



## Vive la difference!

Everybody knows that barbershoppers are all middle-aged American white guys with a wife and a couple of kids who are probably out of the house already.

Except, of course, for those who aren't.

Like most minorities, barbershoppers must endure a stereotype. You know; handle-bar mustaches, straw hats, striped vests, corny jokes, and "Lida Rose". We've all smiled when 'outsiders' mention these things, and then tried to enlighten them on the broader horizons of barbershopping.



**Poor Marilyn**

Part of that barbershop stereotype is the 'middle-aged married white guy' image. Like any stereotype, it doesn't come from nowhere; it's true, a lot of barbershoppers **are** middle-aged married white guys.

But there's more to barbershop--and barbershoppers--than just the stereotype. And that's what we're taking a look at in this issue: the diverse world of barbershop, where straight guys teach gay guys to put on their make-up, Jews and Arabs sing Christmas songs together, and white guys teach black guys to sing the blues.



**It takes all kinds...**

one is different in some way, he explained, consoling her with his cheery upturn, "It takes all kinds of people to make a world."

Yes, the Munsters helped teach us that, even though the people nearby may seem different, sometimes even odd, on the surface, underneath they are often surprisingly similar to us. Even if they do like strange stuff like...barbershop!

Do you remember Marilyn Munster? Poor Marilyn! The beautiful niece on television's '60s TV show "The Munsters", Marilyn was always so sad. She thought she was a loser, because she was so different from her monstrous family. She expressed it in a lovely three-quarter ballad on the 1965 album *Meet the Munsters*: "My name is mud, and I'm just a dud, 'cause I'm not like the rest of the family." (Wouldn't that be a lovely song for competition...)

But her Uncle Herman, with his childlike wisdom, knew that being different doesn't make you a monster. Every-



## Life as a Middle-Eastern Barbershopper or, 1001 Barbershop Nights By George Azzam

When Scipio asked me to write an article about what it's like to be a Barbershopper from the Middle East, I wasn't quite sure what to write. But I've been giving it plenty of thought, and that process has made me think about Barbershop in a new light. Let me first start out by giving you some of my background.

I was born in Beirut, Lebanon, to a Palestinian father and Armenian mother. During my childhood we lived in Lebanon, Kuwait, and the United States, and we eventually settled in Maryland, when I was in the Eighth grade. My parents are U.S. citizens, and as immigrants, they instilled in me a great respect for the United States, and for the many freedoms and opportunities it offers. Barbershop is of course a uniquely American art form. Even so, it's probably no surprise that I never heard a single Barbershop recording as a child.

I had studied instrumental music in grade school, first playing flute, and then trumpet. In my junior year of High School, I decided on a whim to audition for the show choir. Much to my surprise, I was accepted, and soon thereafter the director resigned. The new choral teacher was a fan of Barbershop, and asked all of the men in the show choir to learn some PoleCats to help encourage men to join the choral music program. I was hooked right away. What a neat sound, what a fun way to impress the girls!

I continued singing Barbershop through college, and I eventually joined



the Society. The rest of the story is a tale of 1001 Arabian Barbershop Nights, and those of you who know me, know that means a lot of late night tag singing! Today I've been Barbershopping for 14 years, and I'm a lifetime member of SPEBSQSA.

So what is it about our hobby that would make an immigrant sign up for life membership? As I was trying to answer this question for myself, I first thought about camaraderie. The type of commitment that Barbershoppers have for each other is something I see also in my culture. The Middle East is full of strong family ties, and great hospitality, just like SPEBSQSA. Still, as much as I love the close friends I've made through Barbershop, it's the music that really keeps me involved. There's something appropriate about me singing a style of music "born and raised" right here in the U.S.A. I'm proud to be American, and what better way to show it, than by participating in a truly American hobby?

Music is one of those things that transcends borders though. Barbershop *isn't* just a U.S. hobby. There are Barbershop singers all over the world, and wonderful affiliate organizations that keep all of us connected. Isn't it neat that I can go to the International Barbershop Convention and be singing with guys from Sweden or Norway or Japan, who don't even speak English? I guess being a Middle Eastern Barbershopper is more about being a Barbershopper than about being from the Middle East. "WAH-hid, It-NAYN, Tah-LAH-tah...It's great to be a Harmonizer!"



## Mission: Multicultural!

by Alan Wile

Jim Henry — musical director of the Ambassadors of Harmony (St. Charles, MO) and bass of the 1993 International Champion quartet Gas House Gang — documented in his doctoral thesis that barbershop harmony is primarily a product of the African-American culture of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Over time, as barbershop music developed and matured, it attracted white singers and quartets to the point that it is now sung by and associated almost exclusively with white America. As a result, the rich heritage of the Black culture in America was closed out and no longer influenced the development of barbershop singing.



To address this situation, Society leaders committed to create initiatives and a social and music environment that will enable each chapter's membership to reflect the diversity of the community it serves. In consonance with this and because it was concerned that our cultural profile and mem-

bership trends are predominantly Caucasian while the general population of North America was growing increasingly multicultural, the Society Board established a Multicultural Task Force to examine all aspects of the issue and to provide specific recommendations to the Board for consideration and implementation.

Those appointed to the task are John Krizek (chairman; president, Far Western District), Dr. Jim Henry, Ken Hatton (lead, 1978 International Champion Quartet Bluegrass Student Union; Greater Louisville, KY Chapter), Dan Washington (baritone, Northeast Connection; Beverly and Nashua, NH Chapters), and yours truly. In addition, Dr. Greg Lyne (Society Staff Director of Music Education and Services) serves as liaison to the Society Staff and Chuck Watson (Past International Society President) serves as liaison to the Society Board of Directors.

