

# The Harmonizer

BRINGING BARBERSHOP

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2026



## NOTeworthy

SUNDAY NIGHT SOCIAL WITH LADY GAGA  
RECRUITING AMONG SUPERHEROES

## TIP SHEET

WHY IT MATTERS TO KNOW THE  
TRUE MEANING OF A "CONCERT"

## INSIDE

WHO JUDGES QUESTIONS OF  
TASTE IN PERFORMANCE?



BAUBERSHOP HARMONY SOCIETY

# ST 26

INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION

# THE BIGGEST BARBERSHOP PARTY OF THE YEAR

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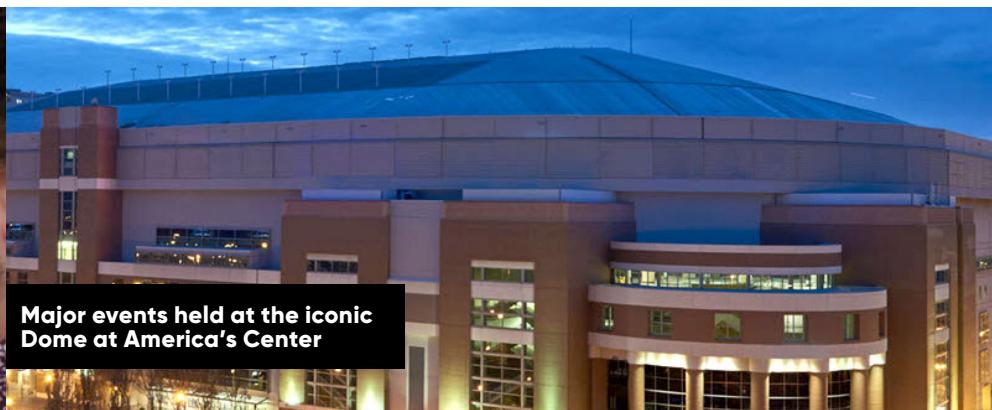
The very best in barbershop square off in our contests, with a new "sing in" tournament for the quartets



Come celebrate the biggest barbershop party of the year with us this summer in St. Louis, Missouri.

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This year's Dream Chorus will be directed by Theo Hicks

Don't miss the biggest barbershop party of the year!

Mon  
June 29

Tue  
June 30

Wed  
July 1

Thu  
July 2

Fri  
July 3

Sat  
July 4

Show up the day before and get settled in before all the main events start on Tuesday. Tags and parties all night!

Quartet "Sing-In" Tournament

NextGen Varsity Quartet Championship

Afterglow

Quartet Quarterfinals Session 1

Quartet Quarterfinals Session 2

Afterglow

Gold Medal Hours

World Harmony Showcase

Quartet Semifinals

Afterglow

Chorus Contest Session 1

Chorus Contest Session 2

Association of International Champions Show

After Party

Chorus Contest Session 3

Quartet Finals and Finale

Chorditorium



New "sing-in" contest for quartets scoring between 78 and wild card qualifiers.



One day for Quarterfinals



Gold Medal Hours

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Housing and registration for all is now open!

**barbershop.org/stl**

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JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2026 • VOLUME LXXXVI • NUMBER 1

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**The 2023 International Performance judging panel (Marty Lovick, Allen Otto, Gary Steinkamp, and Theresa Weatherbee) conference following Midtown's 2023 Quartet Finals set. Shortly after, they made Midtown's "Spiderfarm" the first and only quartet song to receive 100 points from each Performance judge. In many cases, judges must not only consider how well a song is executed but whether diverse audience members would consider the performance in good taste. Learn what judges are doing to better score and guide performers in the ever-shifting environment of BHS audience expectations.**

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## Connect with us

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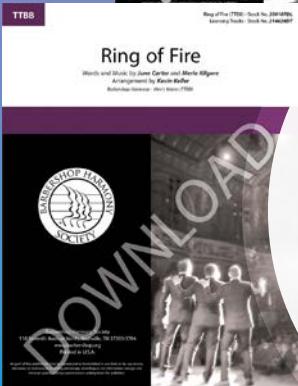
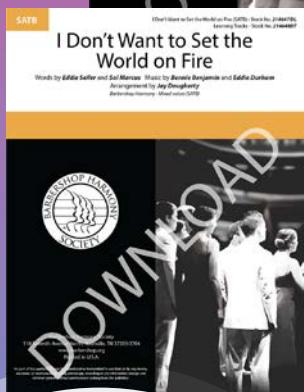
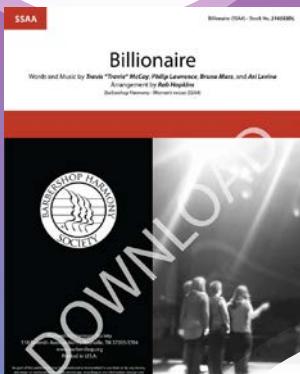
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The Harmonizer

GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE/EDITORIAL  
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EDITOR  
Lorin May

OUR VISION  
Everyone in Harmony

## OUR MISSION

To bring people together in harmony and fellowship to enrich lives through singing.

## OUR PURPOSES

To perpetuate the old American institution: the barbershop quartet and barbershop harmony

To promote appreciation of barbershop harmony

To initiate and maintain a broad program of musical education, contests, and appreciation in support of barbershop harmony and the allied arts

To establish and maintain foundations that support our vision

To initiate, promote and participate in charitable projects that support our vision

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# Small chapters fulfill the Society's mission



Most Society members either do or did participate in smaller chapters. Small chapters are indispensable to the entire Society as they enrich the lives of not only their members but the lives of those they serve in hundreds of local communities.

My first six years in barbershop were in a small chapter (**Florissant Valley, MO**). Had we competed, we'd have scored in the low to mid 50s. We were 25-30 guys when I first joined, and around 20 guys six years later, when I left for my first job in Texas.

We took great pride in our contributions to the community. We put on a show each year, raising money for Logopedics and other charities. We sang in local seniors centers and hospitals, spreading cheer and joy in places where sometimes it was not plentiful. We regularly performed in malls and other public venues. A large number of us replaced church choirs during the summer. For years, we were the largest fund raiser for the St. Louis Christmas Caroler's Association (a St. Louis non-profit raising funds for the less fortunate). We did it because we felt the

calling and truly enjoyed doing it.

In every sense of the word, we were connected to our local community. We intentionally went out beyond our chapter's walls to spread the joy of barbershop singing.

Did we compete? Nope, other than the local St. Louis Area Contest. In fact, from 1972-2002, the chorus did not show up to any CSD functions. But that didn't diminish the fun we had!

After I returned to the area in 1989, I joined the **St. Charles, MO Chapter** (now **Harmony STL**). It was a personal growth opportunity to be an assistant director in a then up-and-coming chorus, **Ambassadors of Harmony**.

In 1996, I directed the **Belleville, IL** chorus—at that time, around 20 guys who sang in the low 60s. During the summers, their outreach activities included having a parade float in every small town parade in Southern Illinois. We balanced rehearsals with other activities. Life got busy, and I stepped away.

