

Forward Motion

DIRECTOR CERTIFICATION PROGRAM NEWSLETTER - MARCH 2005



THE MASTER DIRECTOR'S COLUMN:

BARBERSHOP STYLE or "Do You Hear What I Hear?"

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BARBERSHOP STYLE - WHAT IS YOUR DEFINITION?

The barbershop style of music sounds entirely different from any other style of music. Unless you know exactly what you are listening to, you may not be aware why.

The music is specifically and creatively characterized and arranged with four-part complete chords, including mostly major triads, dominant 7ths and dominant 9ths. Other chords are used in passing as required by the implied harmonies. The melody is carried by the lead voice, while the highest voice sings a harmony part. There are two other parts contributing to our unique harmony. Musical characteristics, deliberately designed by the arranger are used so the delivery is like no other ensemble or choral performance.

The melody line carried by the lead voice is singable and the harmonies (tenor, baritone, and bass) are strong, so as to give the illusion of full accompaniment, which also gives multiple dimensions to the performance. A barbershop arranger also considers the rise and fall of the melody line, arranging so as to enhance the melody, and imply a natural and expressive dynamic plan. There is a natural forward motion in the delivery which is also inherent in the arrangement. There is a constant build and release of tension throughout each arrangement which, when executed with a high level of vocal skills, creates a truly emo-

tional experience for the listener, as well as the performer.

If you have a strong barbershop arrangement, it is easy to sing in the truest sense of the style. A barbershop arrangement is your "roadmap," so to speak. Therefore, it is essential to select an arrangement that suits your ensemble by showcasing your strengths, and minimizing your weaknesses. Precision, in combination with an artistic delivery overflowing with finesse, is essential to the characteristics of barbershop style. The better the understanding of all the essentials of barbershop style, the higher the level of skill can be achieved. The higher the level we are able to achieve to execute these elements, the more impressive and unforgettable our barbershop performances will be.

Let's get back to our definition of barbershop style. Whatever your definition is, it should include several characteristics:

MUSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Embellishments and Swipes – Embellishments should be creative, yet subtle at times and outstanding at other times, depending on the intent and arrangement. Barbershop swipes should be handled confidently, and with artistry. Swipes should be executed so that if we could see them, they would "look" like the shape of an hourglass. That is, the originating note should be connected to the final note, while seam-

IN THIS ISSUE



PAGE 2
Barbershop Style (continued)

PAGE 3
Clear the Confusion

Flap Your Wings

What the Judges Would Like To Tell You

PAGE 4
The National Anthem Project

A History Lesson, From the Stairwell

Register for IES 2005

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lessly incorporating all notes in between. The speed of the swipe can vary and should be planned and determined purposefully. When two or more voice parts are executing a swipe at the same time, the execution, speed, etc. should be planned and synchronized. In preparation for the swipe, the sound should be lifted and expanded. The swipe is then executed, and at the end, the sound should grow and be energized once again.

TRANSITIONS / EXCHANGES

Transitions between sections of songs are incorporated into barbershop arrangements to create interest and excitement. The effective use of transitions is critical to establishing unity and congruency in the delivery of the song. These transitions or exchanges should not be overlooked as they are an essential element in our music that sets us apart from others. They can be difficult to execute, requiring great stamina, to obtain the desired musicality throughout the piece. However, if you have ever heard a performance where the musical storyline keeps building, and the excitement and involvement you feel as an audience continues to grow with each passing phrase, you can be sure the performers are utilizing transitions to their fullest and intended use. There is no substitute for generating such exhilaration!

MELODIC VARIATIONS / TRANSFERS

While the lead singer carries the melody most of the time, a barbershop arrangement may transfer the melody line to another voice part, for various reasons. The melody note must be included in all barbershop chords. However, sometimes the melody note will be out of the best range for the lead voice part. The arranger will then transfer the melody to another voice part, adding interest, variation, texture, and color to the performance. Once again, when executed effectively, the listener is only aware of the excitement and the mood created, not the technical aspect of the diversion. These alternate voicings should be opportunities to maximize the difference in melody transfer, which will maximize the performance as well.