The Society Board has accepted the following Task Force recommendations:

- Develop barbershop arrangements of two multicultural songs that would be suitable for audiences with diversity in membership.
- Review barbershop songs and material that may be considered offensive by some and provide an updated set of suggested guidelines for choruses and quartets.
- Produce a "kid's album" of songs, tailored to preschool or elementary school-age audiences, featuring barbershop groups
- Enlist support of established chapters in multicultural population areas to participate in organized outreach efforts.
- Produce a PowerPoint presentation based on the National Public Radio segment on the roots of barbershop harmony that aired in March 2002.
- Seek and manage opportunities to appear at meetings and conventions of multicultural organizations.



## My Life as a Black Barbershopper

or "What do you mean, 'no blackface' ?"

By Sam McFarland

My life as a black barbershopper is not much different than it is for any other barbershopper. We share the love of close harmony, good friendships, very close in most cases, and in our chapter a need to compete and be our very best. Most of the time I never even think about being black at our rehearsals and singouts.

However, the exceptions when I do think about the fact I am a black barbershopper are when we have black guests or other minority guests, there are black audience members, I go to a barbershop convention and see the other few minorities, and finally when someone in the chorus makes some kind of joke related to my being black. In many cases I have initiated them myself, I am not very thin skinned, but most of the time they have been from other chorus members. Only once in my time with the Harmonizers did it get out of hand. I was so angry I lost my focus on what the chorus was doing for almost 15 minutes. I called the person who made the remark and told him how much it bothered me and he said he would never say anything like that again.

Being one of the few black barbershoppers makes me very recognizable and therefore, makes me a representative not only for my race but also of the Harmonizers. I have become well known at Southern, Mid-Atlantic and



International conventions and also out at Harmony College. Since I am identified so easily as a member of the Harmonizers I know that makes me an ambassador of the Alexandria, Virginia Chapter and the Harmonizers, therefore, I must always be on my best behavior. If I was with a group of guys from the chorus and we were clowning around or in any manner being rude to anyone they would not remember the other guys, but you can bet they would remember me.

Conversely, there are also many barbershoppers who confuse me for other black barbershoppers. When I was in Kansas City in 1989, at my first International Convention, as a member of the Harmonizer Family, several people came by and congratulated me about my fine quartet performance. The problem was I had not competed. Terry Reynolds told me they thought I was Farris Collins. Another time when Cecil, a member of the Big Apple Chorus did a solo

with his chorus in Atlanta, several people came up to me to let me know how much they enjoyed my singing "Going to Build a Mountain".

In my 15 years as a barbershopper I have only experienced three negative situations because of my race. When I sang with another Chapter they took



a singing job for a group and one of the chapter leaders said he thought it would be better that I not attend the singout.

Second when I was an area counselor and installing the board of one of my chapters I was introduced to the former mayor of the town in which the installation dinner was taking place. He was very cordial and we talked at great length before the formal part of the ceremony. During the former mayor's speech he mentioned what a beautiful facility they were in and how much everyone enjoyed it until integration came along and ruined everything. After his speech he came over and again engaged me in friendly conversation. I think because he had gotten to know me on a personal level I had ceased to be a black man and had become just another barbershopper. I chose not to confront him about what he had said in his speech in order not to bring conflict to the installation banquet. However I was totally blown away that when I mentioned it to some of the chapter leadership they were not even aware the former mayor had said anything negative.

The final incident occurred during my first trip to Harmony College. When I reached out to shake the hand of an elderly gentleman from one of the deep-south states he refused to shake my hand. I am told by one of the Society Headquarters staffers that this gentleman believed that the voices of black and white men would not blend in harmony. However when I went back to Harmony College the next time this gentleman had changed his attitude, we even sang a tag together (After Dark with the original lyrics).

All in all my experience as a black barbershopper and a Harmonizer in particular has been very positive. My hope is one day to have several minorities on the risers. However, the minorities in the Harmonizers can't do it alone, we need for our members to invite all good singers to sing regardless of their ethnic background. Well this is my story and I am sticking to it.

Music is good. Love is good. Money is good. Wouldn't it be great if you could put them altogether and spend all day in music, and love, and money? Well, you can, thanks to the Harmonizers.



Every year, our Chapter sends out put-together quartets on Valentine's Day for hire. It makes the Chapter barrels of money, since, except for a few necessary props like roses and candy, it's a nearly cost-free production. It's easier than falling off the risers during a closed-eye drill.

The Chapter helps put you in a quartet, if you don't have one. The Chapter trains your quartet to sing some Valentines-y polecats, if you don't know them. The Chapter arranges the gigs for your quartet. The Chapter clusters your gigs geographically, sequences them conveniently, and arranges transportation if you need it.

You get to walk into people's offices and stop all activity while everyone pays attention to you, dressed in white tie and tails. You get to sing two of the easiest songs in the world and have people falling over in admiration. You get to sing to teary-eyed glowing ladies, giving them an experience they'll always remember for the rest of their lives, or to red-faced squirming gentlemen, giving them an experience they'll be unable to forget for the rest of their lives. You get to take the day off from work (which you wanted an excuse to do anyway) and make tons of cash for the Chapter (which saves on Chapter dues, so it's really money for you).

