



## The hills are alive...

Once upon a time, in Austria, there was a little family. Actually, a rather large family.

The family had a lovely home and was well administrated. They had sturdy and presentable uniforms and an efficient whistle-based system of communication. Everyone knew what his duty and tasks were.

But the family was sad! What did they lack?

Why, music, of course!

When music returned to their household, so did joy, sharing, bonding, and, finally, love. Well, after dealing with the Baroness Von Schraeder and the Nazis....

Without music, our chapter would be just like that Austrian household. A large family, well organized, snappily dressed, with clear duties to perform....but ultimately hollow. It's music that fills our chapter activities and makes them meaningful, the common bond through which we share our love of life, one another, and our audiences.

So this issue we dedicate to music, with:



The Von Trapp children,  
saying good night to their guests.

Our musical path to Montreal and beyond, by Bob Sutton,  
a wedding reception with a bachelor party, moving to the music with Larry Silva, our weirdest music ever,  
some photo memories from the President's Ball, Seven flavors of ice cream;  
Russian Orthodox barbershopping, a witch doctor and a doctor of immunology,  
Metallica and other heavy metal artists, a new quartet with a long pedigree,  
a tete a tete with the Harmonettes, a bon voyage to a beloved Harmonizer, and an introduction to Brother Ken, western music's least known hero.

By the way, the "Communication" theme from last month's issue inspired a new feature debuting in this month's Echo: active e-mail links! From now on, when you see someone's e-mail in the Echo on-line you will be able to click on it and actually send an e-mail to him or her! Neat, huh?

Now, when you read a story about a Harmonizer who deserves congratulation or encouragement, you'll be able to send him a message using a link in the story itself. We're hoping this will make the **Echo** an interactive device to help members communicate with one another.



**From  
the  
President's  
Ball:  
The Sowers,  
Johnsons,  
Toths,  
and  
Halls**



**Bill &  
Charlie  
Sowers**



**Susan &  
Ross  
Johnson**



**Rory &  
Debbie  
Toth**



**Vanessa  
& John  
Hall**



## Awards from the President's Ball

Our recent President's Ball wasn't just a great party; it was a celebration to honor the dedication and contributions of fellow Harmonizers. This year's awardees are:

### PRESIDENTIAL CITATIONS

These are presented in recognition of members following significant efforts and contributions on short-term projects and activities generally of less than one year in duration.

- John Pence
- Tommy Morris
- Bruce Lauther
- John Thompson
- Steve White
- Gary Plaag
- Terry Reynolds
- Bill Cody
- Kirk Riffer
- Bill DePuy
- Chris vanAtta
- Rick Wagner
- Chad Hoseth
- Skip Coburn
- Michael Calhoun
- Paul Greiner
- Mike Everard

### MERITORIOUS SERVICE AWARDS

Meritorious Service Awards for exceptional achievement during the past year in one or more Chapter activities, such as committee work, housekeeping duties or other tasks in either the administrative or musical area. Such achievement is ordinarily recognized for a period of at least one year's duration.

- Bob Sutton
- Chris Buechler
- Bruce Lauther
- Ken Rub
- Dean Rust
- Martin Banks



### THE NEW NOTE OF THE YEAR AWARD

Presented to the Harmonizer who has contributed outstanding service to the Chapter in his first year of membership.

**Carlos Bermudez**

### HARMONIZER HONOR AWARD

Presented to the Harmonizer whose service to the Chapter during the past year was above and beyond the usual service expected of our membership.

**Kirk Riffer**



### SPIRIT OF HARMONY AWARD

Presented to the Harmonizer who during the past year best exemplified the fundamental Society membership qualities of congeniality and good character and worked hardest to encourage participation in vocal harmony by Chapter visitors and members.

**Jeremy Richardson**





### THE OZ NEWGARD MEMORIAL AWARD

This award is given to the Harmonizer who has made a significant contribution to the musical program of the Chapter during the past year. The awardee should be a dedicated Harmonizer who has

endeavored to improve the Chapter image in the Society and in the Alexandria community through musical excellence.

**Will Cox**



### IBBIANNE AND WILBUR SPARKS AWARD

This award is given to recognize the important contributions of Harmonizer family teams to the success and well being of the Chapter. The award will be made only to a truly outstanding team which has contributed greatly both in volume and quality of services over a period of time. The team can be a Harmonizer and any family member or significant other.

**Tommy and Susan Morris**

### THE ALEXANDRIA HARMONIZERS MEMORIAL AWARD

This award is presented in memory of those who died while members of the Chapter, this is the highest recognition the Chapter can bestow on a member. It is given to the Harmonizer who, during his entire period of chapter membership, has

devoted himself most unselfishly in rendering outstanding service to the Chapter. The award is made only to a truly outstanding member who has regularly attended Chapter activities and who has contributed greatly both in volume and quality of services over a long period of time.

