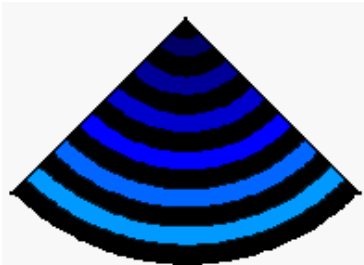


The monthly chapter newsletter of the Alexandria Harmonizers



The Echo

October 2003

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The Weirdness of Barbershop

Barbershop is beautiful; haven't we all listened to it for hours on end?
Barbershop is wonderful; what could be more intoxicating than ringing a tag?
Barbershop is exciting; who hasn't thrilled to the musical tension before a chord resolves or the electric sight of a stunning visual package?

But, more than anything, barbershop is weird.

Oh, yes, very weird...and not just to people who don't participate in it!
We all have favorite moments from our barbershop careers....beautiful, wonderful, exciting moments. But what moment do we really remember and retell again and again?

The weird ones, of course.

So dive in to our celebration of the weirdness of barbershop...

**How can any one photo
hope to capture the
weirdness of barbershop?**





B-Flat Black Holes in Three-Quarter Time

by Scipio Garling

One of the cutting edges in modern astrophysics is detecting black holes, clusters of mass so dense that nothing within a certain radius can escape their gravitational pull. Having analyzed light and heat signatures, scientists have now added sound to their array of “thumbprints” for identifying black holes.

By analyzing the x-rays produced by superheated gasses in the vicinity of the Persean Galactic Cluster 250 million light-years from Earth, the Chandra Observatory has determined the first sound signature of a black hole: it’s a B Flat...57 octaves below Middle C.

“I am not surprised,” said Jeremy Richardson, local doctor of astrophysics. “I have always believed that barbershop was the Music of the Spheres, so it’s natural that a black hole would be humming along in B Flat. I’ve already begun a paper on my theory that on the Risers Cosmic, the black holes are the basses, quasars are the invisible baritones, the tenors are the squeaky high-energy pulsars, and the leads are the bloated gaseous giants. Look for it in forthcoming issues of the Virtual Journal of Nuclear Astrophysics and the Midl’ Antics.”



Quick to act, Ev Nau has confirmed for the Echo that he has already used the SPEBSQSA satellite to send the Persean Hole an invitation to join the Society, voiced by Dick Van Dyke. “It’ll be have to be Frank Thorne, at first,” Nau acknowledged, adding, “but soon we hope to spark enough interest to charter a Persean Galactic Cluster Chapter.” Naragansett Bay has volunteered to serve as sponsor, while Greg Lyne is rumored to be considering a move to the Persean Galactic Cluster to direct them at the first Intergalactic Chorus Competition.

Upon learning the Persean Hole has been holding its B Flat note for an estimated three billion years, Society notable Tony DeRosa commented, “I’ll work on it....”

Meanwhile, within the Alexandria Harmonizers, singing judge Bob Wachter has been pressuring NASA to sign the Persean Hole up for a vocal production workshop, Roger Day is hoping to snag it for the upcoming Put-Together Contest, and Ken Fess has already pencilled it in as next year’s Vice-President for Community Outreach. Terry Reynolds is scrambling to determine whether the Persean Hole is a “Low 3” or a “Low 2”, but because there are ten million years between each of its sound waves, Terry must rely on input from Mike Everard, who swears he used to sing with it in Fairfax.





What I Won't Do for the Harmonizers

by Roger Day

It seems that ever since I joined the Alexandria Harmonizers in Sept 1989, my Fate was pre-determined! For You See, I have had the privilege to be cast in many, shall we say, unusual roles during those days when our shows were scripted.