If you're reading this on New Year's Day, Valentine's Day is exactly 43 days away. So, unless you don't care for music or love or money, sign up for Singing Valentines NOW. Quartet signup: Michael Calhoun (540) 856-2288; Questions: Brian Eng (202) 667-4859



### Barbershop: It's a Black Thing...

excerpted from an article by Jim Henry

If you're a Barbershopper, the odds are good that a certain Norman Rockwell print is hanging on some wall in your house. You know the one I mean. First appearing on a 1936 Saturday Evening Post cover, the scene depicts four men, one with lather on his face, warbling a sentimental ballad: the quintessential barbershop quartet.

Barbershop quartets often are characterized as four dandies, perhaps bedecked with straw hats, striped vests and handlebar mustaches. These caricatures of the barbershop tradition are not only a quaint symbol of small-town Americana, but have some historical foundation. Barbershop music was indeed borne out of informal gatherings of amateur singers in such unpretentious settings as the local barber shop.

But modern scholarship is demonstrating with greater and greater authority that while the stereotype seems to have successfully retained the trappings of the early barbershop harmony tradition, it breaks down on one key point. If you visualized the characters described above as you were reading, you probably pictured them — like Rockwell did over sixty years ago — as white men. And therein lies barbershop music's greatest enigma: it is associated with and practiced today mostly by whites, yet it is primarily a product of the African-American culture.

The African-American origins theory is not new. Several of our early Society members and recent historians have made the assertion, or at least suggested an African-American influence upon barbershop harmony. But it



was a non-Barbershopper, Lynn Abbott, who in the Fall 1992 issue of American Music published, "Play That Barber Shop Chord": A Case for the African-American Origin of Barbershop Harmony," presented the most thoroughly documented exploration into the roots of barbershop to appear up to that time. In that writing, Abbott draws from rare turn-of-the-twentieth-century articles, passages from books long out of print, and reminiscences of early quartet singing by African-American musicians, including Jelly Roll Morton and Louis Armstrong, to argue that barbershop music is indeed a product of the African-American musical tradition.

Among Abbott's recreational quartets, W.C. Handy, for example, offers a memory that is quite telling of the racial origins of barbershop music. Before he became famous as a composer and band leader, Handy sang tenor in a pickup quartet who, he recalls, "often serenaded their sweethearts with love songs; the young white bloods overheard, and took to hiring them to serenade the white girls." The Mills Brothers learned to harmonize in their father's barber shop in Piqua, Ohio, and several well known black gospel quartets were founded in neighborhood barber shops, among them the New Orleans Humming Four, the Southern Stars and the Golden Gate Jubilee Quartette.

**See Page 9 for the historical evidence and Page 11 for the musical evidence of the black roots of barbershop!**



### **My Life as a Jewish Barbershopper or, “Yes, Virginia, there is a Chanukah...” by Sam Brothers**

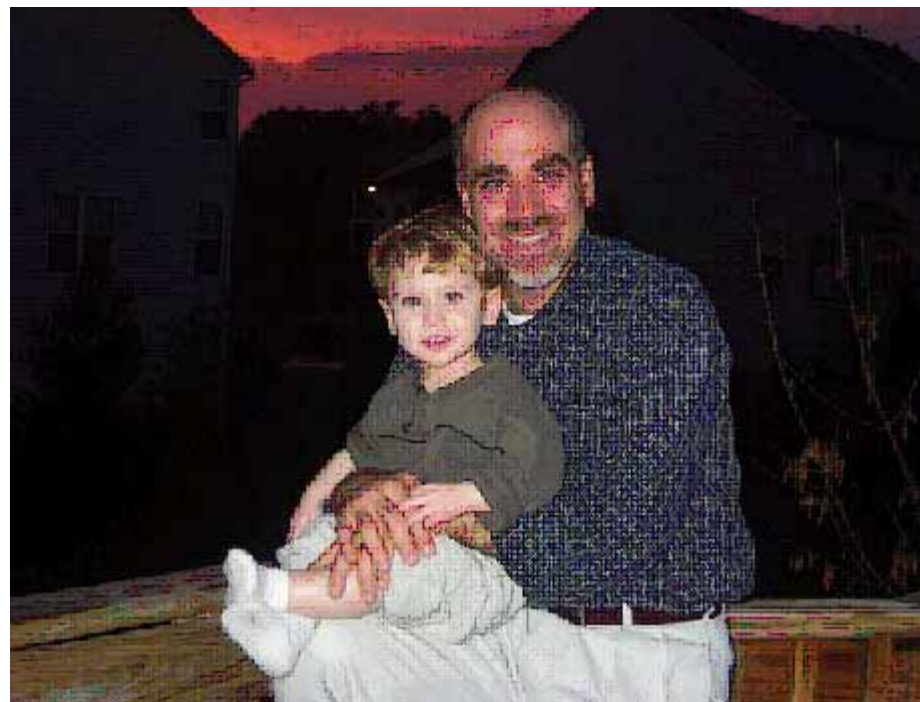
What does it feel like to be Jewish singing Christmas songs?

I have been singing Christmas music since the age of 5, and it was not until I joined the Harmonizers did this become an issue at all. In all of my past singing groups, I never was taught, and never connected my inner feelings with my singing. I was just singing for singings sake. While I enjoyed singing a great deal, I never considered the true feelings behind the words (I am not sure that I was mature enough to handle this concept until I was older anyways). I always strove for perfect singing and was not conveying the true message of the song.