**Terry Reynolds**



*Congratulations and thanks to all!*



Bob &  
Jean  
Wachter



Don & Lynne Johnson



Bob &  
Maggie  
Eckman



Jeremy  
Richarson  
& Ken  
Rub

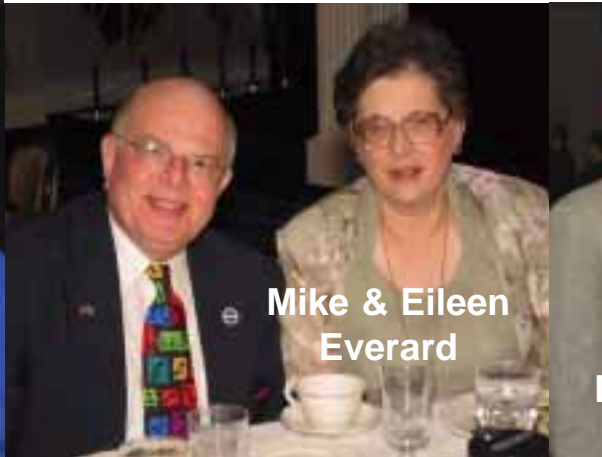
### From the President's Ball



Kirk & Dana  
Riffer



John & Sara  
Thompson



Mike & Eileen  
Everard



Darrell Vail & Dick Weick, flanking  
Alan Kousen & David Leopard



### Coming back to the Harmonizers

by Jim Shoenhard

When I was asked to write an article for the Echo about why I came back to the Harmonizers now I thought, did I really go away? As a barbershopper, I've maintained my membership with the Chapter and continued to sing in a couple different quartets, but I had been inactive with the chorus for almost seven years.

In my last quartet, NewTrickDotCom, I had an unusual privilege. I got to sing with an international champion quartet baritone, Dennis Malone. No pressure, the gold medal baritone was going to sing bass and was asking me to sing baritone. Our lead, Scott Bowman, and tenor, Tom Griffith were also accomplished quartet men and great guys.

One of the goals we set for the quartet was to improve our vocal production skills. The other was to make sure we had fun. This is our hobby and decided it needed to be fun. We all had fairly high pressure lives and needed to have a place to go and put the cares of the world away, even if it was for just a few hours a week. We also knew winning was pretty fun too. You'd think having someone like Denny Malone in the quartet would be all the musical expertise a quartet would need. But Denny was singing a new part in a quartet (he sang bass in his first chorus).



We all knew the secret to success was to sing well. Denny knew a person from his church who was a professional voice instructor. She had a Ph.D in voice and knew nothing about barbershop. We went back to basics – posture, breathing, mouth shape for vowels, finishing phrases.

What a difference it made – for each of us individually and for the quartet. It wasn't easy. We all had old bad habits we needed to break and it was tough learning how to do things right. But it was well worth it. We went on to win the Southern Division and sang in finals at District and Prelims.

Sound familiar? We have a new opportunity to improve our vocal production skills. It's something we all need to commit to do individually. If we all do our part it will make a huge difference to the sound of the Harmonizers.

What makes our hobby great? It's the wonderful camaraderie among people who love barbershop harmony, who are dedicated to improving the quality of performance in all its aspects, and who know winning is pretty fun too. As much fun as it was to win a gold medal in Miami, the thing I enjoyed the

most were the great life-long friends I made along the way. It was the journey. The fun we all had improving with Dr. Greg Lyne's coaching and a great musical team. So why decide to come back? I'm back for the journey. I'm glad to see many of my "inactive" brethren are back too. It's great to be a Harmonizer.



### Letters to the Echo

“Thank you. I immediately printed off my copy of *The Echo* and read it with great enjoyment. It’s gratifying to know that Chuck’s contributions are missed. Believe me, Pat and I also miss him greatly, and obviously we continue to be concerned for his safety and well-being. Keep up the good work. From my perspective (and I receive and read a LOT of other chapter bulletins) you are producing the best publication in the Society.” **Chuck Hunter Senior**

**Editor’s Note: Readers, remember that Harmonizer Chuck Hunter Junior, who is in the State Department, is off serving our country on assignment in Israel. Why not send Chuck a supportive e-mail note in these tense times to [harmonyfiend@hotmail.com](mailto:harmonyfiend@hotmail.com)?**

“To wind this missive up, we want to compliment you on such a wonderful job of compiling factual and helpful data for your membership. Don’t believe we have ever seen another chapter devoting entire issues to only one subject, and being able to develop so much material. The *Echo* is truly a blessing to your chapter. Please continue to share your news with us. Some of our members enjoy taking an issue home to digest after we spread the bulletins on our display table. Thanks, again!” **Roy Hayward, editor of Keynotes, Worcester Massachusetts Chapter**

**And some well wishing from director emeritus Scott Werner:**  
“As usual, great *Echo*. I sure enjoy reading your articles and keeping up with The Harmonizers. Please give my best to all and have a great Spring Tonic.” **Scotty**



**The Keener Chords**, a Washington DC barbershop quartet, is looking for a tenor to join the group in fun singing engagements around the DC metro area. New repertoire focuses on barbershop arrange-

ments of recent and contemporary music. Quartet members, a top DC attorney, a department director at U of Maryland, and a former intelligence officer are active members of DC’s Singing Capital Chorus. To increase the fun in your life as a quartet member, contact us through our contact man Allen Snyder, 301-365-1146, [allen.snyder@verizon.net](mailto:allen.snyder@verizon.net).