In the show "Piracy On A High C" I was cast as the ships Cook,(Go figure! A little type casting here, Hmm!?*), who was predisposed to chasing the Energizer Rabbit around the stage hoping to get a decent meal for my fellow shipmates, since they have had nothing to eat but "Seaweed Burgers" for weeks. There I am clad in cook's clothing, hat, apron and meat cleaver running after this pink rabbit (played by Mike Fultz). I must say that I really put some MEAT into this role! I didn't STEW about it for very long, because there was a lot at STEAK for me, being this was only my second show as a Harmonizer! I played my role as close to the BONE as possible and removed as much of the FAT as I could (which is not a small task, for those who know me)!

My next role, well you might say, was a bit bazaar! It was during the production of (and the title escapes me for now) but it was something like ("A Space Odyssey, Beam Me Up Scotty")? I played the role of (and it pains me to say this) a Ballerina! Yeah, you heard me right, A BIG OLD PINK BALLERINA! (got any problem with that)!

Keith Jones, one of the writer/producers of the show called me one evening to ask me if I would be interested in dancing in the next show. However, I



knew something was up when the tone in his voice changed. I knew right then just what I was about to agree to, and it wasn't going to be a Gene Kelly type number. For you see, I had had an actual dream that I was going to be wearing a pink tutu on stage for the Harmonizers! Well, the dream turned to reality!

Picture it, me, Doug Abt and Steve Tramack (former Harmonizer) three guys, who were, lets say, "Big Boned," so big that for Halloween we could have gone as the state of Rhode Island! One day we were standing outside of a US Post Office and someone handed us an application for a ZIP CODE! But anyway I digress. Here were these three great guys all wearing pink tutus doing the dance of the Hippos from Walt Disney's "Fantasia" Performing "One Grecian Urn" on stage to the roars of the audience! I still have my tutu as a memento! I think Doug Abt says he still has his as well!

My next role was as unusual as the last one. I played the role of "Amana Frostfree" a Sexy Southern Belle in the Production of "A Radio Show" The show was about the old time radio shows people used to listened to. My segment was called "Mystery Theater" One of the characters was detective Blake Diamond (played by John Stauffer, a former Harmonizer). He and I would stand together in front of the audience and read our parts as if we were actually broadcasting a radio show over the airwaves. John (Blake Diamond) was dressed in a detective's trenchcoat and hat. I on the other hand was wearing my white tie and tails, as were all of the Harmonizers on the risers behind us on stage. However, there was one addition to my outfit,



For the Harmonizers

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A BIG YELLOW FEATHER BOA! (I had to be in character)! There was a lot of dialogue between me- Amana Frostfree and John-Blake Diamond. However, on the Saturday night show, I thought that I might juice up the production a little. While John was reading one of his lines I decided to walk my fingers up his arm to his shoulder then on to his neck finally landing on his left ear where I started playing with his ear and eventually blowing in it. I don't know why I did this. I thought that I am going to be in big trouble! But, it was just an impulse. And being as shy and demure as I am, I thought I would give it a try. Well, my fears ended when the Harmonizer on the riser behind us started falling off of the riser in hysterics. At that point I noticed that the audience started reacting also, at which time the feathers from the boa somehow got into my mouth and I started trying to spit them out, only fueling the laughter even more! Poor John Stauffer didn't know what to do with my antics but played his role to the letter and didn't let this affect him at all!- NOT! Once we got back stage during intermission he turned to me and said "What were you thinking, I loved it"!

That was my one and only time I became a DRAG QUEEN for the Harmonizers. Let's make sure that never happens again! PLEASE! Well, that's my story about performing for the Harmonizers. I have loved every minute of it. I love being on stage especially, when people are laughing with me and at me when I perform these roles. Thanks for the memories!

Stop the Sea!

by Leon Avakian

The following happening took place while I was M.C.'g a quartet contest in Asbury Park's Convention Hall. After the first few quartets had sung, Ray Glynn, Chairman of the judges, stopped the proceedings. He jumped up and signaled me to the edge of the stage. "Stop that infernal noise backstage," he demanded. I told Ray I was sorry, but it would be impossible to do so for the sound wasn't backstage at all. The Convention Hall had been built out over the ocean and, as a result, waves rolled in underneath the structure, pounded against the concrete pilings making the deep rumbling noise. With his tail between his legs, Ray went back to the judge's table and the contest resumed.