After joining the Harmonizers, I quickly learned about connecting meaning to the music. This was the true artistry!

The first time that I was presented with singing a Harmonizer song about Christ & Christmas was a unique experience. For the first time, I had to alter some of what the presentation plan was. I had no memories of Santa, and Christmas morning etc... Instead, I substituted my own images of Chanukahs past. We too had presents, and gathered together to celebrate the holiday. And then there is the Christmas tree (I substituted the menorah) and then there is Santa & the “Christmas spirit” (I am still struggling with exact matches for these two).

For any other voids that are left, I fill them by pretending that I am singing a lullaby to my son Jacob. Image: He is in the 2nd row, sitting in his seat listening to every word I say... smiling the whole time. Sometimes my wife is there too (for the romantic ballads). And sometimes, Jacob & I are sitting



in his rocking chair in his bedroom together and I am holding him in my arms while singing to him. These are some of the compensation techniques that the Harmonizers have taught me over the last 6 years.

I think that many of you do the same thing as well. Some guys have male partners instead of female ones; I assume that they compensate some way as well. One of our power ballads comes to mind: “If you were the only person in the world, and I were the only other person.”

Thank you, Harmonizers for teaching me this connection between song & spirit. It has helped me in my professional as well as my personal life to be a better father, husband, and performer!



## Show and Tell: The Holidays

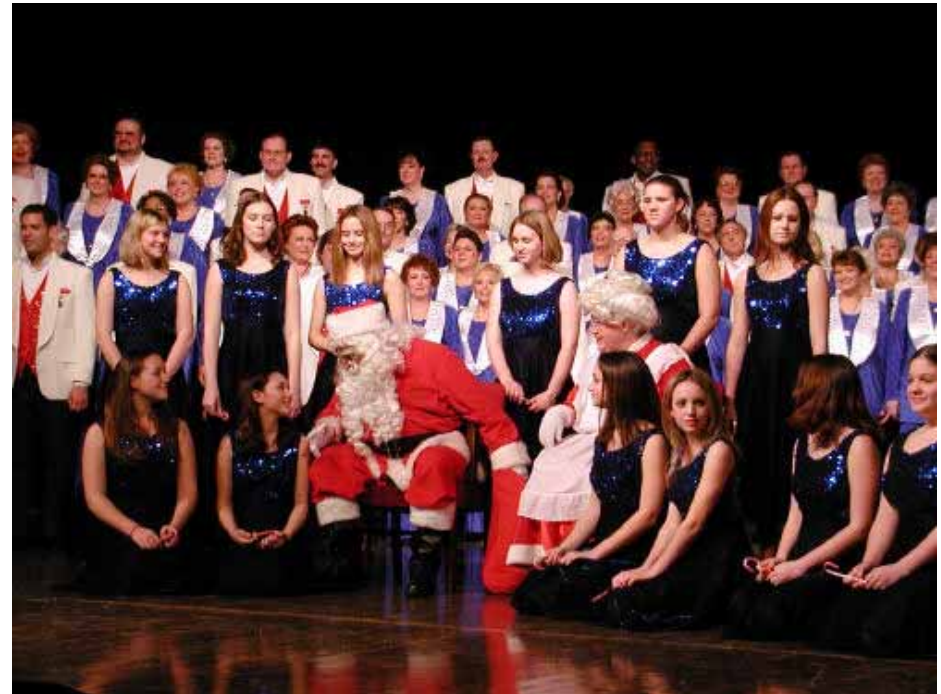


The finale of the Holiday Festival.

During the Chapter's hospital singout, Santa Claus visits with a child and her father.



Santa and Mrs. Claus join the performers on stage at the Holiday Festival.



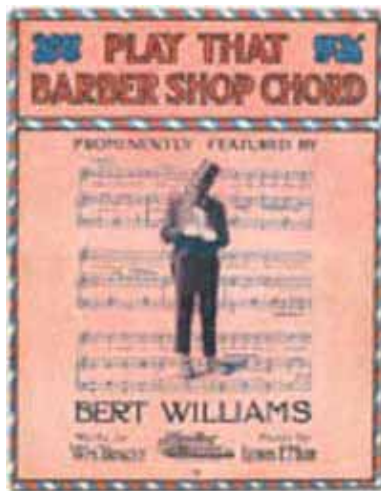


## The Historical Evidence of the Black Roots of Barbershop

excerpted from an article by Jim Henry

Specific early musical references suggest that barbershop was once acknowledged as African-American music. For example, the illustration on the cover of Irving Berlin's 1912 composition, "When Johnson's Quartet Harmonize," features an African-American quartet. In another, Geoffrey O'Hara's attempt to accurately transcribe what he had heard sung by early African-American barbershop quartet singers resulted in the publication of "The Old Songs," which we still sing today as the theme song of SPEBSQSA. The first refrain of O'Hara's version proceeds on to "Massa's in de Cold, Cold Ground," complete with its reference to "the cornfield" and vocal imitations of farm animals and a banjo, all conventions of early black vocal music.

The earliest white quartet recordings are rife with minstrel show conventions which included negro dialect and other parodies of the African-American culture, suggesting an African-American association with the music. Furthermore, the earliest known references to the term "barbershop," harmony, link it with African-American society. As early as 1900, an African-American commentator with the self-imposed moniker "Tom the Tattler" accuses barbershop quartet singers of "stunting the growth of 'legitimate,' musically literate black quartets in vaudeville." The 1910 song "Play That Barber Shop Chord," which before Abbott's discovery of the Tattler's commentary was considered the earliest reference to the term "barbershop," also associates the genre with African-American society.