In 2000, my work phone rang. Carl Daniel, Florissant's director at the time, notified me that he was ill. Could I step in and direct the chorus in the chapter

show in two months? Of course.

In those two months, I learned and re-learned so much about what makes small choruses tick; what makes them so valuable in our Society. Rehearsal started at 7:30. I would arrive at 7:20. I was the last to arrive. All of the guys were there. Eventually I figured out why: making music was secondary to being with each other. This was their time each week to bond, to connect, as well as to sing. Their love and friendship were palpable. Although they didn't have the voices to excel, that didn't diminish their desire to be the best that they could be. Each week they rose to any attainable challenge I gave them. It was such a meaningful time back with my first chorus. But life was still

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**MOST PEOPLE IN THE "OUTSIDE" WORLD KNOW NOTHING ABOUT CONTEST SCORES, ABOUT THE SIZE OF A CHORUS, WHETHER A CHORUS COMPETES OR NOT, ETC. WHAT THEY KNOW IS WHEN THEY SEE JOY IN THE FACES OF THOSE SINGING.**



## Get in Touch

**Kevin Keller, Society President** [bhspresident@barbershop.org](mailto:bhspresident@barbershop.org)  
Follow current issues: [barbershop.org/board-topics](http://barbershop.org/board-topics)

busy, and a new director stepped in.

Leaping forward 20 years: coming out of the pandemic, Harmony Hall initiated a program to reach out to every chapter and find out how they were doing. I made about a dozen calls, almost all to small chapters. I was amazed by what I heard. Many of them were purposefully going out and doing what I called “The Senior Citizen Center Tour.” Systematically, they would go out into the community and spread joy and love and music. It gave them great pride in serving the community. And if it wasn’t seniors centers, it was something else that they would step out and purposefully immerse themselves in as a community asset.

These chapters truly live out our mission: “The Barbershop Harmony Society brings people together in harmony and fellowship to enrich lives through singing.”

Our mission is more than enriching our own lives. It is to enrich lives ... period. No conditions on who. Every



touchpoint is an opportunity.

I believe the greatest core strength of our Society, both past and present, is that each chapter defines its destiny. Many chapters choose to compete, but many do not. They can be just as successful in advancing our mission.

Most people in the “outside” world know nothing about contest scores, about the size of a chorus, whether a chorus competes or not, etc. What they know is when they see joy in the faces of those singing in front of them, that joy brings joy to them. That is fulfilling our mission—enriching lives through singing.

My challenge for all, big and small, is to look at what you do as a chapter:

- If you simply show up on Tuesday nights to sing, great. But what more



(Left) Kevin Keller (second from left) performs with his first chapter, Florissant Valley, MO. (Right) Kevin (bottom right) directs the Belleville Bell-Notes at the 1997 Illinois District convention.

could you do beyond the walls of your chapter space to impact your community?

- If you are getting out into the community when opportunity presents itself, great. What might happen if you thought strategically about your community involvement?
- If you are actively embracing your own purposeful mission of being a community asset and enriching lives, please don’t stop! Know that you have our gratitude and appreciation.

Meet me in St. Louis! ■

# The Harmony Hall Think Tank

A flexible strategic effort at Harmony Hall takes a non-reactive look at long-standing organizational challenges, helping chart a thoughtful path forward. It's not a decision-making body, but a catalyst for BHS leaders at all levels.

One thing has always been clear throughout the Barbershop Harmony Society: our members care deeply about the future of barbershop singing. Whether that care shows up as passionate debate, thoughtful questions, dedicated volunteer service, or simply by showing up week after week to sing or to support singers, it reflects a shared

desire to see the BHS remain strong, relevant, and vibrant for generations to come.

In that spirit, I recently launched a new strategic initiative called the Harmony Hall Think Tank. This is a focused, flexible effort designed to take a hard look at some of our most long-standing organizational challenges and help chart a thoughtful path forward.



At its core, the Harmony Hall Think Tank exists to ask big questions and to do so intentionally. Rather than reacting to issues as they arise or attempting to solve



## STARTING PITCH

A conversation with our President and CEO

RATHER THAN REACTING TO ISSUES, THE THINK TANK CREATES SPACE FOR STRUCTURED CONVERSATION, INFORMED INSIGHT, AND CLEAR-EYED EVALUATION OF HOW THE SOCIETY OPERATES TODAY AND HOW IT MIGHT EVOLVE FOR TOMORROW.

everything at once, the Think Tank creates space for structured conversation, informed insight, and clear-eyed evaluation of how the Society operates today and how it might evolve for tomorrow.

The Think Tank is guided by a small core group of staff members whose role is not to make unilateral decisions, but to frame conversations, facilitate productive dialogue, and turn ideas into meaningful action. When a topic requires additional perspective or specialized knowledge, subject-matter experts, including members, volunteers, and partners, are invited to participate in a targeted time-limited capacity. This approach ensures that many voices can inform the work, while keeping the process focused and forward-moving.

Importantly, the Harmony Hall Think Tank is designed to be outcomes-oriented. Its purpose is not discussion for discussion's sake, but progress. That progress may take many forms: pilot programs, strate-

tic frameworks, recommendations for operational policy changes, or even identifying practices that no longer serve the Society well and should be simplified or retired. Not every conversation will result in immediate change, but every conversation is intended to move BHS closer to clarity and alignment.

While the Think Tank is currently engaging with several major areas of opportunity, its structure is intentionally flexible. This allows it to convene around emerging or pressing matters as the needs of the Society evolve. How people volunteer, how they participate in organizations, and how they connect across

For members, the launch of the Harmony Hall Think Tank is a signal of commitment. It reflects a recognition that the structures and systems that supported BHS in the past must continue to evolve if we are to serve singers, chapters, districts, and partners effectively in the future. It also reflects confidence in the collective wisdom of our community and a belief that the best way forward is one built on listening, learning, and collaboration.

Perhaps most importantly, this initiative is rooted in optimism. Barbershop harmony is not a tradition in decline. It is an artform with extraordinary potential. By investing

### So, what does this Think Tank mean for you?

Imagine a newer singer who loves barbershop harmony but can't commit to a traditional weekly rehearsal schedule. Or a longtime member who wants to volunteer their professional skills but isn't sure where they fit in the current structure. Or a chapter leader looking for clearer support, better tools, and a stronger connection to the broader Society. The Harmony Hall Think Tank exists to explore how the Society can better serve people in exactly these kinds of situations, by examining how we invite participation, how we define value, and how we support engagement at every level. While no single solution is predetermined, the goal is to ensure that more people can find a meaningful, welcoming pathway into BHS that fits their lives.

borders are all evolving as we speak. Our adaptability is essential.

What the Harmony Hall Think Tank is *not* is equally important. It is not a replacement for governance, and it is not a decision-making body. Final decisions continue to rest with BHS leadership and the Board of Directors. Instead, the Think Tank serves as a catalyst: a place where complex issues can be explored thoughtfully, where assumptions can be challenged respectfully, and where well-considered options can be developed for leaders to evaluate.

time and energy into thoughtful strategic work today, BHS is choosing to be proactive rather than reactive, intentional rather than accidental.