Congratulations to **director Richard Lewellen and his wife Christina**, who were thrilled to announce at a recent Harmonizer party that they are expecting a baby at the end of the year. It will be their first child.



## I Can't Believe We Sang THAT!

by Jack Pitzer

Despite having a reputation for being a classy group, the Harmonizers have performed some strange (or at least different) music over the years. Some songs, such as "Witch Doctor," were learned and performed for just one show ("Murder By Magic," Spring Tonic 1989). Every time the chorus started singing the refrain, "OO EE OO AH AH," the lighting designer turned the chorus **green**.

Did you know that the Harmonizers performed a Walter Latzko arrangement of "When the Kaiser Does the Goose Step to a Good Old American Rag" as part of their swan song package in Hartford in 1987? Scott Werner reminisced with us in a telephone interview about how the swan song package came into being....

Scott was talking with Walter and said, "Let's find some real obscure songs and do something with them." He explained, "We primarily wanted to make sure that we entertained and did some fun things that they would remember. Also in this package was 'Four Walls' and 'Carolina Rolling Stone' – 'Carolina' wasn't as weird a song as the other two, but what we did with it visually made it quite funny. The audience loved the package." Mike Everard added that "Four Walls" was making fun of choruses that did all sorts of strange tags. All done to spoof other choruses who had won International and their packages or acceptance packages.

"Another funny song that the Harmonizers did," Scott mentioned, "was the John Hohl arrangement of 'Huggin' and Chalkin.' Jack Pitzer used to dress up in a dress as a "really big" woman while Mike Organ and Randy Lazear hid behind him. They acted out the song and met in the middle and got into a scrap over huggin' the same gal. While we wouldn't want to do this today, it was received well back then."



*This is **not** Bob Braunstein...*

Mike Everard noted that some songs themselves were pretty normal but what the Harmonizers did with them was anything but. "Years ago when Mike Organ first came to us. He had a show in 1977 "Pennies from Heaven" and Mike conned me into to dressing up and collecting pennies that were thrown at me in an upside down umbrella. I borrowed a slicker suit from Hank Ricker, which was hot and very uncomfortable. I had to do a pratfall, which I hadn't done before and haven't done since. Three performances of that was plenty. I was supposed to slip and slide while picking up pennies while the chorus sang a straight song – throwing things out at me all during the number.

"The 'George M. Cohan Medley' was learned and performed for our 1996 swan song package in Salt Lake City. The front row had some incredibly difficult costume changes to execute during the number – including several of the men changing from black tails to white tuxedos – including changing socks and shoes. While there was nothing weird about the medley itself or the performance, what the front row did to the director team will never be forgotten. During the final rehearsal of the song, at the very end of the song as the chorus unfurled flag pieces to turn into a flag, the front row dropped their trousers and revealed their patriotic boxers."



### Meet the Alexandria Harmonettes!

The Alexandria Harmonettes is a support group for the Alexandria Harmonizers, which is the chorus composed of members of the Alexandria VA Chapter of the Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Barber Shop Quartet Singing in America (SPEBSQSA). If you are a spouse, family member, friend or fan, you are automatically eligible to be a Harmonette.



Most of us believe that the best part of participating in Harmonette activities is the friendships formed with others. Please join us – we guarantee good times and good friends.

For more information contact Carole Mankin by phone at 703-922-7548 or by e-mail at [cwmankin@hotmail.com](mailto:cwmankin@hotmail.com).

We have lots of fun while at the same time supporting the Harmonizers financially and emotionally through a variety of activities such as:

- ♪ Conducting fund-raising events.
- ♪ Sponsoring craft demonstrations and hands-on sessions.
- ♪ Collecting tourism and travel information on cities where chorus contests are to be held.
- ♪ Making mementos for contest chorus members.
- ♪ Meeting for meals and social events at district and international contest sites.
- ♪ Gathering each January for a special dinner to honor the incoming and outgoing Harmonettes Officers.

The Harmonettes meet regularly at 7:00 PM on the second Tuesday of each month (except for July and August) at the Plymouth Haven Baptist Church at 8600 Plymouth Road in the Mount Vernon section of Alexandria (just off Fort Hunt Road). We use an email/phone cascade to inform our members about important news and special events.





## Music a la Mode

by Scipio Garling

You may already know that, in Western music, we write our songs using scales of seven notes in two different patterns called “modes”, the Major mode and the Minor mode. We can start the scale for a song on any note, the “key” note (or “tonic” as barbershoppers usually call it); that, plus the mode, tells us the scale the song is based on (such as B-flat Major or A Minor). That’s how all the music in Western civilization works.

Wrong!

That is how **most** songs work. But there’s more than just “the” Major mode and “the” Minor mode. So what the heck can it be?

Let’s take a short trip to the Middle Ages to find out. There we meet a monk, whom we’ll call Brother Ken.

Brother Ken gets bored one night; he has a lot time on his hands because Chapter Board Meetings had not yet been invented. So he bellies up to the monastery piano and invents Western Music. [Okay, okay, the piano hadn’t been invented yet; Brother Ken was a visionary.]



