

LEVELS

T1 – ERIK // LEO
T2 – ROMAN // WILL
B – BEN, RONALD // NITSAN, RAMSEY

CONCEPTUAL AND COLLABORATIVE ARRANGING

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This arrangement is being presented as it was performed by the 2016-2017 CMU Originals. Edited excerpts from the original collaborative (google) document are placed next to their corresponding sections or moments in order to better explain how they came to be. Notes in parenthesis are made in hindsight. The original reference document was created by myself and Nitsan Shai at the end of 2015, after which we divided up sections evenly between us to arrange. After a week of exchanging critique and edits, both working in Finale, I copy and pasted our individual sections together to create this arrangement.

JAAAAAM ♩ = 100

TENOR 1

ERIK *mf*

Le - vels

BARITONE

NITSAN

p

ooh

mf

RAMSEY

Le - vels

BASS

mf

Le - vels

Intro through Verse 1

- Mostly percussion, CHILL halftime groove
- Should have a distinct, nonrandom rhythm that is used later for the drop (helps make these percussion sections more meaningful; we basically already set ourselves up to write drop 2 by reusing this intro).
- Nitsan ooh opening (no blown pitch)
- "Levels" part of original intro, last entrance is the bass
- No ensemble yet (no reason for them to sing yet! Let's make their entrance meaningful)

S

Get on my e - le - va - tor, ba - by we're go - ing up. Give me that now and la - ter, I can't get e - nough.

B

mf

(doo)

S

So much to dis - co - ver, please don't stop me now. E - ve - ry time I touch you, (you) lift right off the ground. Let 'em go,

B

(doo)

Prechorus 1

- Homophonic pre chorus, add a note in the chord every measure
- Tim's gluck noise (covers a sound in the song; no singing simultaneously because the gluck is quiet)
- (This entire section's structure comes from the simple idea of introducing a part a measure. This also influenced the choreo; each entrance has its own moment where 1/3 of the ensemble

13

S All the ones try-na get in the door. I'm a go where they all could-nt go: up a floor up a floor up a floor. Oh, I know

T1

BS2

T2

B *mf* I'm a go where they all could-nt go: up a floor up a floor up a floor.

B *mf* All the ones try-na get in the door. I'm a go where they all could-nt go: up a floor up a floor up a floor.

14

Chorus 1

- Switch to homophonic pads; bright, jazzy vowels
- Bring in kick halfway through
- Build to drop 1 (eventually became "oo" -> "oh" -> "ah" for natural dynamics)
- Interesting high frequency vp (we used 2 vp; one for lower frequency sounds and one for higher frequency sounds.

This made it easier for the sound guy and for the VPs to perform around each other.

- Very still, or movement into another formation (eventually the became part of the choreo)

- (You may notice that parts may keep the same vowel but repeat notes. How can you emphasize chord changes when your note stay the same? I say that you "rearticulate" those notes, meaning that you emulate the attack of a note change while staying on the same note. This will help repeated notes change in different chords and make your ensemble really feel like one being.

17

S we can get higher there's le - vels to your love yeah there's le - vels to your love and I know

T1 *p* ooh *mp* ooh *p*

T2 *p* ooh *mp* ooh *p*

B *p* ooh *mp* ooh *p*

B *p* ooh *mp* ooh *p*

18

LEVELS - CONCEPTUAL AND COLLABORATIVE ARRANGING

Musical score for the first system of "Levels". It features five staves: Soprano (S), Tenor 1 (T1), Tenor 2 (T2), Bass (B), and Piano/Vocal Part (VP). The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. The score begins at measure 27. The Soprano part has the lyrics: "we can get higher there's le - vels to your love and I keep on climb - ing up". The Tenor parts have "oh" and "hah" vocalizations. The Bass part has "oh" and "hah" vocalizations and a "ROOF TOP" annotation. Dynamics include *mf* and *f*. The Piano/Vocal part provides a rhythmic accompaniment.