The Harmony Hall Think Tank represents an investment in hope: hope that our Society can continue to grow, adapt, and inspire; hope that new pathways to participation and service can strengthen our community; and hope that barbershop harmony will continue to bring people together in meaningful ways for generations to come.

As this work unfolds, you will hear more, not always about answers, but about progress. That progress belongs to all of us, because the future of barbershop harmony is something we shape together. ■



## Get in Touch

**Robert Rund, CEO** [CEO@barbershop.org](mailto:CEO@barbershop.org)



# HARMONY UNIVERSITY

July 26 - August 2, 2026  
at the University of Denver

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Chorus



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## NOTEWORTHY

The latest in the world of barbershop

### ● SING WITH A CHAMP!

# 2026: Summer of Theo

Guy finally finishes his Ph.D., and suddenly his summer calendar is wide open. Call him *Doctor* Theo Hicks and sign up to sing in either of two ensembles he'll direct at major BHS events in the Summer of 2026. (See HU Chorus info on opposite page.)

Compete in the Dream Chorus at the 2026 BHS International Chorus Contest on barbershop's biggest stage in a unique, high-quality, one-time-



only chorus! This chorus is scored and ranked on the Official Scoring Summary, alongside all other qualifying choruses in the final results.

Registration is limited to 150 singers! Learn music in advance and rehearse Wednesday to Saturday during the convention week. Arrangements will be accessible to all vocal ranges. Sheet music and tracks will be provided to all singers. Get details at [barbershop.org/STL](http://barbershop.org/STL).



### Sunday Night Social plays a big role in Lady Gaga concert

It turns out that Lady Gaga and barbershop harmony go together *really* well. The now 16-time Grammy winning singer picked 2025 International 6th-place quartet **Sunday Night Social** to help open her surprise Los Angeles pop-up concert, with video released on Dec. 24, 2025. So far, 1.4 million have watched the 50-minute *Lady Gaga in Harlequin Live: One Night Only*, recorded for a live audience and released via YouTube.

The performer long ago branched out from the disco-pop sound and has abandoned the ubiquitous media trolling that made her famous; she is now hailed as a serious actor and an uber-versatile performer who excels in every musical style imaginable. Covering many genres, the show set list was inspired by the soundtrack for her recent *Joker: Folie à Deux* film. (The quartet also appears on the soundtrack backing Lady Gaga in “Good Morning,” later the opening number for this show.)

The quartet only received a couple of weeks notice to fly from Denver to LA to record the event, appearing on stage for three songs. Link to the concert at [tinyurl.com/snsgaga](http://tinyurl.com/snsgaga).

### Join the BHS Board of Directors

Join a team of thought leaders devoted to bringing barbershop harmony to all people in all ways! The Board seeks people who might not have ever considered themselves for this role, whether from age, gender, background or previous barbershop experience. Bring your generosity: of time, talent, and the courage to look at our future as a shared song we're all helping to write. See [barbershop.org/become-a-board-member](http://barbershop.org/become-a-board-member).

### 2019-2020 BHS President Dick Powell passes away

Richard “Dick” Gary Powell, 2019-20 BHS President, passed away at age 81 in Crofton, Maryland, on January 3, 2026. He was also chair of the Society Leadership Task Force, CSLT Committee and COTS Subcommittee, a Contest Administrator, and had decades of chapter and district leadership roles, including president of the Mid-Atlantic District.



### Paul Martin, Steve Tremper, Jeff Osborne



### Chapter inaugurates Hall of Fame

How do you honor those with decades-long impact? Durham's **Heart of Carolina Chorus**, the newly minted **Central Carolinas Chapter** Hall of Fame recognized Chris Slack, Dr. Bill Adams and Steve Tremper as its inaugural inductees. The chapter stages mixed, men's, and women's choruses—**Heart of Carolina A Cappella** (HCA), **Concordia**, and **Melodiam**.

## MUSICAL OUTREACH

# 49 new leads in a day at Comic-Con

**W**hat happens when a traditional barbershop quartet walks into a room full of superheroes, stormtroopers, and anime characters? If you're **The Sea Breeze Singers**, the answer is simple: you sing your hearts out and leave with nearly 50 new contacts eager to learn more about barbershop harmony.

Our quartet represents the Sea Breeze Singers of the **Corpus Christi Chapter**. We recently had the opportunity to showcase barbershop at Corpus Christi Comic Con, and we're proud to share that the event was not only fun and rewarding, but incredibly fruitful for our chapter's outreach.

We had a dedicated booth on the convention floor, but quickly realized the best way to share barbershop was to roam the crowd and bring the music directly to people. With the help of Tina, our social media manager and chapter supporter, we coordinated an outreach effort that mixed tradition with just the right amount of geeky flair.

We sang "The Banana Boat Song (Day-O)" and "I Don't Want to Set the World on Fire," prompting attendees to stop, smile, and listen. That led to dozens of photos and social media posts, impromptu performances with cosplayers, and Bobbie brought along an extra vest and pulled in bystanders for a quick, friendly tag taught by Gary. If they could match a pitch, they earned a barbershop lapel pin and a place on our guest registry.

By the end of the weekend, we had names and phone numbers of 49 individuals who were genuinely interested in barbershop and our chorus. Tina followed up with every one of them, and we've already had new faces show up to rehearsal.

— Tim Weitzel, *Corpus Christi Chapter*



Tim Weitzel (Br), Bobbie Whalley (T), Tina Sams (seated, social media), Doug Whalley (Bs), Gary Hannah (L)

## HARMONY UNIVERSITY

### QUARTETS: BRING YOUR BARITONE FOR FREE TO HARMONY UNIVERSITY 2026

**R**hinestones—Angee Ledbetter, Rosetta Springer, Dawn Gutschke, and Nathan Gutschke—have returned to Harmony University every year since 2018. The high-level instruction, constant encouragement, and incredible amount of joy (and ice cream, of course) keep them coming back.

"You will never get this level of coaching anywhere else," said Angee, "or have such camaraderie with people who love what you do as much as you." Rhinestones has limited access to coaches in their Lubbock, TX hometown, making district events and Harmony University a vital source of high-level coaching. Rather than addressing scores, HU coaching focuses on becoming better singers, ensemble members, and people. "It's worth every dime you spend to get there," Angee said.

"The coaching experience has been deeply transformative," said Dawn. "I've learned how to sing like myself instead of trying to sing like someone else."

What truly sets Harmony University apart, the quartet agrees, is the community. "I take so much more back from it each year than I could ever repay," Angee said.

Nathan calls HU audiences the most engaging they've ever sung for. "HU gathers people from all over the world to sing harmony together and learn to be better at it," he said. "You just can't beat that!"

Dawn describes the "Barbershop Bubble" at HU as "an immersive barbershop community with a powerful sense of belonging." Angee adds, "No one is against you. Everyone is for you."

"As a quartet," Rosetta declares, "HU will be the best week of your year!"

For 2026, we've brought back the **Bring Your Baritone For Free** promotion: submit your quartet deposit today for 25% off each member's registration! Learn more at [barbershop.org/hu](http://barbershop.org/hu). Read more about Rhinestones at [barbershop.org/news](http://barbershop.org/news).

