



***Disclaimer:** The following article, **Copyright Basics for Barbershoppers (United States)**, is intended for general and informational purposes only. This article is not rendered legal advice. Should you or your group require legal advice or representation regarding a copyright or intellectual property matter, please consult with an attorney.*

Copyright Basics for Barbershoppers (United States)

Copyright laws exist to encourage and protect creativity and the expression of ideas. In order to do this the U.S. Congress has granted certain exclusive rights. This, in a sense, is the only way to guarantee that if you create something - in this case a song - you are entitled to the benefits of your creation. These laws also encourage the creation of future works.

A song and/or arrangement covered by copyright are intellectual property. The owner has certain exclusive rights, and you/your group must get permission - usually involving the payment of a fee - to utilize it. In reality, the same guidelines apply as when you rent, lease, buy, borrow, adapt or enjoy any piece of property owned by someone else.

United States copyright law, which went into effect on January 1, 1978, gives certain exclusive rights to the copyright owner, who may be the writer of a song or someone who has been assigned ownership (such as a publisher or an estate, through contractual agreements). These rights are to:

- **PREPARE** derivative works based upon the copyrighted work;
- **REPRODUCE** the copyrighted work in copies or recordings;
- **DISTRIBUTE** copies;
- **PERFORM** the work publicly; and
- **DISPLAY** the work publicly.

We will discuss the first four rights in this article.

1. Preparation of *Derivative Works*

If you plan to create an arrangement (which is called a “derivative work”) of an existing copyrighted work you may do so only WITH PERMISSION from the copyright holder of the work. The Barbershop Harmony Society provides a service through the Copyright & Licensing Department at Harmony Hall (library@barbershop.org) for securing such permission. It involves the payment of a fee for the permission to arrange and the number of authorized (legalized) copies you need for your group. Arrangers must be certain to secure this consent before preparing an arrangement. However, in some cases the copyright holder of the song may ask to review a draft of the arrangement prior to giving approval. The Society’s ***Arrangement & Reproduction Request Form*** is available for download at our website (www.barbershop.org).

It is important to note that, under the law, an arrangement becomes the property of the copyright holder, not the arranger, group, or customer paying for the permission. In some cases the arrangement may eventually be offered for sale by the copyright holder, the Society, or another, as additional licenses are granted by the holder.

Please be advised that any use of a copyrighted composition without formal permission is a violation of copyright law. The penalties for infringement can be as high as ***\$150,000 per song***. At a minimum, a copyright holder will set infringement fees well above the price of the original clearance fee. So, groups have an obligation to make certain that arrangements of copyrighted songs have been created with the consent of the copyright owner.

Check the source of an arrangement to be sure permission was secured to create that arrangement and the copyright holder was paid accordingly. Please note that if a song is in the public domain in the United States (chiefly, those songs published before 1924 as of January 1, 2019), the arranger may well be the copyright owner of his public domain arrangement - refer to the copyright notice on your sheet music for this information.

2. *Reproduction of the work*

Printed Material

Any original work - be it a song, cartoon, arrangement, lyric or other creation - is considered under copyright if it bears a copyright date and name. A simple rule to follow: if you see a copyright notice that’s dated 1924 or later, don’t copy it without permission! The inverse is not necessarily true, however; you might occasionally obtain material that does not carry a copyright notice. That doesn’t mean it’s not copyrighted, or that it is legal to copy it. Always do your research before using it and seek permission accordingly.

Legal sheet music arrangements can be purchased from the Barbershop Harmony Society’s Marketplace (<https://shop.barbershop.org/>) and other third party distributors, such as:

- **Alfred Music Publishing** (www.alfred.com);
- **Bourne Co.** (www.bournemusic.com) (which has numerous classic SPEBSQSA publications);

- **Carl Fischer Music** (www.carlfischer.com)
- **Hal Leonard Corporation** (www.halleonard.com) (which distributes many of the Society's published arrangements throughout the world);
- **J.W. Pepper** (www.jwpepper.com);
- **Musicnotes, Inc.** (www.musicnotes.com);
- **Music Sales Corporation** (www.musicsales.com);

and many others not mentioned here. Use the keywords “barbershop arrangements” or “barbershop sheet music” in your online searches.

Ensure you purchase (or legally clear, if not available for sale) one copy of the arrangement for every member of your group, plus a few extras for your file. (It's much easier to buy a few more than you need at the beginning than going to the trouble of re-ordering or re-clearing.) Every performer must have a legally purchased copy of the arrangement (no sharing).