He plunks out seven scales, each one starting on a different white key on the keyboard. He starts with C, ‘cuz it’s in the middle of the keyboard, you know. Each successive note in his scales is either a half or whole step higher than the previous one (‘cuz that’s how pianos are built).

He notices that each of the scales he just formed has a different pattern or half and whole steps jumps. Brother Ken decides to name the patterns, because he likes to name things, and monks, after all, don’t have children.

So, he names each of the patterns after the Ancient musical modes he read about in Greek classics, like *The Republic*. Brother Ken is bluffing, here; no one in the Middle Ages (or now) had the slightest idea what the Ancient musical modes were like. The Ancients had wasted their time inventing Drama, Art, Comedy, Government, Philosophy, Mathematics, and Science, and never got around to musical notation. The number-obsessed mathematician Pythagoras tried to interest people in music, but no one listened to him because he thought eating beans was sinful and had gone to school at Bowling Green.



Anyway, Brother Ken names the modes using names stolen from old Greek books, and says to the other monks, “Okay, let’s jam!” The other monks indulged him since they were bored too. They started writing tunes using scales in the various modes Brother Ken had cobbled together. [All except the Holy Order of Contest Administrators, who were immune to boredom and were busy inventing the Chapter Board Meeting.]



After a few centuries of doing this, they quickly noticed that some of the modes were kind of creepy. They called the less creepy ones ‘major’ modes and the more creepy ones ‘minor’ modes. Monks do like naming things.

Most of the modes were hard to write in and the resulting songs sounded bad anyway. Particularly the Locrian mode; blech! Why bother? By this time Brother Ken had left the monastery and gone to his reward (a basement apartment in Dupont Circle), and nobody was worried about offending him. So everybody started to ignore the weird modes and stuck with the two easiest and enjoyable ones. One of the modes was a major one which became “the” major mode and the other, a minor one, became “the” minor mode.

*How quickly they forget*, thought Brother Ken bitterly, reading the news of all this in **The Harmonizer**. *There are nice songs written in all of my modes, even today. Well, if not nice, at least interesting.*

Then he picked up the infamous “diversity” issue of **The Echo** and discovered that The Peoples of the Far and Middle East (see photo above) had developed all sorts of modes of their own. And jazz theorists and heavy metal artists (see photos below) were doing the same thing.

*Jazz theorists!*, thought an irate Brother Ken, *that’s the last straw*, and resolved to re-interest people in his medieval system of seven modes.



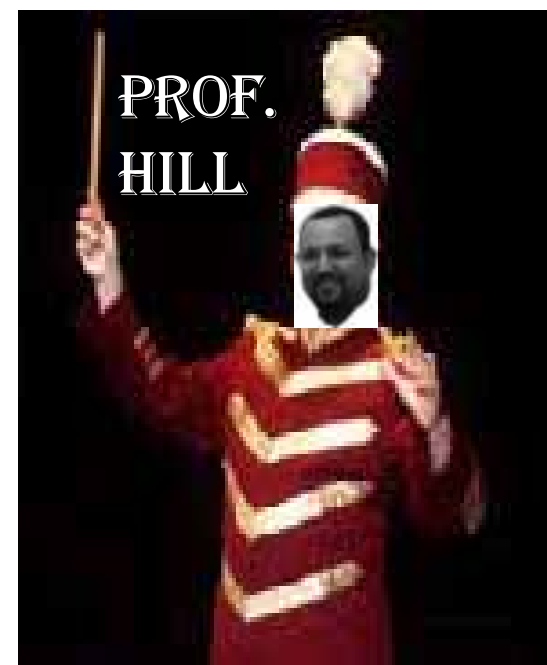
Brother Ken was now working as a principal for a school board of four guys from Iowa who never stopped singing (see photo). They put him in touch with a Prof. Hill, who, they said, had taught them to sing by using ice cream and was trying to do the same for others at Harmony College.

Hill, a victim of synaesthesia, had some wacky but effective theories about learning music by associating one sense with another. Together, Brother Ken and Prof. Hill worked on the “music a la mode” system so that modern people could appreciate and understand all of the modes Brother Ken had invented in the Middle Ages.

After joining Weight Watchers and resolving not to eat beans in deference to Pythagoras, Hill abandoned the ice cream theory and turned to directing rubber bands.

And that is the true history of musical modes in Western Civilization. For a taste treat, check out Brother Ken’s “Music a la Mode” system on the next page.

Use it to impress your Harmony College friends at the Ice Cream Sociable!





## Music al la Mode: Brother Kenny's Ice-cream based system for understanding the medieval musical modes.



**Ionian: The Vanilla Mode**  
C D E F G A B C  
(all major and perfect intervals)  
(or, play the white keys starting with C)  
*Happy Birthday*, and *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star* are classic songs in the Ionian mode. Our modern basic major mode; How comfortable it is!



**Dorian: The Strawberry Mode**  
C D Eb F G A Bb C  
(minor 3rd and 7th)  
(or, play the white keys starting with D)  
Dorian was big in the middle ages: *Barbara Allen*, *Scarborough Fair*, *Greensleeves*. Even a modern song like *Eleanor Rigby* or *The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald* sounds "old" because of the Dorian mode.