— Erin Whippner, *BHS Education Activities Coordinator*

### HU Chorus featuring Instant Classic.

The 2015 champs will be section leaders for the HU Chorus! All voices, all singers—no audition required. Spend the week rehearsing, learning rehearsal techniques, and exploring what makes great ensemble singing come alive. Rehearse Monday-Friday, 2:00–4:00 pm and perform on the HU Saturday Night Show.





## NOTEWORTHY

The latest in the world of barbershop

### ● HQ ADDITIONS AND TRANSITIONS

# BHS launches new Philanthropy team

The Society has now assumed development and fundraising responsibilities from Harmony Foundation, and new BHS staff roles are being filled by both existing and newly-hired BHS employees

**W**ith a new strategic alignment with Harmony Foundation International in place as of January 1, the Barbershop Harmony Society will now manage its own donor operations and fundraising activities. Joe Cerutti has been named to the new position of Director of Philanthropy, and will lead a team of experienced professionals:

- Christina Brewer, *Fundraising*



### *Campaign And Donor Engagement Officer*

- Dixie Semich, *Development Operations Manager*
- Rick Taylor, *Legacy Gifts Officer*
- Tyler Wigginton, *Philanthropy Officer*
- Jeremy Gover, *Video Content Strategist*

"We are integrating vital expertise from BHS and HFI," said CEO Robert Rund. "We are positioned to achieve ambitious goals, expand our reach, and create an even greater, lasting difference in communities through music, education, and camaraderie."

### **NEW STAFF POSITIONS AND ROLES**

On the staff operations team, Rund announced several new roles and shifting responsibilities.

- Devin Anna Bradford, *Chief of Staff*



- Darin Drown, *Harmony University Program Coordinator*
- Sean Lubbers, *Community Care Team Lead*
- Brian Lynch, *Manager, Chapter Relations & Marketing*
- Luke Miller, *Manager, AI & Operations Enablement*
- Michele Nieg, *Director of Marketing and Communications*



# What's Happening

### **The Big Leap (NED)**

**April 10-12**

[barbershop.org/big-leap](http://barbershop.org/big-leap)



### **Harmony University ▲**

**July 26–August 2, 2026**

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### **2026 International St. Louis**

**2026 International St. Louis**

June 28–July 5

**2027 International Minneapolis**

July 4–11

**2028 International Chicago**

July 2–9

**2029 International San Antonio**

July 1–8

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THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING BHS PROGRAMS

# "IT STARTED WITH A MUSIC EDUCATOR SCHOLARSHIP TO HARMONY UNIVERSITY IN 2019."

**Amy Moyer**  
Wade Hampton Singers,  
Greenville, SC

**2024**  
NextGen Youth Chorus  
"Audience Favorite"



"I truly believe the spark ignited in my students at the 2020 Midwinter Convention kept them involved and hopeful through the pandemic for the future of singing."  
Amy Moyer, music educator



2020 MIDWINTER



2023 MIDWINTER



2024 MIDWINTER



2025 INTERNATIONAL  
AMY'S QUARTET EXTRA CREDIT  
(COMPOSED OF MUSIC EDUCATORS)  
COMPETED IN DENVER



**YOU BELONG  
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ENERGIZE  
YOUNG SINGERS

PRESERVE  
BARBERSHOP

BUILD THRIVING  
SINGING COMMUNITIES

SUPPORT  
MUSIC EDUCATION

BHS  
MISSION



## TIP SHEET

Dr. Jay Dougherty, Musicality judge, coach, Director of Choral Activities at Drury University  
✉ jaydougherty@gmail.com

### ● BETTER REHEARSALS

# The true meaning of a “concert”

The way we use the word “concert” today only captures a portion of its richer meaning. The full meaning expands on the nature of how we make music together.

When most of us think of a concert, we imagine a performance: the culmination of weeks or months of rehearsal, polished and prepared, presented to an audience. However, it is much more than that and understanding the origins of the word can transform how we view what we do as singers, directors, and even audience members. Grasping its true meaning can change the way we experience our craft, and can inspire us to approach rehearsals and performances with more pure intent once we understand what a concert really is.

The word concert comes from the Italian *concerto*, which in turn comes from the Latin *concertare*. The Latin verb *concertare*—from *certare* (“to contend, strive, struggle”) with the prefix *con-* (“together, with”)—meant both “to contend, strive, fight, dispute” and “to work together, act in agreement,” providing us with a seemingly contrastive, dual sense of both conflict and cooperation—both a struggle and a collaboration. This double meaning is not a contradiction but instead reveals something profound about what it means to make music together.

### THE HISTORICAL ROOTS

When the Italian *concerto* emerged in the late Renaissance and early Baroque, it described music in which voices and instruments interacted—sometimes contrasting, sometimes blending. Giovanni Gabrieli’s antiphonal works in Venice are a prime example: choirs and instrumental groups



The *contending* that is inherent in preparing for a performance makes not only every show but every rehearsal a type of concert.

engaging in musical dialogue, handing off ideas, then joining together in unity. This was *concertare* in action—interplay, contrast, cooperation, striving.

By the 17th century, this idea developed into the *concerto grosso*, where a small group of soloists (*concertino*) contended with and cooperated with the larger ensemble (*ripieno*), eventually giving rise to the *solo concerto*, where one performer worked both with and in contrast to the orchestra. As the term

traveled into French and English, concert began to mean a musical gathering or performance—a useful definition, but one that captures only part of the word’s deeper origins and the richer meaning that still underlies it.

### A REHEARSAL CAN BE A CONCERT

Even a rehearsal is a kind of concert. We contend—with wrong notes, tricky rhythms, balance issues, and our own limitations as singers. We strive to improve, to challenge ourselves, to raise our level of artistry. That struggle is baked into the very etymology of a concert. *To contend is to commit to growth.*

At the same time, we work together and act in agreement. Harmony and artistry, after all, require cooperation. We listen across the ensemble, adjust, support, and work for unity and contrast at just the right moments. We strive to unify vowels, match resonance, and discover satisfying and precise intonation. None of us achieves artistry alone; it is always a shared endeavor. When the melody passes from the leads to the tenors or baritones, or when the bass line takes center stage, that’s our version of the Baroque interplay—parts handing off the spotlight, supporting one another, making music a dialogue rather than a monologue.

To begin noticing the “concert” happening within the rehearsal itself, we can adopt a few simple habits that deepen how we listen and engage:

- **Stay open and attentive.** As you rehearse, notice how your line fits into the broader musical texture.

Whether you're singing melody or harmony, listen for how your part supports or interacts with the others around you.

- **Listen for texture contrasts.** Pay attention to moments when the musical spotlight shifts—when a non-lead part briefly takes the tune, when tenors and leads share a duet, or when the leads sing the melody over a trio patter. Recognizing these contrasts helps you experience the “contending” implied in *concertare* that gives the music life.
- **Seek natural balance.** If we allow this awareness to guide our rehearsal, we can more easily identify which lines should naturally be more featured, we'll start to sense when a section functions like a *concertino* and when the ensemble returns with the strength of the *ripieno*. This kind of listening will enrich both the rehearsal and the performance that follows.