There is at least one occasion when it is permissible to make copies of music. You are permitted to make one or more *emergency copies* for an impending performance, if the copies are made from one that you obtained legally, so long as replacement copies are on order. You must destroy the emergency copies after the replacements are obtained. You may also copy short passages of up to about four measures for educational or study purposes for a classroom situation, provided that you credit the copyright holder.

Recorded Material

Unauthorized duplication of copyrighted recorded material is illegal, whether it is an LP (vinyl album), CD (compact disc), cassette, DVD, or other medium. The producers of these recordings must pay royalties to copyright holders for the right to record their songs and duplicate to distribute and sell to others.

Below are various scenarios to which this applies:

Learning Media (CD)

You may of course purchase one full learning media CD (or digital album download) from the Barbershop Harmony Society (at <https://shop.barbershop.org/>) for each singer in your group, or purchase one album and secure a *mechanical license* from the copyright holder of the song for each additional track you duplicate for your singers. Most mechanical licenses can be secured from the Harry Fox Agency (“HFA”) via their online portal at www.songfile.com; however, some songs may require you to contact the copyright directly for a license. For Society-controlled songs (where © *SPEBSQSA, Inc.* or © *Barbershop Harmony Society* appears on the arrangement), please contact the Society at library@barbershop.org to request a mechanical license.

The current U.S. mechanical license rate is \$0.091/unit (9.1 cents USD) for each track copied (for tracks under 5 minutes long each). The current mechanical royalty rate schedule is available for reference at the Harry Fox Agency website.

- **Example 1:** Reproducing a CD with 4 tracks on it (one per voice part) with 100 CDs being made means a license for 400 units times \$0.091 / unit = \$36.40 owed to HFA, plus their applicable administration fees.
- **Example 2:** If you have 20 lead singers and want to provide them each with a CD including one full mix and one part-predominant track, each CD would contain 2 tracks, so 20 CDs (one CD per lead singer) x 2 tracks per CD = 40 units to be licensed times \$0.091 / unit = \$3.64 owed to HFA, plus their applicable administration fee.

Other Learning Media Options

A simple, legal way to create a voice part learning tape is to have your section leader or other strong singer sing directly into your hand-held recorder during a chorus rehearsal. This does not require a mechanical license. Please note that you cannot duplicate that tape, but several individuals may record simultaneously.

Learning Media Distributed on Chapter Websites

If you are making copies of learning tracks originally purchased from someone else (BHS, etc.), or are creating your own learning track recording, the type of license you need to legally post tracks to your website for downloading is a *PDD (Permanent Digital Download)* mechanical license.

Visit the Harry Fox Agency website (www.songfile.com) to see if they represent the song. If so, secure a PDD mechanical license through them. (For groups residing in Canada, contact CMRRA – www.cmrra.ca – for licensing.)

- If HFA does not represent the song, you will then need to research the ASCAP, BMI, and/or SESAC websites (SOCAN for groups in Canada) to locate the copyright holder information, then contact them directly for a PDD mechanical license.
- For Society-controlled songs (where © *SPEBSQSA, Inc.* or © *Barbershop Harmony Society* appears on the arrangement), please contact the Society at library@barbershop.org to request a PDD mechanical license.

PDD mechanical license fees are typically \$0.091 (9.1 cents) per copy for songs under 5 minutes, plus a processing/administration fee.

For the definitions of various digital permission options currently available in the U.S., visit HFA's website at www.harryfox.com or in Canada, the Copyright Board of Canada - <https://cb-cda.gc.ca/societies-societes/index-e.html> .

Once you have obtained the proper licensing you may post the song on a password-protected page on your website, and instruct each member to download ONE copy of it. The copies must not exceed the number you have paid for, and you should only keep one master copy on file. Your webmaster should use web analytics tools (usually available for free from Google and other online providers) to monitor the number of downloads from your website, and account/re-license accordingly to the copyright holder if you exceed the number downloaded that you've licensed.

Recording audio of your Quartet or Chorus (Audio Single/Album/CD/Digital Download)

If you or your group creates an audio recording, U.S. law states that you must have permission to produce a recording (in any form) of a copyrighted song or arrangement. For audio-only recordings you'll need a *mechanical license*.