The song tells of a black piano player, "Mr. Jefferson Lord," who was given the plea by "a kinky-haired lady they called Chocolate Sadie." The fact that the barbershop chord in this case is not articulated by a quartet, but rather by a single pianist shows that by 1910 the flavor of barbershop harmony had already taken on a life of its own beyond the boundaries of its usual host.

It is unknown exactly when or why barbershop music became associated with whites. Abbott cites African-American author James Weldon Johnson who, in the introduction to his *Book of American Negro Spirituals*, published in 1925, offers a hint at how the association might have shifted:

It may sound like an extravagant claim, but it is, nevertheless a fact that the "barber-shop chord" is the foundation of the close harmony method adopted by American musicians in making arrangements for male voices. ... "Barber-shop harmonies" gave a tremendous vogue to male quartet singing, first on the minstrel stage, then in vaudeville; and soon white young men, where four or more gathered together, tried themselves at "harmonizing."

There is additional support for the effluence of barbershop music from black neighborhoods into the white mainstream, as suggested by Johnson, in its parallel with other forms of African-American music. Ragtime, for example, was wrought by African-American musicians, whose syncopated rhythms and quirky harmonies (which, by the way, are the same as those found in barbershop music) became the backbone of the white-dominated Tin Pan Alley. More recently, musical genres such as rock-and-roll and country-and-western, though clearly rooted in the African-American musical tradition, are now commonly associated with whites.



### **My Life as a Gay Harmonizer** or **“If you were the only person in the world, and I were...um, the only other person.”** by **Tim Emery**

If you had told me years ago that I would have some of the best times of my life hanging out with straight married men, I would have said you were crazy. How could I enjoy hanging out with guys that are so different from me? Impossible, right?

Nothing could be further from the truth for me. On Tuesday nights, I have the privilege of sharing the risers with a great bunch of guys that are a lot like me. Guys that love to sing and to perform and to really move an audience with our lyrical messages. Guys that are willing to work hard to reach higher and higher standards of excellence. Guys with heart who sing our patriotic songs with pride and love songs with the honest vulnerability required of real love. In many ways, these guys aren't so different from me. Who would have guessed?

Sometimes, the differences are real. Before our performance in Nashville, Geri asked us to close our eyes and imagine saying goodbye to the girl we loved because our family didn't approve. I had no problem relating to the fact my family didn't approve of my love. I know the pressure of being asked to marry the 'right' person when I loved another.



It wasn't a big stretch to imagine the heartbreak of saying goodbye to that important first love because polite society just wouldn't approve. I've known that kind of heartbreak. I've often felt society's disapproval of the love I have experienced. Remembering the pain, the sense of loss and injustice of much of my adult life helped me to sing with the honest emotion required by the message of the song's lyrics. My tears were real. It just wasn't the girl I was picturing.

But those differences are easy to put aside because I have felt welcomed and accepted into the Harmonizer family. My sexual preference has never become an issue. The Harmonizers have embraced our gay members and the many talents that we bring, and the chorus as a whole is richer for its diversity; so am I. Not all chapters, I'm sure, create that kind of warm atmosphere.

It is just another way in which the Alexandria chapter is special, a step ahead, blazing the trail for other chapters in the Society to follow. Just another reason that I'm proud to be with the Harmonizers and to be one of them.



## The Musical Evidence of the Black Roots of Barbershop

excerpted from an article by Jim Henry



The scope of this article allows me only to summarize my findings, focusing on call-and-response patterns, rhythmic character, and harmony.

The call and response pattern is one of the most fundamental characteristics of black music. Though it has many variations, call-and-response can most simply be defined as a type of responsorial song practice in which a leader sings a musical phrase which is either repeated or extended by a chorus of other voices. It is heard in spirituals, gospel, the blues, Cab Calloway's "Hi-De-Ho" songs and rap, to name a few genres.

The barbershop musical lexicon abounds with examples of African-American-based call-and-response technique. Indeed, some of the most recognized barbershop tunes such as "You're The Flower Of My Heart, Sweet Adeline," "Bill Grogan's Goat," and "Bright Was The Night" are made up almost entirely of call-and-response patterns where each musical phrase is sung first by the lead and repeated by the other three parts.

The very first song to be sung at that fateful 1938 meeting in Tulsa that christened the SPEBSQSA was "Down Mobile," whose ending — -at least as transcribed by Sigmund Spaeth in his 1940 book *Barbershop Ballads and How to Sing Them* is a classic example of call-and-response. The following year, in 1939, the Bartlesville Barflies would win our first "international" competition with a medley that included a call-and-response rendition of "By the Light of the Silvery Moon."

Upon listening to nearly any form of African-American music, sacred or secular, one is immediately drawn to its unrelenting regularity of the pulse. Above this basic pulse might be found any variety of uneven rhythmic patterns. Tilford Brooks explains that the element of rhythm in most black forms of music can be contrasted with that of music in the European concert tradition in that "the former makes use of uneven rhythm with a regular tempo while the latter employs even rhythm with accelerandos, ritards, and different tempi." This metric sense is so ingrained in the music of the African Diaspora that it is stressed "even in the absence of actual instruments."