Even concerts themselves involve interplay between other elements of the performance. An emcee introduces a song with a joke, or a quartet member shares a heartfelt personal story before singing a ballad. These spoken moments aren't just filler. They are part of the concert in the truest sense: different voices taking their turn, contending and cooperating, creating a whole greater than the sum of its parts.

### CONTENDING TOGETHER

When we finally gather on stage, the striving doesn't stop—in fact, it intensifies. A concert is not just the polished presentation of prepared performances. It is a live, human event where we continue to contend with nerves, with lighting and sound systems, with the acoustics of an unfamiliar or unresponsive space, with the unpredictability of live performance, and with the challenge of pouring our deepest artistry into the moment.

At the same time, we work together, as though grasping invisible strands

## A CONCERT IS A REAL-TIME, LIVED EXPERIENCE. IT IS THE STRIVING ITSELF—THE IN-THE-MOMENT COOPERATION AND CONTEST—THAT BRINGS MUSIC TO LIFE.

that connect each singer, carefully maintaining the fragile balance needed to keep the concert ship afloat. In that shared struggle, we compete with ourselves to see how far we can go, how honestly we can connect with the music, and how consistently we can carry the habits of healthy singing and effective performance techniques from rehearsal into performance.

This is why a video recording of a performance never quite captures the same energy as a live concert. A recording preserves a snapshot of a finished product, but a concert is a real-time, lived experience. It is the striving itself—the in-the-moment cooperation and contest—that brings it to life.

You may have heard the familiar adage: “Rehearse like it's a performance; perform like it's a rehearsal.” While this phrase carries several useful lessons, the etymology of concert highlights what may be its most significant insight: our awareness of the deeper musical construct should be nearly identical in both settings. Approaching music this way not only enriches our rehearsal experience—because we're more attuned to the interplay of contrast and unity happening around us—but also shapes our performances into genuine invitations for the audience to share in that collaboration, creating a fully connected human experience much like what we enjoy in the rehearsal room.

### THE CONDUCTOR'S CONCERT ROLE

In many ways, the role of the conductor mirrors the soloist in the Baroque concerto. The conductor strives, contends, and cooperates with the ensemble, guiding the performance while also being shaped by the singers' energy and artistry. It is not a one-way street. Just as a violinist in a Vivaldi concerto pushed against and played with the orchestra, so too does the director engage dynamically with the ensemble, working together to achieve something neither could accomplish alone.

### WHAT MATTERS MOST

The modern use of the term concert as a showcase of prepared performance takes on deeper meaning when we consider its etymology. Perhaps even more important than the musical gathering for audience entertainment is that when we come together—singers and audience alike—we bring to life the deepest meaning of the word. We gather not merely to showcase what we have prepared, but to celebrate the human condition through music: to strive together, to contend with our own limits, and to work towards unity through a shared moment of musical mastery.

So, the next time you step onto the stage, remember that this understanding can shape the way every participant approaches the experience. Singers can listen more intentionally for contrast and cooperation, directors can frame rehearsals as living musical conversations rather than preparation alone, and audiences can be welcomed as partners in the shared striving that gives a concert its energy. You're not just putting on a performance; you're experiencing a concert—in the truest, oldest, and richest sense of the word. You are contending, cooperating, and striving together in real time, reaching for something higher than any of us could achieve alone. That's the true beauty of what we do. That's what makes it a concert. ■



**Huron Valley Rocks!**

# **The Secret Sauce**

**The recipe a thriving Michigan  
chapter follows for steady growth**



**D**espite extensive efforts to keep members engaged during Covid lockdowns, the 2018 Pioneer District champion **Huron Valley Harmonizers** saw six to eight members attending early post-lockdown rehearsals. There seemed to be a very real prospect that the chapter could dissolve. We have instead grown to about 40 members over the past three years, with new members joining almost every month!

This is the story of a chapter that kept doing what we've always done well, but in updated ways that resonate with today's Ann Arbor, MI community. The key ingredient to our auditionless "we'll teach you to sing" recipe for success is FUN—chapter meetings and social activities that are so rewarding that members feel valued and want to invite their friends!

It may sound overly basic to say our focus is to "share the joy of singing together"—doesn't every barbershop chapter want that?—but success comes from including all the right

ingredients and giving them time to cook. We thought others might want to know the ingredients to our "secret sauce."

### OPENING MEMBERSHIP TO ALL

For years, Director Rob Pettigrew was a little bothered by Huron Valley's public mantra, which amounted to, "If you like singing, you should be singing with us ... unless you're female," he said. "That always felt awkward." Beginning in 2023, gender restrictions were removed from our definition of "everyone," making the Harmonizers a TTBB mixed chorus.

Long-time member Jim Windak said "welcoming women had a very positive effect on our chapter." Making the chorus mixed quickly boosted membership numbers, including four married couples who joined HVH so they could sing together.

"We've always had a lot of variety in each rehearsal, different things that scratched different itches. It's had a snowball effect: people come in, they have fun, they bring in their friends."

Dawn Swartz had long admired the warm bond her husband had with the other men in the chorus. When the chorus became mixed, she joined and quickly noticed the men were extremely excited about their chorus in its new form.

Mary Beth Eagle likes that HVH is a "super nice group and very welcoming."

Lynne Peirce-Kemp was the first female director of HVH, serving from 1998 to 2005. When Lynne

The Harmonizers at a convention in the early 1980s, directed by Jim Stephens. Formed in 1978, two-time International quartet champion Glenn Van Tassell was a founding member and driving force for decades.



**Nancy & Dan Vogt** are members of the **Huron Valley Harmonizers**, with Nancy serving as 2026 chapter president. They joined the Society in 2023. [nancyvogt@gmail.com](mailto:nancyvogt@gmail.com) [danielvogt2@gmail.com](mailto:danielvogt2@gmail.com)



learned in 2024 that the Harmonizers had become a mixed chorus, she attended a rehearsal with her long-time Barbershopper fiancée. “It did not take us more than five minutes to become excited (okay, totally geeked!) at the prospect of singing side-by-side with the Huron Valley Harmonizers,” Lynne states. “Now I am singing with him and with men who had sung under my direction 20 years before, plus a lot of amazing women and new Barbershoppers!”

## A GREAT CHAPTER MEETING, NOT JUST A REHEARSAL

“We’ve always had a lot of variety in each rehearsal, different things that scratched different itches,” said director Rob Pettigrew. “It’s had a snowball effect: people come in, they have fun, they bring in their friends.”

Mary Robinson likes that Rob sets a high bar for creating quality music and promotes the joy of singing through community outreach.

“Rob Pettigrew has the uncanny ability to get the most out of his

singers,” adds Jim Windak. “He has a delightful warmth and sense of humor.”

## A CULTURE OF FRIENDSHIP AND FUN

At the beginning of her first visit, Betsy Price told others that she was simply too busy to join. By the end of the night, she was determined to fit HVH into her life because she had “so much fun!”