**Phrygian: The Coffee Mode**  
C Db Eb F G Ab Bb C  
(minor 2nd, 3rd, 6th, 7th)  
(or, play the white keys starting with E)  
Lots of Spanish, Jewish, and Gypsy music uses the Phrygian mode, which to most ears sounds dark and rich. For a taste, try Chick Correa's *La Fiesta*.



**Lydian: The Mint Chocolate Chip Mode**  
C D E F# G A B C  
(augmented 4th)  
(or, play the white keys starting with F)  
Lydian stuff sounds, well, unnerving and off-kilter. So where do we hear it? In cartoons, of course! Try the themes from *The Simpsons* or *the Jetsons* !



**Mixolydian: The Caramel Mode**  
C D E F G A Bb C  
(minor 7th)  
(or, play the white keys starting with G)  
You've swallowed more in this flavorful mode than you realize: *Norwegian Wood*, *Luck Be a Lady*, *Star Wars*, *The Beat Goes On*.



**Aeolian: The Chocolate Mode**  
C D Eb F G Ab Bb C  
(minor 3rd, 6th, 7th)  
(or, play the white keys starting with A)  
Our modern basic minor mode. Pull up a big bowl of *Popeye the Sailor Man* or *Jingle Bell Rock*.



**Locrian: The Pineapple Sherbet with Caramel Sauce and Coconut Sprinkles Mode**  
C Db Eb F Gb Ab Bb C  
minor 2nd, 3rd, 6th, 7th, diminished 5th  
(or, play the white keys starting with B)  
The Locrian mode is almost unused in Western Music because it's so weird. Try a spoonful of *Metallica's Wherever I May Roam...if you dare!*



### A Bachelor Party....for the bride?

In March, the Chapter threw a wedding reception party for new director Richard Lewellen and his bride, Christina. The affair, hosted by Rick and Peggy Wagner and arranged by Ross Johnson and others, was a smashing success, with over 100 in attendance. Seen here is (appropriately enough) "Bachelor Party" serenading Mrs. Lewellen before the crowd.

### *The Echo*

*Back by the loading dock,  
through wisps of tags and shades  
of chatter,  
I listen to the winds of now  
for the echo of the concert still to  
come,  
full of chords we've not yet made,  
from a chorus we're to be,  
for I know,  
when all the songs are blown  
away,  
the echo will remain.*

### **The Echo**

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## Move to the Music!

by Larry Silva

As our chorus heads toward new performance greatness, along the way, we must achieve several goals. We will be successful when we each contribute our best.

We must be aware of the scope of the task we are being asked to do.

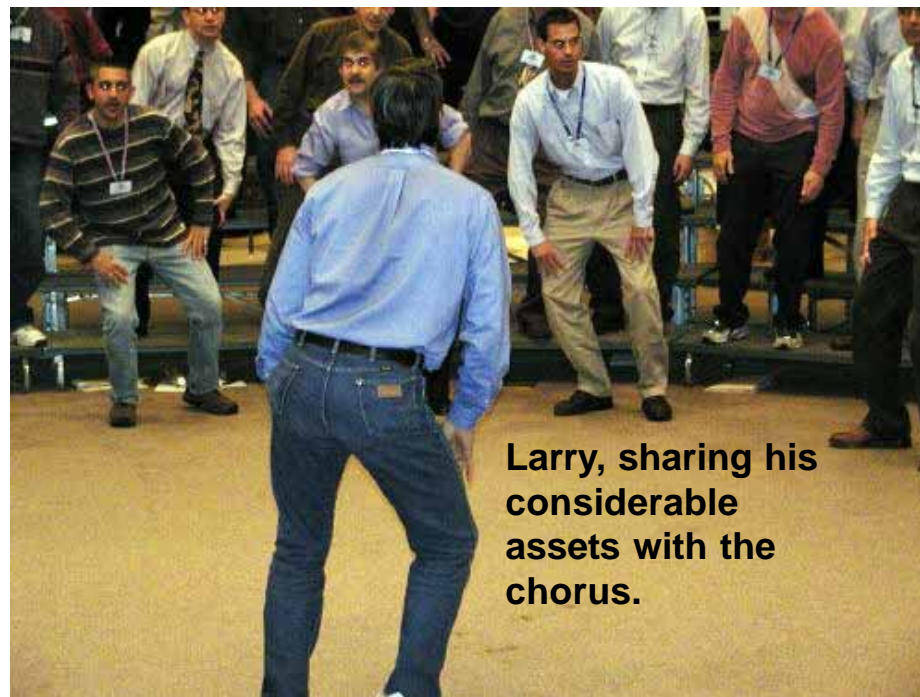
We must have the will to do it.

We must trust in our abilities and that of our fellow performers.

In Presentation, our goal is to communicate successfully with the audience. To accomplish this, we must perform up to our potential. No one performs above his potential. With the guidance of our leaders and coaches, we must train ourselves to reach our potential. Then add the spit and polish.

I believe that our hearts, not our bodies are musical. Our hearts drive the notes, words and ultimately the emotion of the performance. Without complete dedication to singing from the heart, the musical experience will be cold and hollow for us, as well as, for our audience.