The African-American a cappella quartets devised a method whereby the feeling of percussion and meter is created through vocal means. The technique employs a class of devices — called "rhythmic propellants" by recent barbershop theorists — which are designed to maintain the metric pulse through held melodic notes and rests. Like call-and-response patterns (which themselves can be considered types of rhythmic propellants) the rhythmic propellant is fundamental to the barbershop style, and most Barbershoppers will recognize the prevalence of these devices in the songs they have sung or listened to.

Perhaps the most common rhythmic propellant in barbershop music is the "echo." The echo is closely related to call-and-response pattern and usually occurs at the end of a musical phrase while the melody is holding a note. To keep the pulse going under the held note, one or more of the harmony parts will repeat the last word or words of that phrase.

**continued on next page**



One need only look at the phrase endings in the song, “Keep the Whole World Singing,” to find clear examples of echo technique. Other rhythmic propellants clearly of black origin and commonly found in barbershop music include instances where one or more parts sing strict downbeats under syncopated rhythms; counter-melody or “patter” (take, for example, the lead patter that accompanies “Down Our Way”); “fills” (basses are especially popular choices to fill this role; every time you’ve heard “bum bum bum,” “my honey,” or “oh, lordy” you’ve experienced fills); “swipes” (where the chord changes or moves to a different voicing under a held melody note — recall, for instance, the phrase endings in “My Wild Irish Rose”); and the ever-popular “tiddlies” (baritones are particularly adept at performing these little flourishes to color a held chord, and become quite agitated when you try to rush them through it).

Perhaps the most characteristic element of black music, the one that pervades every one of its incarnations, is the so-called “blue note.” Relative to the Western major scale, two blue notes are commonly identified: the lowered third and the lowered seventh notes of the scale.

The blue note is a testament to a culture’s ability to retain musical traits over great spans of time and distance. It is an anomaly by Western standards. No form of Euro-centric music gave rise to it. It is this blue note and the scale that derives from it that offers the strongest argument in favor of the “African-American origin” theory of barbershop music.

The single most telling hallmark of the barbershop style is that curious sonority we call the “barbershop seventh” chord. The barbershop seventh chord is described as a “major-minor seventh” chord because it results from taking a simple, three-note major chord and adding to it a minor seventh above the root, i.e., the lowest note of the chord. If we were to build seventh chords on every note of the major scale, the only one that would yield this sound would be the fifth note of the scale, sometimes called the dominant. For this reason,

many musicians call this chord a “dominant seventh,” and give it the Roman numeral shorthand V7.

In Western classical music, this dominant seventh chord anticipates a harmonic return back to the tonic chord (called Roman numeral I because it is built on the first note of the scale, the key note). We call this motion a “falling fifth” because the progression from the dominant to the tonic is down a perfect fifth. So in the key of C, the major-minor seventh chord built on the fifth note of the scale (G) will tend to lead back to C. (Go backward down the musical alphabet counting each letter: G-F-E-D-C — five total letters.) The major-minor seventh chord as heard in classical music is almost always used to suggest this dominant function.

In African-American music, however, we may hear the major-minor sound built on, and functioning as, any number of chords other than the dominant. A major-minor seventh chord built on the subdominant (i.e., the fourth note of the scale, Roman numeral IV), for example, is a common occurrence. The natural seventh of this particular major chord is a major seventh. Yet in African-American music one will often hear it sounded with a minor seventh, thus giving it a major-minor or “dominant” sound. The major-minor seventh chord in this instance, however, is clearly not conceived as a dominant seventh chord because it does not progress in the falling fifth manner discussed above. Rather, it moves as it would if it were a simple version of IV.

While barbershop has been an ever-changing musical art form, certain hallmarks of the style seem to have remained implacable for well over a century. Call-and-response patterns, rhythmic propellants and “barbershop seventh” chords are among the many distinctive features of the barbershop tradition that, when considered alongside the entirety of found historical evidence, root the genre in the African-American musical tradition.



## My Life as a Chinese-American Barbershopper

or, “Chinese Seventh, Indeed...”

by Brian Eng

It does not take long to notice that I am the only Asian Alexandria Harmonizer on stage. I am often asked if being the single Asian member of a large, predominantly Caucasian chorus carries any privileges or disadvantages. As you would expect, I have never been treated any differently than any other member of our Harmonizer family. The question that still lingers is why aren't there more Asian barbershoppers in our chorus and society.

After attending several district and international conventions, I could not help but notice that a disproportionately low percentage of male barbershoppers are Asian, but I realized that this same low proportion applies to most singing and performing related activities, not just barbershop. This prompted me to look for potential explanations.

Broadly speaking, Asian cultures tend to value the society over the individual. That is, it is better to blend into the crowd than to stand out. Indeed, the squeaky wheel gets attention, but usually not in a positive way. With this mindset, it is no surprise that the idea of performing and calling more attention to oneself is unattractive in those cultures.

Moreover, in many Asian cultures, performers are traditionally considered a lower class or are thought of as “the help.” I only discovered this bias when my uncle, who has lived in the U.S. for a considerable number of years, expressed shock and embarrassment that I was a member of a male cappella group in college. He could not understand why my parents supported rather than discouraged my participation.



Despite the traditional tenets of Asian culture, you would still expect a different mentality among Asian males who have long lived or were even born in the U.S. Different phenomena come into play to explain the dearth of Asian American singers. In my experience, one potential cause is that while Asian American parents prefer the arts over athletics when

choosing extra-curricular activities for their children, they tend to choose classical instruments, such as the piano or cello, over common ones like voice or guitar.