METER AND RHYTHMIC VARIATION

The meter in barbershop style delivery is usually simple and symmetrical. It is important to maintain the appropriate and intended meter and pulse when singing a tempo song. The ability to maintain tempo is artistry at its best, and requires skill as well as an understanding of how to achieve this and why it is important. Variations in tempo should be used sparingly and skillfully, so as not to draw attention to the actual tempo change, but to enhance the musical delivery of the song. When you have experienced a performance where tempo has been executed effectively at a high level, your awareness and reaction can be physical, as well as emotional.

DYNAMIC VARIATION

Singing with dynamic flexibility is much more difficult than it sounds. A barbershop singer requires a great degree

of skill to be able to execute dynamic levels flawlessly, while maintaining the balance and blend of the ensemble, throughout all the dynamic ranges. The tone production must be consistent and steady, and the quality must be maintained. If you use the musical arrangement as your guide, the intended dynamic plan will be evident. The plan should then be adapted to the presentation, taking into consideration the skill level of the performing group, as well as the intended message. Creating dynamic variances can be a powerful tool in interpreting music, in the barbershop art form.

The following *Intuitive Characteristics*, demonstrated by and emanating from the chorus director, can be utilized to enhance the performance of the chorus:

INTERPRETIVE FREEDOM

Barbershop style is characterized by the artistic departure of strict tempos in delivery and execution. This should be based on the abilities and individual style of each performer, utilizing arrangements appropriate to the performing group.

ENERGY TRANSFER IN PERFORMANCE

Energy transfer to the audience occurs in our performances when all the executed techniques are being utilized appropriately in concert with strong physical and emotional commitment of the performer. This is something that is not necessarily seen by the audience, but felt. Energy transfer assists in telling the tale by using effective dynamics to convey mood changes.

TEXTURES, COLORS

We often use the term "painting a picture" when referring to our music. This occurs as our singers utilize different techniques to add textures and color to the sound. It may mean managing air flow to add varying levels of vocal energy, varying degrees of vocal placement: effective use of "word sounds" (i.e. make a whisper sound like a whisper, a dance feel like a dance, a cloud sound like a cloud). These effects enhance the performance, adding even more dimensions.

EMOTIONAL CONNECTION

The performer is truly the only connection to the audience during a performance, thus carrying the emotional message of each song.

The artistic potential is unlimited when the director and performers are not held to only the printed music. The ultimate performance experience of "being in the moment" will happen when all the techniques are in place, and the performers (including the director) are free to allow the emotion of the music to be created right then and there. Yes, everyone is aware of the plan. However, setting the stage should only happen initially. Once a picture is created, each performance will differ as skills develop. With a full commitment from everyone, there will be freedom to make each performance its own unique experience.

In order to better understand and appreciate the outstanding characteristics of barbershop style as compared with

BARBERSHOP STYLE ... (continued)

other choral music, one should experience performances of all choral and group ensembles, both a capella and those with instrumental accompaniment.

To further understand and experience the dazzling differences and characteristics of barbershop style, *listen only* to all different types of choral singing, leaving the Barbershop sample for last. While you are listening, ask yourself these questions: What do you hear? Why? *What is the director attempting to execute? What is the feeling the director is trying to create?* Not only will you have a vivid mental image of the sound of barbershop style, but your reaction to the music will be visceral, leaving you few words to describe the experience.

Once you fully realize the impact all the characteristics of barbershop style have on the musical product, the more you will be able to utilize all the tools available to you, to maximize the barbershop experience. Not only do we want to make our choruses and quartets the very best they can be, we want to share this with everyone we possibly can, continually enticing singers to join our organization and become part of US! Barbershop style at its best incorporates all of the necessary technical aspects mentioned earlier in its creation. However, when experiencing the music, there is absolutely nothing technical about it. It is emotional, spiritual, moving, and tells a story that you immediately become part of. And once you become part of the story, the story never ends.

FLAP YOUR WINGS!