As performers, we attempt to recreate the message the composer has conveyed in notes and words by using our own emotional experiences. We then must create a connection, a bridge if you will, with the audience. This can be very powerful if there is a connection between our inner emotions and what we outwardly demonstrate. This can be difficult because it requires us to be open and vulnerable to the audience. The presence of this emotional bridge is what will separate a powerful performance, from a group of men just singing a song. Once we establish this connection with the audience, we will experience an emotional response from them. When we open our musical hearts to the audience they will be drawn into our performance and thereby experience with us.



**Larry, sharing his considerable assets with the chorus.**

As a performer for forty -six years I never try to force-fit some thought up character or scenario into a song. I only relay honestly the composer's message by allowing it to become my experience and message.

If we dedicate ourselves to the concentration, industry and perseverance of allowing (not making) ourselves messengers of an emotional from the heart experience, we cannot fail.

In closing I thank the members of the newly reorganized Presentation Team, Dean Rust, Jack Pitzer, Craig Odell, Gary Plaag, our new director Richard Lewellen, the Music and Performance team, and especially the men on the risers for their support and confidence in allowing me to contribute to the cause.



## Member Profile: Bob Wells

By Roger Day

Bob was born and raised in the “Buckeye State” of Ohio in a little place called Middletown. He attended Ohio State Univ. where he received his BS degree in education. The following year he got his MA degree in biology at the University of Michigan. Immediately upon graduating he entered the United States Army as a Second Lieutenant. He was stationed at Fort Knox Kentucky as an armor officer. This is when the world opened up to him and he made a career of serving his country.

Part of his worldly travels took Bob to Vietnam as a Medic and two years as a medical research dept. chief in Bangkok Thailand. During his 28 years with the United States Army he was encouraged to go for his Ph.D., which he did at the University of Michigan. His Ph.D. is in Microbiology and Immunology. This is why you might hear someone in the chorus call him “Doc.”

Bob finished his military career as a Colonel in the Medical Service Corps, having spent much of his time in association with Walter Reed, doing research in Tropical medicine.

Somewhere along the way in his busy schedule he managed to fall in love with a lovely girl Virginia (Ginny). They had two

children daughter Andrea and son Rob. Bob and Ginny are now proud grandparents (to look at them you would never believe it) of 5 grandchildren. Three by Andrea and two by Rob.

Bob and Ginny live in Bethesda, Maryland, and got there via the U.S. Army.

Bob, like so many, was introduced to the Harmonizers by Sam McFarland. Sam, like Bob, was stationed at Walter Reed, where he kept pestering Bob to come to the Harmonizer shows. Bob finally relented, and was soon hooked. He joined as a first time barbershopper in 1991.



Since becoming a member he has served as Board Executive Assistant, President in 1996, and is currently the Music Librarian. He has always sung lead in the chorus and is very proud of his two gold medals (1995 and 1998), as well as one silver and two bronzes.

Bob’s favorite song the Harmonizers sing is “I’ll Be Seeing You” (which was the winning ballad in Miami in 1995).

Bob says he is most proud of being a member of the performing chorus and the regular camaraderie he enjoys with all his friends and their families! Bob is really excited about the new opportunities Richard has and will bring to the Harmonizers and looks forward to continuing to grow to even higher levels of Excellence!



### Musical Path and Goals for Montréal ...and Beyond

by Bob Sutton, Vice President, Music and Performance

The international chorus contest in Montréal is a special one for the Harmonizers in a host of ways. Sure, we have a new Music Director, in Richard Lewellen, but more importantly we have a new music *program*, and by this time the chorus should have had a pretty good taste of it.

There are at least two salient components of the program; that is, the *content* of what we are learning and being taught in terms of skills and execution; and then the *responsibilities* of the individual chorus member, which are complemented by the qualifications program.

#### Skills, Execution and Performance

Although what we have begun isn't going to take five years to approach implementation, it's safe to say that we may be well into 2004 before the skills become second nature to us. Fortunately, we can still "pull out all the stops" on the way to Montréal without compromising the long-term musical good of the chorus. We hear often about *technique* and *artistry* – you need to learn the techniques so they can become invisible, dwarfed by the artistry of the presentation. The 2003 (and beyond) program involves learning a much higher level of singing techniques, so that we can perform with consummate artistry, completely free of the audience distractions of noisy sound, part imbalances and poor technique.

And so – the training that we are receiving is affording us the opportunity



to learn those techniques. Specific among these are such areas as basic production skills. We have begun to learn to "fill the barrel", "reach to the walls" and "fill the well". Amazingly, the modest differences in and across even these few voices translate to mighty large voice color differences when they reach the audience. What does that do? Well, it expands the palette of

colors for the vocal picture we paint in our songs. It lets us make what, for us, are subtle shifts of voice color based on the words and phrases we sing. And that, to the audience, is perceived as *artistry*.