In addition, a commonly held view of Asian Americans is that we are quiet, unemotional, and easily embarrassed. Given this profile, it makes sense that voluntarily getting on stage to sing and emote in front of a large audience and a panel of judges does not top the list of fun things to do for many Asian Americans.

For me, it is important to remember that stereotypes are not always accurate and that peoples and cultures constantly change. I was nicely surprised this past July to see the college quartets from China on the international stage in Portland. Their performances have not only made me rethink my own stereotypes of Asian culture, but also give me hope that more Asians and Asian Americans will join us on the risers in the future.



### Bachelor Party brings barbershop to a new audience

by Brad Jones

When a group of longtime friends plays obscure foreign board games for hours, vacations together, sings with the Harmonizers, enters put-together contests, and performs singing valentines together, a registered quartet is almost inevitable. Such is the background of Scipio Garling (tenor), Greg Tepe (lead), Ken Rub (bari) and Terry Reynolds (bass) who culminated years of friendship and singing by registering about two years ago as the quartet "Bachelor Party". Scipio did note that they may be the only quartet that almost broke up because they couldn't agree on matching shoes! Just this past fall the quartet finished in 13<sup>th</sup> place at the District Competition.

Bachelor Party has been active performing in the area, being featured at the Arlingtones show in October and performing to crowds of unsuspecting listeners at the last two DC Capitol Pride Festivals. The quartet counts as their most rewarding performance their serenade of our Barbershop giant, Wilbur Sparks, during the chorus's visit to Wilbur's home.

The quartet's most unusual performance may have occurred when the quartet was vacationing and rehearsing together in Florida. Scipio was talking to some women around the complex pool and mentioned that he was there with a Barbershop quartet. Quickly pressed into performing a solo show for the residential community at the outdoor commons, Ken and Scipio were sent out to shop for a costume. They returned, to Greg and Terry's horror, with the infamous "Florida shirts" purchased at the bargain price (I wonder why!) of only \$4.50 each and seen by many of us at the Harmonizers' Afterglow last spring. We won't comment on Greg and Terry's reaction to the shirts, but I understand the Harmonizer by-laws have specifically been revised to provide that Ken and Scipio may not serve in a decision making capacity on our Costume committee.



As might be expected with the diverse audiences the quartet entertains, they have developed some specialized repertoire and lyrics to use based on the audience. One embarrassing occasion occurred at Market Square when Ken forgot where he was and used some alternative lyrics to "My Old Man". It did not appear that most in the audience noticed, but the rest of the quartet did not have to fake their "horror" at Ken as they completed the song.

Coached by Freddy King, Geri Geis, John Hohl, and Gary Plaag, Bachelor Party continues to add to their repertoire. They have been very warmly received by Harmonizer audiences in a variety of venues and we look forward to their future accomplishments and performances. The quartet can be contacted through Scipio at [www.Harmonizer.com/bachelorparty](http://www.Harmonizer.com/bachelorparty) or by calling Scipio at 202-232-7247.



### My Life as a Latin American Barbershopper,

or, Singin' la Vida Loca

by Carlos Bermudez

Okay, not quite “loca”, but certainly my being Hispanic has made for some amusing times here with *The Harmonizers*.

The first such happened to be my first memory of Will Cox while he was trying to administer my vocal assessment:

- “Sing *Home on the Range*.” –said Will cheerfully.
- “I don’t know it.” – I stammered.
- “Oh... let’s try *Yankee Doodle*.”
- “Hmm...don’t know it either.” – I stammered.
- “*America The Beautiful?*”
- “No, not really...” [before you get scandalized, I have learned it since...]

Well you can guess where we went next, and after a couple more otherwise natural suggestions and puzzled expressions I thought I would offer [still] the pleasant (but obviously puzzled) Assistant Director: “I should say I did not grow up in the United States”. “OH!” exclaimed Will, relieved.

I’m not sure why it would not be obvious, although I’ve been told many times I don’t have much of an accent or Hispanic look. “Well, do they sing *Happy Birthday* where you come from?!” And so I passed my vocal assessment to the tune of a harmonizing duet of that international hit which, yes, made it to Perú.



Here, a naive Carlos is deceived into believing that the “barbershop sleepover” is an American tradition.

But I learned my lesson, and the following week I forewarned Scipio before my Visual Assessment, who was therefore not as surprised when I complied to his request (‘sing with passion, as if in love to a girl sitting on a chair in front of you’) with a rendition of “*Limeña*”, a traditional creole ode to the Native woman of Perú’s capital.

And so began my experience as a Hispanic barbershopper, which I would have thought would thereafter be predominantly “normal” ... and then came the *r*’s....



You see, rolling *r*'s are just *so* ingrained in my first language, that it is extremely difficult for me not have them stand out as I was trying to qualify for Portland. And so my two tape listeners applied a theory similar to Rich's direction regarding singing only our "good notes", and likewise I was instructed to sing my "good" letters (no bitterness here: I would not have passed qualifications otherwise!). I wonder if K-12 (at my immediate right on the ballad) or Bob (immediately behind me) ever wondered if I had a frozen tongue if they could hear me singing "eh-membeh, the time, the time, you said, I love you, eh-membeh? EH-MEMBEH?! EH-MEMBEH we found...."

