

Repertoire & Standards

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Vocal Jazz



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What is the Best Vocal Jazz Repertoire? Preliminary Results are In!

by
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In the May 2013 issue of the *Choral Journal*, all ACDA members who direct vocal jazz ensembles were invited to participate in a survey of their top ten "Favorite Charts," "Best Teaching Charts," and "Charts with Greatest Audience Appeal." The purpose was to update the last of such surveys conducted twenty years ago, which found twelve arrangers' works named in the top ten of all three categories: April Arabian, Dick Averre, Dave Barduhn, Todd Buffa, Teena Chinn, Gene Puerling, Phil Mattson, Kirby Shaw, Ward Swingle, Roger Treece, Michele Weir; and Steve Zegree.

The favorite arrangements from 1993 were Mattson's *I'll Be Seeing You*, *Desafinado*, and *I've Got You Under My Skin*; Puerling's *Georgia On My Mind*, *Johnny One Note*, *My Romance*, and *Seems Like Old Times*; Weir's *New York Afternoon* and *Ticket to Ride*; and Arabian's *Singin' in the Rain*.

Currently there are approximately 125 ACDA members who indicated

that vocal jazz is their primary choir type, or who are state or division ACDA chairs for vocal jazz. It is likely that other ACDA members direct vocal jazz ensembles as well. Unfortunately, only twenty members completed the survey, so the following results are preliminary and not yet a true reflection of ACDA members' favorite vocal jazz arrangements. Statistically speaking, a minimum of fifty-five more responses would be necessary to be representative, and thus I repeat the call for responses from every member who directs a vocal jazz ensemble.

The twenty who did respond provide vital insights into both new works worthy of attention as well as those that have remained favorites over time. The respondents were a diverse group, with experience directing vocal jazz ensembles from the elementary school level through the professional level, although the great majority were high school and college directors. They have been directing vocal jazz ensembles from five to fifty years, with a mean of almost nineteen years, and they teach in the following states: California, Florida, Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, and Washington.

They were very diverse in their favorite vocal jazz as well, naming works by 70 different vocal jazz arrangers overall, 138 different "Favorite Charts," 128 different "Best Teaching Charts," and 105 different "Audience Appeal Charts." No arrangement was named more than five times.

Only those charts that were named three to five times will be reported here due to space limitations.

For "Favorite Charts," Gene Puerling's *A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square* and Phil Mattson's *More I Cannot Wish You* were named most frequently, with another fifteen pieces named twice. For "Best Teaching Charts," Ken Kraintz's *Down at Smoky Joe's* and Phil Mattson's *I'll Be Seeing You* were named three times each, followed by another eight pieces named twice. For "Audience Appeal Charts," Jeremy Fox's *Amazing Grace*, Darmon Meader's *Sing, Sing, Sing*, and Kirby Shaw's *Operator* were named four times each, followed by Meader's *Cottontail* and Shaw's *Bridge Over Troubled Water*. Another nine were named twice.

Some respondents did not separate their favorites into the three categories as requested but rather just provided a list of their overall favorite vocal jazz charts. In order to use all of the surveys, a master list of named pieces from all twenty directors was compiled. The following pieces were named from three to five times each and provide a preliminary list of seventeen vocal jazz favorites:

Amazing Grace
(Jeremy Fox)

Bridge Over Troubled Water
(Kirby Shaw)

Café
(Jeremy Fox)



Repertoire & Standards

Chile con Carne
(Anders Edenroth)

Down at Smoky Joe's
(Ken Kraitz)

**I'll Be Seeing You*
(Phil Mattson)

**I've Got You Under My Skin*
(Phil Mattson)

Loves Me Like a Rock
(Darmon Meader)

More I Cannot Wish You
(Phil Mattson)

Muddy Water
(Michele Weir)

Nature Boy
(Kerry Marsh)

A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square
(Gene Puerling)

Operator
(Kirby Shaw)

Sing, Sing, Sing
(Darmon Meader)

Smack Dab in the Middle
(Darmon Meader)

South of the Border
(Sharon Broadley)

Words
(Anders Edenroth)

* = also favorites in 1993

This is a fabulous set of favorites for anyone interested in vocal jazz! However, only 20 responses out of more than 125 vocal jazz directors is not enough. I fervently ask that every member of ACDA who directs a vocal jazz ensemble make an effort to complete the survey, so that I can present ACDA with a comprehensive and representative list of works every vocal jazz educator should know, complete with difficulty grading and comments for performance.

You may email me at <owardste@indiana.edu>, phone me 812-855-7738, or send a hard copy to me at the following address:

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Please provide a "difficulty level" (1-5) for each arrangement, and please don't list arrangements that have never been published.

Difficulty Level:

5 – Very challenging for the college-level VJE

4 – Quite challenging for the best high school VJE

3 – Moderately challenging for the average high school VJE

2 – Moderately easy for the average high school VJE

1 – Very easy and attainable by the average middle school VJE

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VOCAL JAZZ REPERTOIRE SAMPLE SURVEY

Your Name (optional) _____

What level of vocal jazz ensemble(s) do you direct?

Elem MS HS Collegiate Community Professional

How many years have you conducted vocal jazz ensembles? _____

What state do you teach in? _____

TOP TEN FAVORITES: (List additional titles on a separate page)

Title	Arranger	Voicing	Grade	Publisher
1 _____	— _____	_____	_____	_____

Comment _____

TOP TEN TEACHING CHARTS: (List additional titles on a separate page)

Title	Arranger	Voicing	Grade	Publisher
1 _____	— _____	_____	_____	_____

Comment _____

TOP TEN AUDIENCE APPEAL CHARTS: (List additional titles on a separate page)

Title	Arranger	Voicing	Grade	Publisher
1 _____	— _____	_____	_____	_____

Comment _____