We suggest you set up a spreadsheet for the following information: *Song Title; Writers; Copyright Holder; Arranger; Harry Fox Payee (or Other Payee); Length of Song; and Comments/Notes*.

Check out each song in the Public Search section of Songfile at the Harry Fox website, (<http://www.songfile.com/>) to help complete and verify your song-information spreadsheet, as well as to pay your license(s) online. This will greatly simplify and speed up the licensing. The Harry Fox Agency requires payment via credit card. As mentioned previously in this article, HFA and other agencies may not represent all shares of a particular song. They can only grant you a license for those shares that they do represent, and you will have to seek clearance for the remaining share. Songs must be licensed at 100% in order to be in compliance with the law.

For other research sources, please see the resource list at the bottom of this article. As always, should you need assistance in locating a particular song's copyright holder, you may contact the Society's music library (library@barbershop.org).

If a song is in the public domain (published before 1924) but is sung directly from an established barbershop arrangement, you must contact the arranger, or the Society (if it's our controlled publication) and request a mechanical license. If you have created your *own* arrangement of a public domain song, there is no need to obtain a mechanical license from a third party.

If you are making a recording of a contest or show, all of the above applies. In addition, you must secure written permission from each performing group (quartet, chorus, soloist, etc.). The reason for this is that some performers may not want their performance on someone else's recording.

Please note: Any song lyrics reprinted in your packaging do require permission from the copyright holder of the song, and additional licensing fees may be charged.

Obtaining permission for DVD/video recordings

Permission to use songs in a video recording, film, etc., falls under an entirely different licensing category, called a "synchronization license" or "videogram license". Since there is no statutory (standardized) fee for these licenses, each song must be negotiated separately with the copyright holder. Fees can vary considerably, from as little as 15¢ per copy per song, to \$300 or more just for the use of one song in the recording. Most copyright holders will require a "*Most Favored Nations*" clause, which means you must pay every song holder in the video the highest negotiated rate. Also, in the case of video recordings, the copyright holder is under no obligation to approve your request, or even respond to you.

Some copyright holders are sympathetic to the typical needs Barbershoppers require and try to be flexible. For example, if a chapter wishes to make copies of the archival video of its

annual show and give the copies (or sell them at cost) to its members for their own personal archives, a copyright owner *might* give permission for this without charge, but you **MUST** ask permission first. Also, a copyright holder might be sympathetic to the use of a promotional tape of a chorus or quartet that uses clips of songs to show off the performing aspects of the group to potential clients.

The Society may allow their copyrighted arrangements and/or convention videos to be used as promotional materials on group websites, but you must seek permission (contact library@barbershop.org). Before you begin your clearance project, determine the copyright holder from the copyright notices at the bottom of the first page of your music.

You can see that it is important to communicate complete information (intended audience, number of copies to be made, length, and territory of use, etc.) to the copyright holder. Remember, synchronization fees are completely negotiable, so it is acceptable to ask for a waiver of fees (called a “gratis use”). Of course, the copyright holder has the final decision to grant permission to use their work and charge any fee for that right. Therefore, it is very important to conclude negotiations **before** investing time and money into your project.

3. Distribution Rights

Recordings for sale

The Society does not restrict Barbershop Harmony Society member groups from producing their own albums and videos to sell. Recordings produced by quartets and choruses may be reviewed for resale by the Society. An actual recording must be submitted and final approval will be determined by the Society’s Director of Merchandise & Retail Operations (contact customerservice@barbershop.org). As a reseller, the Society must be able to purchase the recordings at wholesale/dealer prices in order to distribute them at a retail price.

Website and Internet Licenses

The copyright landscape regarding these types of permissions is ever evolving due to ongoing legislative changes and copyright holder policy changes. Visit these links and other reputable internet sites for the latest updates and guidelines:

USA:

Library Of Congress/Copyright Office - www.copyright.gov

The Harry Fox Agency - www.harryfox.com

ASCAP - www.ascap.com

BMI - www.bmi.com

SESAC - www.sesac.com

Global Music Rights (GMR) - <https://www.globalmusicrights.com/>

Canada:

Copyright Board of Canada - <https://cb-cda.gc.ca/societies-societes/index-e.html>

Government Of Canada - <http://www.ic.gc.ca>

4. Performance Rights

You have the right to perform a song/arrangement that has been legally obtained. However, none of the above precludes the necessity of an ASCAP, BMI, and/or SESAC license for

U.S. public performances. (SOCAN for our groups residing in Canada.) If you sing on someone else's show – a barbershop group, a service organization, etc. – the show host/producer is responsible for paying this fee; however, you should ensure that your host is aware of this responsibility. Chapter show clearances are thoroughly explained in the Society's *Chapter Secretary Manual*.