Our chorus culture is as much about social relationships as music. We focus on friendship, warmly initiating and developing contacts and relationships, making opportunities for members to grow musically, and involvement in both music and non-music roles and activities. Our Director knows how to help members, make it fun, create a sense of community, and promote and satisfy a variety of interests.

Members come early and stay late engaging in music and social activities. It’s common to see more than half our singers attend our post-meeting afterglows. This culture appeals to something in everyone and has been a key to our growth.

Members value the groups of friends and socializing, leadership opportunities, audiences, and community contributions. One member noted “a new personal record for the most new

Chapter members enjoyed a social activity at Buddy’s Pizza after a public performance. The chapter takes a lot of formal and informal gigs, and its post-meeting afterglows regularly attract more than half of the chapter members.

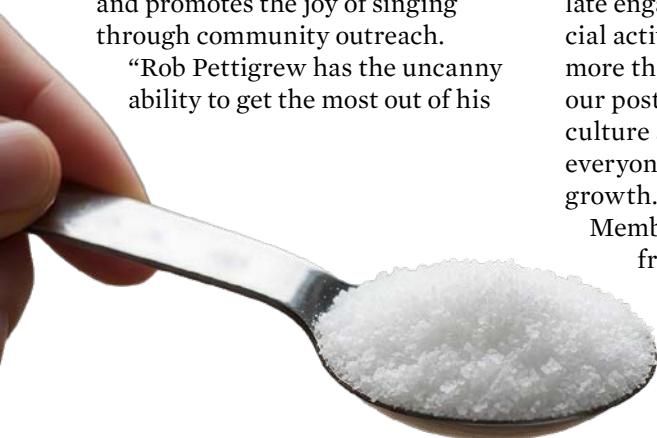
friends in one year.”

Naomi Gilbert felt accepted and welcomed by everyone. She gives credit to Rob. “He is very accepting of all singers regardless of their ability and makes all the rehearsals fun, leading to a feeling of community,” she said. “We socialize outside of singing and care about each other’s misfortunes. I stay for my joy of singing, the acceptance, and for the sense of community.”

## WARMLY WELCOMING GUESTS AND NEW MEMBERS

We consciously make extra efforts to warmly greet and encourage visitors and new members, making clear that all who would like to join are welcome regardless of skill

We have a lot of members interested in contributing to chapter life in ways beyond singing. A quarter of our chapter members attended the recent Pioneer District Leadership Academy.



level, without audition. We provide a non-judgmental space for members and visitors, especially less experienced singers, to try quartets, VLQs, tags, and other music activities.

We have designated individuals to be the contact for visitors and new members. We strive to make sure visitors and new members quickly feel welcome and a part of the group. This allows us to inform new persons about the chorus fully and to quickly develop a personal relationship with them.

## A CULTURE OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Rob Pettigrew and other long-time members had to wear a lot of hats and put in a lot of extra hours as they held the group together during the tough times. Today, a much higher number of formal and informal chapter leaders share the load. More potential members are attracted by the opportunities to give meaningful input and to help lead.

At the basic level, we actively encourage input and feedback from all members, who then help develop our

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The city of Ann Arbor, MI closes its downtown streets on Friday nights in spring, summer, and fall. Chapter members often provide strolling entertainment for outside diners, and often fulfill indoor requests for songs wherever the singers break for dinner.



vision for the future. We also put a lot of effort into learning each member's skills, experience, and interests, and to identify the "pullers" who tend to motivate action in others. Rather than make general requests for help, we make direct, personal requests to members regarding suitable, personalized roles.

As a result of these efforts, we have a lot of members interested in contributing to chapter life in ways beyond singing. A quarter of our chapter members attended the recent Pioneer District Leadership Academy, accounting for 10 of the 52 attendees.

## POPULAR MUSIC CHOICES

Every member is regularly encouraged to suggest songs or arrangements, which has led to a varied repertoire that members enjoy. A bigger variety of song types also helps attract a bigger variety of members, especially those new to barbershop.

We're always looking for low-pressure methods to improve singing skills. For example, we encourage

and promote internal and external workshops, Brigades, and other music education activities. Newer members appreciate that we compete in district contests with an eye toward improvement rather than a focus on scores.

## ACTIVE RECRUITING

We work to incorporate multiple methods to attract new members. All rehearsals are open to guests. We reach out to former members and invite friends and family to visit. We have public sing-alongs and invite other choruses to join us for a night of singing. Our director says at the end of each rehearsal, "If you had fun tonight, tell a friend and bring 'em next week!"

To continue and improve our outreach, we have built an active social media presence. New members Teresa Wen and Oliver Bichakjian have upgraded our website and marketing. We are using our improved social media on Facebook, Instagram, and Eventbrite to target potential new members and performance opportunities.

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH

We are very active in our community. Many members have expressed their appreciation to sing for charities, senior living communities, and farmers markets and to offer Singing Valentines. We have also held our first annual food drive in conjunction with a holiday sing-a-long. These activities appeal to existing and new members and are ways to become known to the public.

We are focused on how to appeal to new members and visitors and how to become better known to the public. Our goal is to continue to grow but continue our culture of music, friendship, learning, and opportunity. ■



Members of Oak City Sound perform "Hippopotamus For Christmas" alongside members of the Holiday Chorus, who learned a total of four songs for the chapter's holiday concert. Some of the Holiday Chorus members came via [meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com), with the majority being invited by chapter members.



# HELP SINGERS FIND YOU

## OAK CITY SOUND SHOWS WHY MEETUP.COM MAY DESERVE A SECOND LOOK

Leaders of my last two BHS chapters warned me about the poor results they'd seen when they'd tried to attract new singers through [meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com), a site/app that helps people connect with local hobbyists. "We canceled it because we don't get anything from it," they said. I understood their hesitancy to try again. Meetup is not an inexpensive way to look for singers, and those who used Meetup in 2024, 2023, and especially prior years probably saw less

activity than they would see today.

My experience in 2025 shows that when you use Meetup aggressively, you can stand out from other area groups and potentially draw good numbers of curious potential singers to your rehearsals. For **Oak City Sound** (Raleigh, NC area), the results speak for themselves. From May through December of 2025:

- We've had more than 109 people join our Meetup group to get updates on our group's activities.
- 41 of these individuals have visited our chapter at least one time
- Many of these guests re-visited our rehearsals multiple times, so we have been averaging six to eight guests per rehearsal, with as many as 14 guests during one rehearsal in July.
- So far, seven of these guests have joined our chapter, with others showing continued interest.

### WHY WE STARTED USING MEETUP

After moving to the Raleigh, NC area from Jacksonville in March 2025, I visited and soon joined Oak City Sound Chorus. They did a great job welcoming guests, but they wanted more of them. My **Big Orange Chorus** in Jacksonville had begun using Meetup aggressively late in 2024 and had experienced some success, so I asked Oak City Sound leadership for

**109 people have joined our Meetup group, and 41 have visited at least one chapter meeting, for an average of six to eight guests per rehearsal, with as many as 14 guests during one rehearsal in July.**



**Mark Roblez** is a 30-year Barbershopper with choruses in California, New Jersey, Georgia, Florida, and now North Carolina. [utahfan@rocketmail.com](mailto:utahfan@rocketmail.com)

permission to do the same.