Drop 1

- still 4 on the floor (similar to the song)
- similar to the song, think "Jazz" backing vocals
- "show off" choreo moments, but with consistent beat and bass
- (Drop needs to be able to carry the arrangement even though the solo is sporadic)
- (How can we show off the ensemble here while keeping the rest of the arrangement simple?)

Musical score for the second system of "Levels", starting at measure 28. It features the same five staves as the first system. The Soprano part has the lyrics: "There's le - vels to your love. There's le - vels to your love." The Tenor parts have "Ooh Hah Oh yeah" and "There's le - vels to your love. Le - vels, le - vels,". The Bass part has "Ooh Hah Oh yeah" and "Le - vels to your love. Le - vels, le - vels,". Dynamics include *f* and *mf*. The Piano/Vocal part features a rhythmic pattern with the instruction "OPEN UP VOWEL TO 'DUH'".

29

S there's le - vels to your love and I ___ keep on climb-ing up

T1 We could get, high - er ___ there's le - vels to your love and I ___ keep on climb-ing up

T2 We could get, WILL high - er ___ there's le - vels to your love and I ___ keep on climb-ing up

B Le - vels RAMSEY high - er ___ Le - vels hah

29

B

Verse 2

- Intro Slide, no vp on 1; vp hit on 2.
- Ahs on off beats for ensemble, marcato and held (basically a reminder that every note should be sung through)
- Big slide into "all this heat keep rising"
- Multiple soloists, featured trio "all this heat keep rising" (the trio is pretty cliché at this point, but effective when staged appropriately; this depends on whether or not it makes sense to highlight them in non-musical ways).
- SUPERNATURAL (we knew a moment was going to be here right away; homophony w/ solo and the ensemble).

33

S Wal-king up to the cei - ling, danc - ing up on the wall, you and that drug you're dea - ling, should ___ be a gainst the law.

T1 Oh Hah ___ Hah ___ Nah, nah, nah ___

T2 Oh Hah ___ Hah ___ Nah, nah, nah ___

B Oh Hah ___ Hah ___ Nah, nah, nah ___

33

B Doo (doo) ___

37

S All this heat keep ri - sing, make you stop drop and roll, Bot - tle - in up the light - nin, SU - PER - NA - TU - RAL! let 'em go

BS1 All this heat keep ri - sing,

BS2 All this heat keep ri - sing,

T1 Hah _____ Hah _____ Hah _____ SU - PER - NA - TU - RAL!

T2 Hah _____ Hah _____ Hah _____ SU - PER - NA - TU - RAL!

B Hah _____ Hah _____ Hah _____ SU - PER - NA - TU - RAL!

B Dah (doo)

p *mf* *fp* *mf* *p*
LIGHTLY

Prechorus 2

- Syncopated Vp/Bass (after 4 on the floor for about a minute)
- Rhythmic ensemble (rhythmic sections are cute, but I wouldn't have them stick around; they're annoying to sing for long periods of time, but feel good to sing briefly and build the audience up).
- (the slide at the end is unique in that we slide up to and LAND on a chord; this contrasts with the 2 slides in verse 2).

41

S all the ones try - na get in the door i'm a go where they all could - nt go up a floor up a floor up a floor Oh! I know

T1 ni mi ni mi na let 'em go! ni mi ni mi na in the doh! ni mi ni mi na couldn't go! Ah

T2 ni mi ni mi na let 'em go! ni mi ni mi na in the doh! ni mi ni mi na couldn't go! Ah

B ni mi ni mi na let 'em go! ni mi ni mi na in the doh! ni mi ni mi na couldn't go! Ah

B

VP

mp *mf*

Chorus 2

- Wow! Featured trio! (the trio gives the 2 backup singers leniency in terms of their blend and volume; they can focus on sounding snazzy with the soloist while the ensemble holds it down).