Judy Olson sent an article from the *Women's Home Healing Journal*. The article reports on the surprising longevity of music conductors. "In past eras when the life expectancy was 50 years old, most music conductors lived late into their 80s and 90s. Some people speculated that the reason for the rich, long lives of these musical maestros was the relaxing quality of the music itself. However, this was not the case—since similar longevity was not found among other men and women who were closely involved in the music field—Research revealed it was the strenuous, upper-body exercise they performed while conducting.

The "wing-flapping" motion proved to be better for the cardiovascular system than the more popular, lower body based aerobic exercises such as walking, jogging and bicycling. The upper body exercise allows the conductor to breathe fully and deeply while expanding and opening the muscles of the lungs and chest. The increased intake of oxygen better serves the whole body and the health benefits include lowered blood pressure.

So count this benefit as you examine the reasons behind your continued participation in the "endurance sport" of directing a chorus!

CLEAR THE CONFUSION

NOVICE DIRECTORS VS. DIRECTORS TRACKS AT IES

All directors (including novices) will be trained all day on Wednesday July 20, 2005 prior to the opening of the official schedule for the rest of the International Education Symposium classes. Directors will all (novices included) have an opening night reception and dinner on Tuesday evening and should plan their arrival on the Furman University campus for Tuesday afternoon.

When the schedule calls for director education later in the week, all directors (novices included) will be taught in small groups during the afternoons. Novices will receive extra training in conducting during the morning classes while more experienced directors have electives. All groups will be together for the Saturday morning directors' panel discussion and wrap up of the symposium.

The sixteen directors volunteering to be the student demonstrators in master classes taught by Rod Eichenberger may be directors at any level of experience, including novices. To apply for that option, directors must fill out the application attached to this newsletter and send it with their registration for the symposium.

WHAT THE JUDGES WOULD LIKE TO TELL YOU

As we enter the regional competition season, it seems appropriate to repeat a message checklist prepared by Sharon Babb for the 1991 international directors seminar, entitled "The Judges Viewpoint." Sharon is a member of the International Board of Directors, chair of the Director Education Coordinators, Certified International Faculty, Certified Judge (Sound) and director of the Colorado Spirit Chapter, Region 8.

"I'm a director, too. I'm pulling for you; I'm looking for the positive. I know that three to six minutes isn't always a reflection of the whole year. Remember, I want you to do well.

"You (as director) are the quality control for your chorus – if the expectations are substandard, the performance will be too. You're in charge of the numbers and the comments that go on the score sheet. We (judges) come with no preconceptions, no biases.

"Here is your checklist for preparation:

- Do you know the rules?
- Do you know the *Judging Category Description Book*?
- Do you OWN a *Judging Category Description Book*?
- Do you share it with your chorus?
- What is your commitment to vocal skills? To vocal production?

(continued next page)

MENC MEMBERS AND AFFILIATES LAUNCH THE NATIONAL ANTHEM PROJECT ON MARCH 10!

Mark your calendar and start planning your celebration for the March 10 launch of The National Anthem Project, the campaign to restore America's voice through music education! American Sweet Adelines International choruses are encouraged to participate in this project in cooperation with MENC—the National Association for Music Education.

From Capitol Hill, musical legends The Oak Ridge Boys, the campaign's Official Musical Ambassadors, will lead schoolchildren and elected officials in the singing of *The Star-Spangled Banner*, promoting the important work of music teachers. Plan your own National Anthem Project school and community events to coincide with this national launch – and let MENC know what you did! (E-mail your information to wendib@menc.org and lorraine@sweetadelineintl.org)

An easy way to participate is to sing along with the World's Largest Concert, featuring *The Star-Spangled Banner*, at 1:00 p.m. EST on PBS (check local listings). For other activity ideas, order a copy of MENC's new publication "It Works for Me: The National Anthem and Other Patriotic Music" for just \$6 from www.menc.org or 800-828-0229.

The Young Women in Harmony arrangement of *The Star Spangled Banner* is available through international sales at a charge of \$.80 per copy. Learning CDs along with the music are available for \$10 and include all four voice parts on one CD. Your chorus might choose to provide copies to local schools and offer to spend a music period working with the students to help teach the music and introduce them to the barbershop style at the same time. This project will continue throughout 2005, so you might want to offer this possibility to several schools. For guidelines in approaching music teachers about this project and about introducing the YWIH program to the schools, please download the YWIH Guidelines for Chapters from our Web site at www.sweetadelineintl.org.