Similar guidelines apply to singing in shopping malls, restaurants or around businesses where an ambiance is intentionally created to attract crowds for buying. This fee is usually the responsibility of the businesses involved, though it is possible that your group will be asked to pay it.

Radio, TV, & YouTube

Performance on radio and television is also governed by the fourth exclusive right granted to the copyright owner. Generally speaking, a barbershop performer does not have to worry about a *live* performance on broadcast radio or television, including public radio and television. Most broadcasters pay an annual performance fee/blanket license to ASCAP, BMI, and SESAC (SOCAN for Canada) that covers all copyrighted music performed.

Cable, Satellite, and Digital Television is another matter. Since many of these companies may not have annual/blanket agreements with ASCAP *et al*, it is the responsibility of the producer of the program to secure permission directly with the copyright owners. The television station, producer, program director, or other official may ask you to do the clearances. If a producer asks you to sign a performer release, be sure to read it carefully so that you are aware of your responsibilities in regards to copyrighted material.

The use of copyrighted video (or portions thereof) - such as the Society's international convention audio and video footage - is also restricted. The synchronization licenses for those productions are negotiated exclusively for home viewing and may preclude broadcast, cablecast or other uses. The Society also owns the copyright of the actual audio and video footage, so permission is required for the use of that as well. Contact library@barbershop.org for further assistance.

Regarding YouTube (www.youtube.com);

- You are welcome to embed BHS YouTube video links into your group's website – the Society's YouTube channel name is currently ***barbershopharmony38***. Your webmaster should know how to do this.
- You are also welcome to upload any of your group's performances singing BHS "Barberpole Cats" (from the first songbook, *Barberpole Cat Songbook*, only) without the need of clearance. Please indicate "*Courtesy of the Barbershop Harmony Society | www.barbershop.org*" in your video description, or embedded in the video itself.
- If the song being performed in your video is in the public domain (published before 1924), you do not usually have to seek permissions to upload the performance video to your website **unless** the arrangement is copyrighted by the arranger or other party. You can usually find this information on your sheet music.
- Songs under copyright must either be pre-cleared (usually with a fee) with the copyright holder before uploading to YouTube, or you must allow the copyright

holder to earn advertising revenue off of your video views, or sometimes both.
More information about this is found on YouTube's website at the following link:
<https://www.youtube.com/yt/copyright>.

Please note that the Barbershop Harmony Society logo and artwork are solely owned and controlled by the Society. To request permission to use any Society-controlled intellectual property, please contact customerservice@barbershop.org or library@barbershop.org.

5. Copyright/Research Resources

Barbershop Harmony Society (615-823-3993) – www.barbershop.org

- Copyright & Licensing Department - library@barbershop.org
- Customer Service - customerservice@barbershop.org

USA Resources:

- ASCAP - www.ascap.com
- BMI - www.bmi.com
- SESAC – www.sesac.com
- Global Music Rights (GMR) - <https://www.globalmusicrights.com/>
- Harry Fox Agency
 - www.songfile.com
 - www.harryfox.com
- The National Music Publishers Association (www.nmpa.org)
- Library of Congress (Copyright Office) – www.copyright.gov
- Public Domain Songs (Unofficial Listing) - www.pdinfo.com

Canada:

- Copyright Board of Canada - <https://cb-cda.gc.ca/societies-societes/index-e.html>
- Government Of Canada - <http://www.ic.gc.ca>

Remember....

 **When in doubt, ASK FOR PERMISSION!**

Disclaimer: *The above article, Copyright Basis for Barbershoppers (United States), is intended for general and informational purposes only. This article is not rendered legal advice. Should you or your group require legal advice or representation regarding a copyright or intellectual property matter, please consult with an attorney.*

Barbershop Harmony Society | SPEBSQSA, Inc.
110 7th Avenue North | Nashville, Tennessee 37203-3704 | U.S.A.
Toll Free: 800-876-7464, x4127 | **Direct:** 615-823-3993 | **Fax:** 615-313-7619
Email: library@barbershop.org | customerservice@barbershop.org