- (We made sure that the ensemble parts were simple in order to):

- Emphasize the trio, since if there's too much going on it becomes difficult for the audience to notice each individual thing; if a trio hits a sick chord and the audience doesn't notice, were they even really singing at all?

- If we reduce the amount of things happening in the ensemble, the ensemble can focus on dynamics; a really good swell on some chords is not only very powerful, but reliably so.

- Set up our soloist such that we let him have his moment and he didn't even need to try; we encourage the audience to focus on our soloist and his natural swagger rather than needing to prove to the audience that he's cool.

- Homophonic chords on "ah" (this way we start loud, as opposed to slowly getting louder like in chorus 1).

- Echoes in the ensemble (in the T2 part; it added enough variety to end up being worth it, I think).

- "Take em to the" ROOFTOP yelled by ensemble + choreo moment (easy thing to isolate directly from the song).

The musical score for Chorus 2 is arranged for a soloist (S), two backup singers (BS1 and BS2), and two tenors (T1 and T2) and two basses (B). The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. The score begins at measure 45. The soloist part (S) has the lyrics: "we can get higher there's le - vels to your love yeah there's le - vels to your love and I know". The backup singers (BS1 and BS2) have the lyrics: "we can get higher le - vels to your love le - vels to your love to your love". The tenors (T1 and T2) and basses (B) have the lyrics: "ah Ah le - vels to your love le - vels to your love ah Ah". The score includes dynamic markings such as *mf* and *mf* for the tenors and basses. The score is written in a grand staff format with multiple staves for each part.

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49

S we can get higher there's levels to your love and I keep on climb-ing up

BS1 we can get higher

BS2 we can get higher

T1 NITSAN LEO ERIK le - vuh le - vuh

T2 Ah le - vuh ERIK TAKE EM TO THE

B BEN RONALD RAMSEY le - vuh NITSAN ROOF TOP

B ah

ff

DROP 2

- Tim and JP switch mics (we did this because the VPs swapped their sounds; the low frequency sounds remain on the same mic. It's dumb and annoying for the sound engineer, so just make sure it's worth it)

- Trap. Research other electronic drops, focus on VP, subsets of chorus (we wanted the halftime groove, but we didn't want to do loud shouty dubstep; we wanted to keep each entrance punchy and important while giving us room to grow to a climax in the final chorus. Keeping the ensemble closely-knit is key here for harmonic stability).

- Lots of movement on stage with sudden stops (works w/ drop's start-n-stop nature).

- Composed, elements of past verses (supernatural, the normal bassline) (sing bridge stuff)

- Trio (easy to make moments with a trio)

Su - per - na - tu - ral.

NITSAN

ERIK

Su - per - na - tu -

Su - per - na - tu -

53

T1 Hoh Na na Hah Hoh Hoh Hah

T2 Hoh Na na Hah Hoh Hoh Hah

B Hoh Na na Hah Hoh Hoh Hah

B Doh (di)

fp

f

FLOAT

57

S All this head keep ri - sing, I know

BS1 *ral.* All this heat keep ri - sing, Heavencan't reach us, we're high fi - ving Je - sus

BS2 *ral.* All this heat keep ri - sing, *mf* Heavencan't reach us, *f* we're high fi - ving Je - sus

T1 *mf* Oh _____ *f* ah _____

T2 *mf* Oh _____ *f* ah _____

B *f* ah _____

B Do (di) Na na na

BACK TO ORIGINAL PARTS!

