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# Preface

This book was written in response to numerous requests from young arrangers seeking practical advice on ways to improve their arranging and orchestrating technique.

The author draws upon many years of experience in the field, having served as arranger-conductor for Dionne Warwick, Wes Montgomery, Carmen McRae, Herbie Mann, Peggy Lee, Roberta Flack, and many other top recording stars.

This experience was gained largely on a trial and error basis; a very time-consuming, and at times, frustrating situation. This book is designed to eliminate many of the problems confronting the young arranger, by illustrating in scored and recorded examples those procedures that have proven most successful, and contrasting them with less desirable ones—a unique feature not found in any other instruction manual. Many of these examples are extracted from actual arrangements written for, and recorded by today's leading professional musicians.

This book does not purport to be a treatise on composition or harmony (there are several fine volumes available that deal specifically with these), and will touch on these subjects only insofar as they relate to the art of creating a better arrangement.

Throughout the book, the masculine form *his* has been used instead of the cumbersome his/her. This is done purely for ease of reading and is in no way intended to exclude the many fine female musicians and arrangers I work with, have taught and admire.

# CHAPTER ONE: Basics

There are four basic factors that are essential in the construction of a good arrangement: Balance, Economy, Focus, and Variety.

## **BALANCE**

1. *Tonal balance*, the proper distribution of tones in order to achieve the best possible sound with any given combination of instruments. (Discussed thoroughly in Chapters Two and Three.)

2. *Formal balance* can be achieved through meaningful, well-coordinated manipulation of three basic elements—*melody, instrumentation, and time*.

a. **MELODY**—As a general rule, the arranger should try to restrict himself to as few melodic ideas as possible, whether they are derived from the song itself or composed by the arranger in deliberate contrast to it. When the need is felt for a fresh melodic statement, it's advisable to try a variation on a motive already used before injecting a new one. This is directly related to the principle of *economy* discussed below. This will give your arrangement unity and help to eliminate confusion. One arranger who is especially adept at applying this principle is Bill Holman; his charts always seem to grow organically from the initial melodic germ. For a thorough discussion of the uses of melody, see Chapter Seven.

b. **INSTRUMENTATION**—The distribution of instrumental sounds has a great influence on the formal balance of an arrangement. The tendency in young arrangers is to use everything available in the first chorus—this leaves no room for development or surprise. Consider recorded example No. 1, an excerpt from a Jackie Cain/Roy Kral record, "Time and Love." In this arrangement, the only instruments used in the first 23 bars were electric piano, bass, drums, harp, and vibes. At the bridge, there was a temptation to bring in the strings. Instead, the organ was introduced, playing sustained chords, lending just enough weight to enable me to delay the entrance of the strings until the second chorus. Here they begin to play the famous chorale figuration from Bach's *Cantata No. 147*. Had the strings been used earlier, the surprise effect of the entrance of this beautiful melody would have been completely negated. To achieve maximum effectiveness from a group of instrumental colors, the arranger must learn to distribute them judiciously throughout his score.

c. **TIME**—The proposed length of a record—from a two-and-a-half minute single to a 60 minute free-form piece taking up a whole CD—makes specific demands on all other basic elements and will (and should) have a profound effect on the formal balance of a score. The arranger must have some idea of the time restrictions he faces before he can begin to write purposefully and realistically.

## CHAPTER FOUR: The Rhythm Section

In the mid 1950's, when I first became professionally involved in music, the standard rhythm section consisted of piano, string bass, guitar, and drums. Because the general level and direction of commercial recorded music tended to be fairly consistent, this basic unit was adequate for most sessions.

When rock and roll became popular, musicians (especially rhythm section players) were forced to adapt to the new trend. Elaborately modified electric guitars, along with more sophisticated amplifiers, were used with increasing frequency. Electric basses began to replace acoustic basses for certain record dates. Bass drum heads became tighter, tomtom heads looser than they had ever been before. New electronic keyboard instruments were invented, providing the arranger with brand new sounds.

In the 1960's, another trend appeared—bossa nova. Almost overnight, this smooth jazz-influenced Brazilian music with its gently plucked classical guitar chords and its churning percussion effects made a deep impression on the recording scene. It continues to play a big part in commercial music today.

Folk music, with its simple unamplified sounds, also became a major pop movement in the 1960's. Several hybrid forms emerged—jazz-rock, folk-rock, country blues, bossa-rock, etc., providing more variety and textures to our daily musical diet.

The standard all-purpose rhythm section of the 1950's has evolved into a highly sensitive and flexible group of musicians who have absorbed all the influences we've mentioned, and more, in order to meet the varied demands of the music they are called upon to perform daily.