The following year when Ray was again chairman of the judges and the contest was again in the same hall, he laughingly reminded me of his impossible demand of the year before. I told him that no demand was impossible and took him outside to the promenade behind the building. Lo and behold, the ocean was no longer running up under the building; it was being held back by a huge stone breakwater, constructed at a cost of more than \$700,000.

Later that weekend, when Ray had an opportunity to address the convention, he remarked that the people of Asbury Park were willint to do most anything to improve the facilities for our barbershop contest. Maybe I should mention that as City Engineer for Asbury Park, I had been involved in the planning, design and finally the construction of the breakwater for several years. Perhaps I should also add that the construction of the breakwater had nothing to do with our contests, rather, was constructed to save the building from the ravages of the ocean.



“Sam Club” honors Wilbur Sparks

by Mike Everard

The Sam Club, a collection of Wilbur Sparks’ personal friends, have agreed to guest edit an issue of the Echo in honor of their late friend.

The first annual meeting of the Sam Club was held the evening of September 3, 2003—the one year anniversary of the passing of Wilbur D. Sparks (known affectionately to his long-time friends as “Sam”, a nickname given him by music director Oz Newgard in the 1960s).

Nine Harmonizers (Terry Jordan, Al Wolicki, Mike Everard, Jack McKendree, Nelson Sublett, Dick Whitehouse, Dick Hall, Jack Pitzer, and Bud Arberg, *see photo*), all members since at least 1970, attended the event at the home of organizer Mike Everard. The group viewed the 1994 video “This is Your Life, Wilbur Sparks”, traded stories about Wilbur, ate some goodies, and agreed to serve as a guest editorial board for an upcoming issue of the Chapter’s newsletter, The Echo.

“It’s a fitting way to honor Wilbur,” Everard said, “who edited the Echo for over 25 years.” The issue is slated to focus on what has made the Harmonizers great and how to keep the greatness going.



Wilbur Sparks, in later life.



Photo courtesy of Carolyn Hall



Barbershop Eye for the Regular Guy

Capitalizing on recent programming successes that have dramatically expanded its visibility, the Bravo cable channel has announced a new show debuting in its fall line-up: **Barbershop Eye for the Regular Guy**.

Produced in collaboration with the Alexandria Harmonizers, each episode will have a group of five barbershop style experts make over an ordinary schlub into a convention-ready barbershopper.



Decor & interior design,
Sam Brothers

Grooming &
make-up
Chris VanNatta

Fashion & personal style,
Ray Johnson

Culture &
etiquette,
Sarah Thompson

Food & wine,
Joe Kane





Lattice-work, Fishnets, and Nude Silhouettes

by Brad Jones

Barbershopping is not all about singing, as I had assumed when I joined the Harmonizers! It can be dangerous, weird, and funny at the same time! Sometimes intentionally, sometimes accidentally, things don't always go as planned on the stage.

Many Harmonizers will recall "feeling the earth move" at Division Contest several times as the Chorus performed its popular "Georgia Brown" package. The temporary stage used in Reston had the unique quality of deciding to join the chorus during the sway movements. There's nothing quite so unsettling as finding the risers still heading towards the back of the stage when you are trying to get into that big impact move that has you pressing to the audience!

But never mind the danger to the less sure footed barbershopper, the swaying stage at Reston decided a more aggressive attack on the chorus was needed to defend its territory. Yours truly was standing at the end on the risers with our esteemed Editor, Scipio, on the next row down and slightly closer to the front of the stage. As the swaying stage reached its peak velocity during Georgia Brown, the very decorative lattice-work screen placed to the stage right side of the risers by convention planners lost its footing. I observed fairly early the impending crash and, having determined that it would not hit Scipio, continued performing "the plan". As the lattice-work came down it fell perhaps a foot and a half in front of me and but much closer to Scipio. We both continued on and were rewarded when one of the judges specifically mentioned how incredible it was that our faces never lost the message of the song as the stage crashed around us. Funny, I didn't realize "fright" was in the Georgia Brown plan.



