

# An Introduction to Color

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Erik Fredriksen

[erikfredriksen.com/a-cappella](http://erikfredriksen.com/a-cappella)

# Class Summary

- What is a “color note?”
  - Many chords are built around “triads”, which are 3 note chords with a root, a 3rd, and a 5th.
  - What does “root”, “3rd” and “5th” mean?
    - If we are in a major or minor key (the “happy” and “sad” keys you hear in pop music), the set of notes in those keys is called a scale (aka notes without an additional # or ♭).
    - The “third” is three notes up the scale (including the root)
    - The “fifth” is five notes up the scale (including the root)
  - A “color note” is an additional note (NOT in the triad)
- We will begin by discussing important concepts in voice leading (aka writing the individual parts to be sung in our arrangements).
- Then, we will focus on practical examples that use more complicated “harmony” (basically, the chord progression).
- This class will provide you the materials to begin using notes you wouldn’t have thought of using before.

# “Tension and Release”

- “Tension and release”
- This can get as complicated as we’d like it, but to keep it simple:
  - We want to feel tension, and then we want to feel the catharsis of resolving that tension.
  - We want to become invested in the music and be excited about where the music is going.
  - We want to feel comfortable with where the song is going (subversion vs. a jarring surprise)
- With clear tension and release, your group can better understand their parts.
  - If the dynamics feel natural, it is easier for your group to remember them and perform them well.
  - Even the most simple parts are interesting and fun with:
    - Good dynamics
    - Tension and release.
- We also want to set up the audience to be intrigued by your group such that the audience doesn’t end up looking at their phones.

# “Ideal” voice leading (aka mUsIc ThEoRy)

- Music Theory: Looking at other people’s music and thinking about why you liked it.
- The following ideas are “theoretically” harder to sing, but that shouldn't stop you from using them entirely, if at all.
  - Perfect Fifths
    - Remember the “fifth” in a triad from earlier? A fifth is a root note plus the note 5 steps up in the scale (including the root).
    - “Perfect Fifths” are when two parts move the same distance with a fifth between them.
    - It’s easy to tell when a fifth is out of tune.
    - Perfect Fifths are very powerful, which may throw off your group’s key without care.
    - Just remember where they are so that you can work on them in rehearsal (if necessary).
  - Other common voice leading traps:
    - Perfect octaves (truly just perfect fifths but with octaves). Very cool color!
    - Remember that the entire group can go higher, go lower, be close together, or be far apart. Try all combinations if you’re stuck!
    - A lot of semitone chromatic nonsense in a single part (not inherently bad though)
      - Think about major and minor seconds; sing them to yourself often.
      - Moving a step down, the gap tends to be too big. Moving a step up, too small.

# The Fun of Singing

- When we arrange, consider taking some time to make sure that every part is fun and comfortable to sing.
- When we arrange, we orchestrate SPECIFICALLY for voice.
- The best way to test this is to sing the part yourself (in your own octave).
  - Do YOU actually like singing your own music?
  - Do YOU have room to breathe? Can YOU keep your pitch?
  - Is EVERY part similarly as fun?
- We have to sing these arrangements literally millions of times in rehearsal; good for group morale.
- When I speak of using good “voice leading” in a cappella, I am talking about creating fun, memorable, learnable and practical voice parts.
- When you set up your group for success and positivity, it becomes easier execute the ideas in your arrangement more successfully and more often.

# Building Chords using 3rds

- When allocating the our singers to the notes of a chord, we want to prioritize (in order) to make it clear what chord they're singing.
  - The root
  - The 5th (having more 5ths than roots is ok, especially if the bass is singing the root)
  - The 3rd
  - Everything else (color notes)
- If your mic'd "bass" is on a note other than the root, your are building tension.
- In your handout I've created pairs of chords where the color note is the same.
- In each of these pairs, there's one where the core triad is major, and one for minor.
- You can TOTALLY mix different color tones simultaneously together.
- It's generally safer to put your color notes "higher" to avoid clashing with the bass.
- In dominant seventh chords, the tritone resolves inward: The 3rd goes up by a step, and the 7th goes down by a step.

# Examples:

- Seven Devils/Cellophane:
  - Note that the main color note is in the backup solo parts; works because they focus on blending with the soloist, making a “vocoder” effect.
  - 2nd half: the bass gets to move around more, but the “pads” (held notes) keep the chord.
  - The loud chords at the end have a lot of color notes; bright vowels make these chords shine!
- Get You:
  - Perfect octaves for the guitar part (orchestrated for “voice”); the other parts hold chords.
  - A LOT more space; people don’t need to sing all the time.
  - The chords are somewhat ambiguous, but the rhythm section isn’t.
  - I would argue that taking the ensemble out and bringing them back in is not only refreshing for the audience, it’s time for the ensemble to breathe and make their next entrance memorable.

# Need Ideas? Common Arranging Techniques

- Homophony is very reliable and can be very powerful.
  - Higher voices can experiment with pentatonics.
  - Lower voices can drone on chords, especially since the voices are bassier.
  - These can be switched around, of course!
- Drones: Having a part of at least 3 people that can stagger breathe for a while.
  - Pick a new interval to do a drone with!
  - Consider how to resolve your drones satisfyingly.
- Modal Mixture: Basically putting in a chord that's not in the key.
- Putting a familiar section over a new bassline:
  - A constantly moving but repetitive bassline sounds cool under pads.
  - A bassline moving down by step, harmonized with the melody; “linear” harmony.
- Try switching around whatever group of singers is doing what. Give everyone their moment!

# Building Chords using 4ths and 5ths

- 4ths tend to sound “closed”.
- 5ths tend to sound “open”.
- 4ths and 5ths are just the same notes but in a different order; the way the music is presented to us matters!
- Examples:
  - When You Were Young: Ending
  - Stars of Bethlehem: Chorus 1
    - Notice that I pay attention to where the solo line adds harmonically; the solo is always part of the chord!
    - Notice how, while in B minor, I use my G major chord to lead us to C major and F major chords by moving the bass up and down by 4ths and 5ths.
    - M5. the chord on “thing” is stacked 5ths, starting at D and ending in D# (I didn’t use all of them!