Visit the campaign bulletin board www.thenationalanthemproject.org to read what your colleagues have posted.

WHAT THE JUDGES ... (continued)

- Do you go over your score sheets with your chorus? Are there terms that we use that are confusing?
- Why do you accept wrong notes and/or poor vocal production?
- Why do you choose such hard music? (There are no extra points awarded for difficulty levels of music.)
- How do you keep coming up with such creative, entertaining ideas, year after year?
- Be more aware of the audience than the judges. Judges are part of the audience that wants to be entertained!"

History Lessons From the Stairwell - Part 3 in the Series

The third history panel in the stairwell of the new headquarters building carries news of the first national competition and the first national board meeting which was held in conjunction with the competition and convention. The events were held over the weekend of October 3, 4 and 5, 1947, in the Oklahoma Room of the Tulsa Hotel, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

The minutes of that first meeting read as follows:

"The meeting was called to order by the first national president, Helen Seevers of St. Louis, MO. The following board members were present: Euneita Agnew, Pearl Borg, Marcia Craig, Laura Ford, Jane Pfeifer, Helen Seevers, Melva Taylor and Evelyn Westfield. The founder of Sweet Adelines, Inc., Mrs. Edna Mae Anderson, also sat in at this meeting."

The business of the meeting included discussing and accepting a charter for the national organization and making plans to send a charter to each new chorus as it organized. The board of directors also appointed committee chairs for the year.

The board of directors meeting followed the quartet competition held the previous day. That first competition included fourteen quartets from Illinois, Kansas and Oklahoma. Names like "HARMONY HONEYS," "SOONER CROONERS," "MAGIC MEL-O-TONES," "SUSY-ANNAS" and "VOCAL-LIZAS" competed with more subtle ones such as the "JOHNSON SISTERS," "FLORADORA GIRLS," the "FOUR PASTELS," the "IMPROMPTUS," "KEYSTONE BARBERETTES" and the "FRENCH HARPS." Winning that first competition to become the first national champion quartet was "THE DECATURETTES" of Decatur, Illinois, with Viola Stern as tenor, Mary Minton singing lead, Myrtle Vest on baritone and Eva Adams as bass.

All the printed material held the new FLORADORA GIRLS emblem in the (then) official organization colors of ivory and magenta.

international education symposium 2005

IES "Early-Bird" Deadline is March 15!

Have you registered yet? Have you sent your application to be one of the 16 featured directors in the master classes with Rod Eichenberger? Time is running out!

For your convenience an additional copy of the application form is attached to this newsletter.

IES 2005 Directors' Track Volunteer Conductor Application

Sixteen volunteer directors will be selected to prepare and conduct a song of their choice in front of the directors' track. They will receive individual instruction from guest faculty Rod Eichenberger while all directors observe and participate in conducting training.*

Mr. Eichenberger's classes will consist of instructing volunteer conductors in front of the group and asking directors in the audience to model what he is teaching. Each volunteer conductor will choose a song from the published music list to direct—observing directors will serve as the “chorus” and should review the music prior to the event. You may access the published music list using the following link on our web site: www.sweetadelineintl.org/shop2.cfm?music=Yes. A DVD will be made of each volunteer conductor and a nearby room with TV/DVD player will be available for immediate viewing. Each volunteer conductor will receive one 20 minute followup with Mr. Eichenberger later in the week.

Volunteers must submit this application, their IES Registration Booklet, and full payment by the early-bird registration date of March 15. Individuals who apply will be notified during the first week of April and the schedules of those selected will be adjusted to reflect this opportunity.

*Participation in the Directors' Track is limited to front-line, contracted directors.

Name: _____

Member #: _____

Chapter Name/Region: _____

Email Address: _____

Daytime Phone: _____

Years directing any Sweet Adelines International Chorus: _____

Score at last regional/international competition: _____

Song you'd like to direct from published music list:

1st choice _____

2nd choice _____

3rd choice _____

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