I've since noted that Meetup seems to have gained traction compared to previous years. A 2023 report showed a nearly 40% increase in event registrations over the previous two years, and it seems to me that this growth is continuing today.

People seem to especially use Meetup when they move to a new city. For example, during our drive from Jacksonville to Raleigh, my wife used Meetup to find several biking groups that cater to specific types of bike rides and riders. This is what potential guests to your chorus could be doing when they move into your town. This is great news for areas where many people are moving.

## HOW TO ACTIVELY USE MEETUP TO ITS FULLEST

Even assuming Meetup has more users these days, I suspect that anything less than an aggressive approach will bring few people through your doors. Here is how we've learned to use Meetup to its fullest.

**The most useful features aren't free to your chapter.** Meetup is free for users but not for groups that want to post group activities on the site, create Meetup groups, or communicate with Meetup users. Depending on your level of service, it can cost around \$360 per year. You can sign up for a six-month membership, and Meetup sometimes offers introductory pricing for the first six months (\$125 or so), but the cost is certainly a factor to be considered.

**Make your group page descriptive and visually appealing.** With Oak City Sound Chorus, I saw that the current listing was years old, from when the chapter only had a men's chorus. With approval, I revised the page to show we had both a men's and mixed chorus and included photos of the group.

**Consider revising your Meetup name.** We are proudly Oak City Sound Chorus to the community, but people who are browsing hobby options online may fear that an established choral group would have a high barrier to entry. So, to users of

Meetup, our listing simply describes what we do: we are Raleigh Area A Cappella Singers.

**Post every rehearsal as an event.** This gives every member of your Meetup group (similar to "liking" a group's Facebook page) opportunities to see and RSVP to each rehearsal. Keep your group activity public, which helps entice new Meetup visitors to read past messages and join your Meetup group.

**Encourage chorus members to RSVP.** About 30 of the 109 members of our Meetup group are already members of the chapter. I regularly send chapter members Meetup links so they can RSVP for each of our events and rehearsals. The reason: each event/rehearsal shows prospective guests how many people plan to be there, and it's much more inviting for a prospective guest to see that 20+ people will be attending rather than only three or four. Chorus members have responded enthusiastically, and our Meetup page routinely shows 25+ RSVPs to each re-

### Come sing with us! Vocal workshop and rehearsal - Oak City Sound Chorus

Hosted by Mark R.

Raleigh Area A Cappella Singers  
4.9 ★★★★ 100 reviews

Details

Whether you are an experienced singer, or just like to sing in your car, come join us as our guest! The Oak City Sound Chorus, located in Cary, NC, is welcoming guests - men and women - who are interested in joining us in the world-wide community of a cappella singing. No experience is required; we provide music, voice training and an enjoyable singing experience under expert leadership. Our repertoire of music is fun and spans many styles - most songs are easy to learn and sing. Learning materials are provided to help you get started, and we sit you with a singing "buddy" so you can join in right away.

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Glen

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Come sing with us! Vocal workshop and rehearsal - Oak City Sound Ch...



Monday, Jan 12 - 6:45 PM to 8:30 PM EST  
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hearsal, which includes chorus members and guests.

**Personally welcome new Meetup members via chat.** I've enabled notifications so that I can see when a new person has joined the Meetup group or has RSVP'd to an event. I send each of them a personalized chat message, welcoming them to our Meetup group and letting them know of our next rehearsal date and time, plus directions. Some respond that they are planning to come, and a few have asked questions about the chorus. These non-chorus members who RSVP for rehearsals have shown up in person about 70% of the time.

**Regularly send messages to the entire Meetup group.** Roughly once a week, I update the group on chorus performances, chorus news, and the date and time of our next rehearsal. Everybody in your group receives these messages: chorus members, and all guests, whether or not they've attended a rehearsal.

**Be ready when a Meetup guest shows up at rehearsals**

Meetup can open a door that allows more guests to visit your rehearsal.

However, once the door is open, it is up to the director and chorus members to create an environment where these guests want to come back and to eventually join the chorus. Nearly everyone in the chorus must pitch in to make this work. In our case, the





Every person in this photo is a guest at a November 2025 rehearsal. **Oak City Sound** is the **Research Triangle Park Chapter** of the Barbershop Harmony Society, celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2025. The chorus has a strong community focus, conducting more than 15 full-chorus performances for local audiences last year, including a sold-out December Holiday Show with 50 singers on stage.

Oak City Sound has both a men's chorus and mixed chorus. The men's chorus has a storied history, with several trips to the BHS International chorus competition in past years. The mixed chorus was formed in 2024 and is the fastest growing part of the chapter. Meetup and other activities have helped the chorus grow by 14 members during this time.

chorus has been fantastic about taking on the challenge.

**Enhance your guest process.** Oak City Sound Chorus already had a pretty good process, but more guests showing up has shown the need for enhancements: more guest books, more name badges, more official greeters, more people trained to be “singing buddies,” etc.

**Examine your audition process.** If you are successful in attracting guests and helping them want to return, you'll use the audition process more often. There are many good potential processes for auditioning and onboarding new members; just know that once more guests are showing up, you'll need to have a defined process rather than simply wing it.

**Truly accommodate guests during meetings.** Joining an active chorus in rehearsals can feel to guests like

**Thirty of the 109 members of our Meetup group are already chapter members, who RSVP for each of our events and rehearsals. It's much more inviting for a prospective guest to see that 20+ people will be attending rather than only three or four.**

boarding a moving train. We've been tremendously helped by our director, Carol Stephenson, who has done a great job of accommodating and welcoming the sharp increase in guests. With sometimes 10 or more guests new to barbershop at a rehearsal, she takes the time to provide a brief ex-

planation of barbershop and teach a tag before jumping into the rehearsal. You can see it on the guest's faces: the delight in learning and singing a tag—many for the first time—with upwards of 30 people.

**Don't put all your eggs in one basket.** Meetup isn't our sole means of attracting guests. For example, this year we hosted a Holiday Chorus, in which folks could join us in rehearsals to learn four songs for our Christmas concert. While some Holiday Chorus singers came via Meetup, most learned about the opportunity by being invited by our regular chorus members. We had a total of 20 singers join our concert this way, with a total of 50 singers for our main event held in mid-December. Some of them have expressed interest in singing with us as chapter members in 2026. ■



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# in good TASTE

How non-barbershop performances helped judges calibrate in the never-ending search for "the line"



Barbershop is a living, breathing style of music based in tradition but also creative artistry. While the vast majority of performances are pretty mainstream, judges are prepared to see or hear something onstage that will challenge us and our fellow audience members. Fortunately, BHS audiences usually welcome being challenged—with caveats—by performers who try to show us new things, push creative boundaries, or expand our artform's artistic limits. The biggest caveat: our audiences only reward this when it is done in good taste.

**W**ho determines good taste in BHS contests? Over the course of years, audiences are the ultimate judges. In real time, Performance judges strive to represent the tastes and values of our diverse audience members in our scoring and evaluations. We also strive to encourage and support our performers, who are always looking at new and more impactful and artistic ways to entertain.