Thoughts on Chorus 3

- Homophonic "we could get higher" (Nitsan brought this up before we even started arranging; a VERY powerful A Cappella trope).
- Solo ad-libs over trio (this ended up just being a couple changes in the melody; the trio added extra parts to compensate for the linear and constant melody).
- Sudden ending (these endings are powerful BUT think about whether or not you want the audience to be surprised by it. If that's what you're going for, then that's fine, but think about the stifled applause that occurs when people aren't sure if a song ended or not. This sudden ending is prepared, and when the soloist cuts off the audience immediately knows to clap because they're ready).
- The chord voicings are wider such that people that have the high notes can really go hard for 8 bars, but the people without those notes can still go hard in a range comfortable to them. Your group probably has singers in lower parts that have great high notes; they just don't want to have to stay in that part of their range for long because it's exhausting).
- It's hard to go somewhere with "ah" after doing "ah" the chorus before. The main changes here are in that in chorus 2:
 - There was a constant 4 on the floor kick drum, whereas now there are snares on 2 and 4 (really does change the entire mood)
 - The bass part was mostly held notes, whereas now there's a rhythmic element to it (also a big difference).
 - The two backup singers in the trio followed the soloist, but now do their own thing for a bit for variety's sake.

67

S we can get higher there's le - vels to your love yeah there's le - vels to your love and I know

BS1 *ff* we can get higher Le - vels, to your, love!

BS2 *ff* we can get higher Le - vels, to your, love!

T1 *ff* we can get high er _____ ah _____

T2 *ff* we can get high er _____ ah _____

B *ff* we can get high er _____ ah _____

B we can get high er _____ ah _____

B (doh)

VP **JAM**

Closing thoughts:

- For better or for worse, Nitsan and I went into this arrangement intending to put out something very pop and competitive with the groups we were seeing at our ICCA semifinals (ICCA 2016 was our first time at finals). All of the decisions were made to prioritize getting the audience invested quickly to prepare for our more risky (Everybody Wants to Rule the World) and more emotional (Stone Cold). We felt that we could set ourselves up for success by talking through each arrangement to make sure that all our arranging decisions were practical and fun. I think that, by keeping it simple, we were able to make the arrangement interesting before putting notes down. When we finally did write the notes, we were implementing a very thought out plan, and so simple solutions to musical problems went from being boring to being "elegant".
- A lot of these views are indeed influenced by our experience with collegiate a cappella competitions, but I think that they are important to consider in any arrangement to make sure it's fun for your group to sing and fun for the audience to experience.
- This arrangement is NOT perfect; please learn from my successes, my failures, AND your own taste. Problems in hindsight:
 - m25-26: This didn't land until we finally figured out the quick changes in dynamics to be effective; these should have been thought out ahead of time and the crescendos to be effective; these should have been written in.
 - m30-31: That baritone split with similar motion (both bari parts move down) made it easy to get that major 6th tone (The C# in E minor) but that lower note was difficult to approach. The 5th into the unison "Levels" seemed easier; in this crescendo, the top notes provide dynamic contrast while the bottom notes focus a little less on dynamics and a little more on precision.
 - m40: This chord could have been sick, but that A# just never felt natural to the baris.
 - m59-60: This section was handled in exactly the wrong way: it changed multiple times between competition rounds; it was really hard to get to these notes from m57; the voice leading is atrocious in that we can see a macro tritone in the T2 and Bari parts, making a difficult section even more jarring; AND it was really high, and since no one was confident, the chord was out of tune and barely audible. Truly a sequence of errors and blunders and something that will follow me to my grave.
- There are two recordings for this song, linked below. The ICCA QF has video that very clearly presents our choreo, but the ICCA Finals video not only has better executed choreo, but sound comparable to what you would have heard attending finals in person.
 - ICCA Central QF 2016 (1st place): <https://youtu.be/NOvUNB7A2qg>
 - ICCA Finals 2016 (2nd place, aka placing 1st runner up on my CV): <https://youtu.be/vfp1SxKtT0s>

The image shows a musical score for the song "Levels". It includes vocal parts for Soprano (S), Baritone 1 (BS1), Baritone 2 (BS2), Tenor 1 (T1), Tenor 2 (T2), and Bass (B). The lyrics are: "we can get higher there's levels to your love and I keep on climb-ing up". The score features a crescendo leading to a section marked "BUZZY GLISS UP". The music is in a key with three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a common time signature. The score includes dynamic markings such as *fff* and a section labeled "BUZZY GLISS UP" at the bottom.