*Connectors* make up another area of concentration. No chorus in the Society is likely going to be paying the kind of attention to connectors that Alexandria is, and that, too, will pay off in our ability to reach our audiences with clean, precise and accurate word sounds. Nowhere would we expect the distraction of a poorly placed connector to interfere with a beautiful phrase. I'm willing to bet that a few of you may have cracked the connector code already in just the basic work on "Auld Lang Syne" that we have done. Note that Richard asks us to place singable consonants (such as M, N, L and R sounds) on the *prior* note of a word connection,

while vowels, and non-singable consonant sounds – the Ts and Ds and the like – *begin* the following syllable. Try it at home – sing a short phrase of a repertoire song other than Auld Lang Syne, and see if you can get the habit of placing consonants where they belong. You'll find that you can start to do it without thinking on a short phrase. Then try to make it instinctive on Tuesdays!

#### Responsibilities

Because these skills are, in many cases, new, it is incumbent on you, the chorus member, to devote the time to learn and master them on your own,



and do your assigned homework. Only then can we achieve the level of consistency that is necessary, in order to execute but mask the technique, and subordinate it to artistry. In order to be able to pursue mastery of these techniques, however, there are two fundamentals that must already be in good shape in your individual bag of tricks – *voice production* and *intonation*. That is, you must already be able to sing with good vocal quality and good intonation (pitch accuracy). Absent those, the new skills would be impossible for a singer to execute and contribute to the chorus sound.

Quality and intonation are such fundamentals of the Harmonizer chorus performance that their mastery will be a necessary attribute in order to perform with the chorus. Accordingly, the ultimate qualification program for 2003 in Montréal – and, subsequent to that, the performing chorus – *presupposes* the singer’s ability to sing with good quality and accuracy in a reasonable amount of his range.



*Director Richard Lewellen,  
working on our technique.*

To do that, there is ongoing a two-phased qualification program. In the first phase, we asked everyone to submit a cassette to his squad leader for evaluation. This will help the Section Leaders recognize individuals who are having difficulty singing in tune or with good quality through most or all of their range. We will be referring these singers to Bob Wachter or others, and asking them to work hard enough with the coach to demonstrate sufficient improvement by the mid-April timeframe. This is to ensure that singers who would not qualify for Montréal know that fact, sufficiently early.

Thereafter, those who have demonstrated good quality and intonation will work with their squad leader on an “individual vocal plan” – that is, he will begin with his own part and make adjustments in the notes he is responsible for, so as to remove notes or phrases that require straining or difficult vowel placements. A lead may switch to baritone for a phrase if it means not having to scream a high G that he can’t do well. The object is to *keep each singer doing what he does best*. Working with the squad leaders, the singer can master each song much easier by eliminating the challenging parts. What is left, then, is a chorus almost always singing sounds that are comfortable. When the notes are comfortable, the high-level technique can much more easily be mastered – and the chorus can work more easily toward *artistry*.

And it goes without saying – but I’ll say it anyway – that every chorus member should repeatedly tape himself and then go back to the sheet music to check his part. Wrong notes are a complete and fatal impediment to a perfect chorus performance. Every member must continually reexamine his level of learning notes and ensure there’s not a stray error that has been learned. It is a part of the chorus member’s responsibility to his brothers to get all of his notes right.

### Montréal

And so our goals for Montréal are clear –

- A marked improvement in the basic singing skills of the chorus
- A demonstrated capacity to evoke passion in the audience through voice color
- Significant execution of word sound connectors
- Absolute passion in performance

If we do this, we will have won the contest regardless of scores.



## PHAT CATS seek Purrfect Harmony in Montreal!

It is always great to see one of our own quartets qualify to compete at the international contest. One of the latest to achieve that distinction is **PHAT CATS** who placed a close second at the recent Mid-Atlantic District Spring Convention to earn a trip to the “Big Show” in Montreal, Canada this coming July. The quartet members are *Scott Disney* (lead - Bowie Knights of Harmony and former Harmonizer) *Steve White* (bass - Alexandria Harmonizers), *Mike Pinto* (baritone - Centreville Sounds of America and former Harmonizer), and *Ed Cazenias* (tenor - Alexandria Harmonizers).

This will be the quartet’s first international competition with Mike as baritone, having also competed in the Portland contest last year with our own Howard Hull. Backstage in Portland, the quartet found them selves sharing a contest warm-up room with **Four Voices** who went on to win the International Quartet Championship. If that weren’t intimidating enough, imagine watching the Champs’ high-powered coaching entourage that included Greg Lyne, Joe Connelly, Cindy Hanson, and Clay Hine - four big guns for Four Voices. Phat Cats did not seem to mind the pressure and are very proud of their 28<sup>th</sup> place finish – not bad for having sung together for just 10 months.

Veterans of several previous top District and International competing quartets, Phat Cats look forward to a strong finish north of the border in Montreal, “Oui?” Now getting coaching from our

own in-house big gun, *Richard Lewellen*, and presentation coach *Craig Odell*, the quartet has a new sound and a new look to match. They recently joined the Harmonizers on the annual Spring Tonic shows, featured along with several other fine chapter quartets including **Riptide**, International 4<sup>th</sup> Place Medallists.