Speaking of our esteemed editor, he has been the subject (or is it cause?) of several weird happenings on the T. C. Williams stage. As you all know, Geri was fond of telling the chorus that they could never do too much. She solemnly promised to let us know if we went over the top. It is not surprising (perhaps it's a natural quality) that Scipio managed to achieve the distinction of having gone over the top during a performance. It was the Friday night premiere of "Kiss the Girl". Elaborate staging was in place, including bubble machines and brightly painted plywood fishes. Each member of the chorus was encouraged to bring a prop to use...sun glasses, brightly colored hats, handkerchiefs, leis, etc. Scipio assumed his now customary spot on the floor in front of the risers, wearing a previously un-revealed fishnet draped (tastefully, he thought) around head and shoulders. Immediately after the set Geri informed Scipio that the fishnet was OUT! The lack of a prop was remedied the next day when, between shows, Scipio joined several of us at a Polynesian Restaurant, where we quickly realized the speciality drinks came in a Polynesian style mug that you could conveniently keep and use in the evening show. We quickly fulfilled our duty to the chorus by drinking the necessary quantity of drinks and brought back a number of props that were used in Saturday night's show.

Other things happened to Scipio on stage as well. There was the time that the Harmonizers were using white gloves for one of our songs. We were wearing the black tails to get



Fishnets

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maximum impact from the white gloves. As Scipio, standing in the very conspicuous position of second row endman, pulled his gloves from his packet a white paper (a temporary white stuffer if I recall correctly) fell out. But rather than dropping inconspicuously to the floor, Scipio's scrap developed wings. It spun and fluttered gracefully as it took its time to float to the ground making sure the maximum number of audience members could appreciate the distraction.

Sometimes the things that happened to Scipio were not accidental...and that usually involved me. Many of you will recall that wonderful production number of the Guys and Dolls medley. This medley opened with a quartet singing while the chorus was in a freeze behind them locked in very action oriented poses. Scipio stood to my left in the middle of stage right at the time, and we routinely struck a pose of animated argument with me facing him with my back to the audience. This gave me the convenience of being hidden from the audience and it became my mission to think of something different to torment Scipio at each performance. Once I put my finger on his chest as though we were arguing and continually increased the pressure as the quartet sang, almost pushing Scipio off balance...and the riser. Another time I simply opened my mouth and feigned beginning to join the quartet a measure earlier than the chorus was supposed to come in (he almost fell for it). At one of the final performances of the medley, I

kept a hidden miniature flashlight in my hand (those tiny ones with the push buttons for inside theaters). As we struck our freeze and the curtain opened I began flashing the light in his face. He just managed not to burst out laughing before the chorus began singing. I do miss that song!



One final memory of events not going as planned is the now infamous "Cohen Medley". Our front row was particularly challenged in this medley, which included a mid-song change between white and black tux outfits. Special fabric extensions were built and added to the sides of the risers to assure the many prop and uniform changes were hidden from the audience. We premiered the song during a trip to a show in Pennsylvania. Everything was going along somewhat as planned until the front row zipped back to change tuxes. Having never been tried out on a stage before, who was to know that stage lights would render the fabric extensions as kind of silhouette project screens! There, in a very hurried fashion, one could observe the machinations as the front row attempted to change and get back on stage in time. Further adding to the embarrassment was the fact that one of the front row men had not managed to attach the white suspender to the back of his pants and it dangled between his legs throughout the next part of the medley (don't worry, I won't mention your name K. R.).

I look forward to the next time something unplanned adds excitement and memories to my "singing" hobby!