But it wasn't just singing: I was surprised to find difficulty in gestures and moves too! For this one ask Bruce, who I drove up the wall with my "rigid, unnatural hands" that slice through air when trying to gesture an invitation to the audience ("come on along, come on along, let me take you by the hand"). Indeed, everyone else had relaxed hands, slightly open fingers, which was very odd to me. I started asking non-Harmonizer Hispanic and non-Hispanic friends to indulge me in making the move, and to my surprise I discovered that all the Hispanics indeed motion with tight-fingered rigid hands while the non-Hispanics motion as Bruce demonstrated. Hmm... *muy interesante!*

Finally, one for the season: after my debut at the 2001 Holiday Festival. I quickly learned not to participate in another like show (I didn't this year, nor the Hospital sing-out) until I learned the carols: you see, all those 'easy lyrics' that my English-raised brethren grew to know as second nature actually *did* make it to South America... but in Spanish! So beyond *Feliz Navidad*, I couldn't sing a Christmas carol you would understand even if my life depended on it!

So my being Hispanic has added a few funny moments to this great barbershopping experience. I cannot imagine what other Americanisms I will trip on, but I bet chances are they will give us a chuckle or two more!



The Spring Tonic is coming.

You heard me. The Spring Tonic is coming. Have you mentioned it to anyone? Do you know who are planning to invite? Do you have an email list of people you know who might be interested? Do you know where you're going to put up a flyer?

Do you know how many empty seats there were at the fall show? Do you know how much money we could have earned for doing the same three performances if those seats had been filled? Can you imagine how much more fun those performances would have been if all those seats had been filled? Have you thought about how much more we could do with the extra money from all those filled seats? Have you thought about how you could help fill more of those seats on the Spring Tonic?

The Spring Tonic is coming.



## Harmonizers Rock!

by Brad Jones

Recently five Harmonizers found ourselves in a recording studio (“Cue” in Falls Church) decked out with earphones and surrounded by all the newest studio equipment. We were not, however, recording a barbershop CD with a quintet. We were preparing a track to be added to a Jazz/Rock CD being prepared by the local band “Pocketwatch”. The contact was a friend of a relative of Al Hannebaum’s who asked him if he could get a few Harmonizers to help out on the band’s CD. We were told that there was nothing to learn, just to show up and be prepared to have fun. So, at 7:00 on a Friday evening, Al Hannebaum, Roger Day, Sam Brothers, John Hall, and yours truly found themselves preparing to sing.

The first surprise was that the whole band was not in the studio, only three of the four members of “Pocketwatch” were there, we were to be the only performers that night. The particular song we were there for was a slower song where a father is telling his son about the ship that will one day be his. In the chorus the singer is remembering the sea chanty his father used to sing to him. Our task was to create the impression of a bar full of sailors singing the sea chanty during the last run-through of the chorus.

After the lead singer for this song sang us his part at the end of the song he taught us the very short chanty. We then recorded what he had taught us a

### The “A Room” at Cue Recording Studios



number of times in unison. Then we were told make up harmonies and made multiple recordings of the harmonized version. The technician had us stand in different places and moved microphones to different locations to help re-enforce the impression of being in a bar. Finally they had us record some alternative lines -at which point we commented on the final chord not resolving and the fact we were running over the main singers words. The technician said not to worry, it would resolve and not run over the words when he “moved” it. We looked at each other with puzzled looks and continued to record.

Finally the booth indicated they had everything they needed and we could come back to hear the result. While we watched the technician he manipulated sound wave tracks

on his computer screen to “erase” an errant entry from one track, then “stretched” the song so our extra version did not run over the lead singer’s words. He said he was done and hit the playback key. Suddenly, instead of 5 voices we were listening to a group of 50-75 men singing a sea chanty with harmonies and all chords resolving perfectly.

The night of our recording session they did not have the band’s full set of tracks downloaded into the studio computer, so we still haven’t actually heard the song on which we participated. However, the members of the band



in the studio said they were thrilled with the results and asked us to record something. We recorded “How Deep” and it was fascinating to listen to the recording (if a bit challenging without a bass). We all concluded that the three hours we spent in the studio was some of the most fun we have had singing and was an experience we will long remember.

The band expects the CD to be completed in the first quarter of next year and has asked that we attend the kick-off party and join them on the stage to perform the song live. Roger Day, I and my wife did stop by the bands Christmas party at Ragtime in Arlington in December to hear the band at their final 2002 performance and we were very impressed with the band’s talents and sound. The members of Pocketwatch are: Shane McGlaughlin, Josh Espinoza, Michael Feldman, and Ted Mills. The band is a self-described blend of jazz and rock. You can find their web page at [www.pocketwatchband.com](http://www.pocketwatchband.com), and you can follow it to hear some online recordings of the Band, as well as providing locations for upcoming performances.



Multilingual and culturally diverse Montreal is truly an international city, one that consistently makes the short list of North America’s most livable urban centres. Whatever your interests, Montreal has something for you - from professional sports teams to world famous opera, symphony, and theatre companies, neighbourhood cafes to raucous dance clubs, and any number of International Festivals, to name just a few.

The largest French-speaking community outside of Paris, Montreal is, in many important ways, a European culture, with the emphasis less on workaholicism and more on the daily joie de vivre pace that lends it such an inviting ambiance.

It’s also a physically beautiful city, with an 18th and 19th century waterfront well preserved and turned into park space, leading into the modern downtown core, which wraps itself around the base of Mount Royal, an enormous park designed by Frederick Olmstead Laws, the creator of New York’s Central Park. By the standards of large North American cities, Montreal is safe, with excellent subway and bus systems.

PREPARE FOR MONTREAL.