustin S. Cates

Dr. Tim Seelig is internationally recognized for his contributions to choral music and LGBTQ+ advocacy through the arts. He is conductor laureate of the San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus and conductor emeritus of the Turtle Creek Chorale in Dallas, Texas. Dr. Seelig is a frequent guest conductor for honor choirs across the country, and his own ensembles have also performed at state, regional, and national ACDA conferences.

As a champion of new music, Seelig has commissioned numerous new works, including the first AIDS Requiem, *When We No Longer Touch* by Kristopher John Anthony, *Testimony* by Stephen Schwartz, and *I Am Harvey Milk* by Andrew Lipa. In addition to his work on the podium, he is a respected author and educator. His publications, *The Perfect Blend* and *The Perfect Rehearsal*, are widely used practical resources in choral methods and choral pedagogy, and his 2020 autobiographical memoir, *Tale of Two Tims: Big Ol' Baptist, Big Ol' Gay*,



offers a personal reflection on his life and career. His work has also been featured in award-winning documentaries, including the Emmy-winning, *After Goodbye: An AIDS Story* and *Gay Chorus Deep South*, which premiered at the prestigious Tribeca Film Festival.

Over a career spanning more than three decades, Dr. Seelig has conducted a broad range of ensembles. However, the bulk of his work has been teaching and leading tenor-bass choirs, particularly gay men's choruses, within the context of the broader LGBTQ+ choral movement.

As a result of his vast experience and success working with tenor-bass voices, I invited Dr. Seelig to present at our Repertoire and Resources Tenor-Bass Forum at the 2025 ACDA National Conference in Dallas, Texas. The forum, titled “Programming Tenor-Bass Choirs with TLC,” offered insights into repertoire selection, rehearsal strategies, and his signature approach emphasizing tears, laughs, and chill bumps. Following the forum, I had the opportunity to speak with Dr. Seelig in greater depth about his teaching philosophies, his work with tenor-bass choirs, and the lessons he has drawn from a remarkable career in choral music.

### A Philosophy Rooted in Respect

Tim Seelig's approach to teaching is rooted in his background as a professional opera singer and voice teacher. His transition from the studio and stage to the conductor's podium was not only a career shift but also an evolution. “I didn't know any better than to think