For those of you who subscribe to XM Satellite Radio, you will be interested to know that Phat Cats recorded the opening and closing songs and commercial sound bites for a nationally broadcast weekly barbershop radio show called “*Harmony Square*” aired every Sunday evening at 8:00 p.m. Our own *John Hohl* provided the song arrangements for the guys and was in the studio to assist with the recordings.



The March 2003 issue of *ECHO* featured an article highlighting Phat Cats’ successful performances with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra this past January in a series of pops concerts called “*Take Me Out To The Ballgame*” under acclaimed Conductor Erich Kunzel.

The guys keep very busy singing chapter shows throughout the District and beyond. They can be contacted for show bookings at:

[Phatcatsquartet@hotmail.com](mailto:Phatcatsquartet@hotmail.com)  
703-669-4451  
(contact: Steve White)  
702 Moxley Drive, NE  
Leesburg, VA 20176



## My Life as a Russian Orthodox Barbershopper

by Mike Ahmadi

When I was in elementary school, we were given the opportunity to learn to play a musical instrument. I chose the alto saxophone, and I remember in 5<sup>th</sup> grade performing my first solo, the theme song to the TV show “Happy Days.” When I moved up to middle school, I continued with the sax, but moved on to baritone saxophone. This was appropriate, because it had a deeper, bass sound compared to the alto sax, and I was fascinated with it (especially since my voice was changing). Some of my favorite memories include playing the bass line to the theme from the “Muppet Show” (did we only learn TV music in school?), and a solo in Henry Mancini’s “Baby Elephant Walk.” By now, I was hooked to the stage.

Moving up to high school brought about a shift in my musical interests. Since there was no stage band and having no desire to join the marching band, I gave up the sax, and decided to sign up for piano classes. One day, my teacher and I got to talk and she asked me if I sing. I told her yes, in the shower (don’t we all?), and I sang bass in my church choir. When she found out that it was a Russian Orthodox Church, her eyes lit up. She too, was Russian Orthodox and encouraged me (quite strongly) to audition for the New Jersey All-State Chorus that year. After much protest on my part, “Oh, I’ve never sang with a big chorus before,” and “I don’t know anything about that,” I lost, and ended up auditioning and *making the All-State Chorus as a bass!* “I told you you’d make it,” she proclaimed.



Coincidence...?

After All-State Chorus, I joined the high school choir in my senior year and became the student director of the Madrigal Ensemble (the first time I ever used a pitch pipe!).

You see, I didn’t realize it at the time, but my teacher knew that my background and experience singing in my church choir was key training for me to use my talents in a broader musical sense.

For those who are not familiar with the musical traditions of the Orthodox Christian Church, everything is sung *a-cappella*. There is no organ, guitar, or any instrumental accompaniment whatsoever. Being brought up and raised in that tradition has given me a sense and appreciation of *listening to others around me* and using the natural beauty and expressiveness of the human voice to praise God.

As an adolescent, I was first trained to do the Epistle Readings, in which one would stand in the middle of the church and chant the readings in front of the congregation. No services are actually *read* in the Orthodox tradition, but instead, the priest and readers chant everything, and the choir sings all of the responses and hymns.

So here began my early development and background in vocal music. In order to chant properly, I had to learn how to project my voice so that the whole congregation could hear me (including the last person in the back row I was taught). Not only hear me, but they had to understand me, too. I had to pronounce all the words clearly using proper enunciation or diction (not always easy for someone from “Joisey”). I also had to stay in pitch.



Generally you pick a chanting tone (usually keyed off what the priest is chanting before you) and you stick with that key. And some of those church readings could be quite long!

At the age of 18, I learned how to direct, and became the choir director, a position I held for 10 years before moving to Maryland. I learned many more skills as a choir director, such as harmonization, composition, sight-reading, leadership and facilitation skills, and aural skills (or ear training). Since there are no instruments, one of the most important skills I learned was how to give pitches from a tuning fork. I didn't have the luxury of a pitch pipe, but had to learn how to pitch any given piece of music, in any given key, for all four parts (soprano, alto, tenor, bass). I also had to learn to read all four parts and teach them to the choir as well.

All in all, it seems that my church musical experience prepared me well for the Harmonizers; the foundation had been laid. But now being a Harmonizer has expanded on that foundation so much more by teaching me many other skills, especially that of *vowel matching*, something we never really focused on in church music. It is so amazing how much better of a singer I have become, just by being a member of the Harmonizers, and how it carries over to my church singing as well.

So life as a Russian Orthodox Barbershopper is a very rich and rewarding one. Each aspect impacts the other. Learning to listen to others around you; paying attention to your own singing and how you blend with the rest of the ensemble; singing expressively and beautifully; these are all skills that I use both in church and in barbershop, and I am grateful both to my high school music teacher for making me audition, and the Harmonizers for building my already strong musical foundation and making it even stronger.



We recently bid a fond farewell to **Bill Ward**, seen here directing the chorus at his last rehearsal. Bill, known for his hilarious duck imitation, was a dedicated Harmonizer, who often helped with staging and prop construction. Bill is retiring to Florida, where he plans to continue barbershopping with a local chapter. Readers, why not send Bill a farewell note at [wmcward@aol.com](mailto:wmcward@aol.com)?