Like barbershop harmony itself, “good taste” is a living, shifting target, and movie PG or PG-13 ratings are a poor fit for illustrating BHS audience expectations. Because our

audiences tend to approve of a wide variety of songs that deal with adult themes and a wide spectrum of the human condition, at best we can say that we are not a G-rated hobby. Beyond that, much is up for debate and interpretation.

### IT'S A CHALLENGE TO "KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE"

The charge to know your audience is no small task. BHS competitors must make the effort to anticipate how their artistic choices will be received by people from a wide variety of ages and backgrounds, and who hold a wide variety of political, religious, and social views. It requires an awareness that a lyric or theme considered acceptable by one group may alienate members of another group. It also means being aware that perhaps an outfit, topic, gesture, or joke that some performers see as “in bounds” might reasonably be seen by others as provocative or disrespectful.

Performance judges share in this challenge to understand audiences, as we are tasked with the responsibility among judges to adjudicate questions of taste. We do this both during the contest and in the weeks and months following a contest, where we review results and potentially adjust guidance. We also offer performers guidance leading up to contests. (See Taste Resources sidebar)

Our *Performance Category Description* and a *Position Paper on*

THE JUDGING  
COMMUNITY NEITHER  
SHOULD BE NOR WANTS  
TO BE ON THE LEADING  
EDGE OF INFLUENCING  
BARBERSHOP'S ARTISTIC  
LIMITS; HOWEVER,  
NEITHER CAN JUDGES  
BE FAR BEHIND.

---

**Joe Hunter** is chair of the Taste Taskforce, a Performance judge, and a past Performance Category Specialist. He is also an active director, quartet, and coach. [jhunna1@aol.com](mailto:jhunna1@aol.com)



EDDIE HOLT/LORIN MAY



BHS audiences often love to see groups push artistic boundaries, such as the Ambassadors of Harmony's Silent Film set. While this 2019 performance was universally lauded, not every new and innovative set enjoys such a reception.

*Taste* (see Taste Resources sidebar) both provide guidance in exercising our judicial discretion to ascertain the current "line" of acceptability in our barbershop contest world. This is a dynamic and a moving target that we can only address at a given moment in time, since our Category Description utilizes concepts like "contemporary society's standards of cultural currency and sensitivity."

The judging community neither should be nor wants to be on the leading edge of influencing barbershop's artistic limits; however, neither can judges be far behind. Our relationship to the performers includes a responsibility to shepherd changes and also meter the rate of change. We must maintain a balance by encouraging creative risk-taking while still representing the best interests of our hobby.

## JUDGING NON-BARBERSHOPPERS "PERFORMING" ON OUR STAGES

Performance Category leadership frequently convenes in the hopes of achieving relative consensus and

to provide solid grounding to the Category. In the fall of 2024, the newly formed Taste Taskforce (see Taste Resources sidebar) created an exercise to help Performance judges calibrate for contemporary BHS audiences. This challenging "playlist" of contemporary performances (mostly outside of barbershop) pushed the envelope to varying degrees. All Taste Taskforce members, and eventually all Performance judges, individually watched these 26 performances to evaluate how they would be received on a BHS stage. After each performance, we:

- *noted whether this performance would generate a conference.* (Conferences are the occasional standup discussions among judges immediately after a contest set, allowing category members to discuss potential issues from that performer's set before they return to write down their individual scores.)
- *noted whether this performance would generate an advisory note* (more detailed guidance to a performer regarding a concerning aspect of their performance), or *instead some level of penalty up to and including disqualification.*
- *provided rationale in the comments section of the spreadsheet.*

When the Taste Taskforce later met, we were heartened to see

## TASTE RESOURCES

For more information, go to [barbershop.org/taste-resources](http://barbershop.org/taste-resources) to find:

- The Performance Category *Position Paper on Poor Taste*
- Links to the 26 non-barbershop performances that were evaluated, with notes
- The *Performance Category Description*
- A link to submit questions to the Contestability Suitability Committee

that even when we didn't begin in agreement, we achieved consensus on every performance using our guidance and Category Description language. In many ways, that discussion mirrored what occurs during a conference at a contest, just in longer form. The discussions were similar after the entire Performance Category completed the exercise and later met online.

Further discussion and guidance proceeded with the understanding that the judging community, and particularly the Performance Category, has the responsibility and custodianship of good taste with the aims of the furtherance of the Society's brand while still encourag-

THE TASTE TASKFORCE CREATED AN EXERCISE TO HELP PERFORMANCE JUDGES CALIBRATE FOR CONTEMPORARY BHS AUDIENCES. THIS CHALLENGING "PLAYLIST" OF CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCES (MOSTLY OUTSIDE OF BARBERSHOP) PUSHED THE ENVELOPE TO VARYING DEGREES.



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THE STUNNING, NEAR-PERFECT PERFORMANCE WOULD HAVE SCORED IN THE HIGH 90S IN PERFORMANCE ... UNTIL SHE DROPPED THE "F-BOMB." WE WOULD HAVE DISQUALIFIED THE SONG—RELUCTANTLY.

ing artistic expression, risk-taking, and expanding artistic boundaries. At times, these goals can be at odds with one another; in these cases, we use judicial discretion to best serve these multiple goals.

## HOW DID THE "PERFORMANCES" FARE?

Here are a few concrete examples taken from that exercise:

**One fly ruins a perfect soup.** A stunning, near-perfect performance of **Radiohead's** "Creep" by Effie Passero with **Postmodern Jukebox** would have scored in the high 90s in Performance ... until Effie dropped the "f-bomb," which is, in fact, in the original lyrics. While the language was authentic to the original, we universally deemed it inappropriate for a BHS stage and would have disqualified it—reluctantly.

**Yes to that dress.** Dolly Parton performed "9 to 5" in a chic gown that was somewhat revealing. We all perceived this as acceptable for a barbershop stage, not in small part because Dolly radiated wholesomeness throughout the performance. No penalty or conferences were recommended.

**Too risqué for BHS stages.** "Texas Hold 'Em" was a very popular and somewhat mainstream performance by Beyoncé. Her official video featured extremely revealing

## THE TASTE TASKFORCE

Following the 2024 International Contest, a Taste Taskforce was constituted, which is composed of current Performance leadership (Category Specialist Gary Steinkamp and Performance Board of Review members Dusty Schleier, Allen Otto, and Theresa Weatherbee) as well as Performance judges Blair Brown, Will Lagos, and past Category Specialists Mark Kettner and Marty Lovick. Past Category Specialist Joe Hunter serves as the Taste Taskforce Chair.

attire and arguably included some suggestive lyrics and movements. We all deemed it inappropriate for a BHS stage in topic, intent, and attire. It would have warranted a mid-level penalty.

**Not even close.** Marilyn Manson's cover of "Sweet Dreams" is a nightmarish, shocking performance that would have warranted a call for stoppage of the contest. While Marilyn Manson ticket-holders know what to expect at his concerts, the visuals and themes would be absolutely unacceptable to a BHS audience.

**Overly passionate interlude.** Meatloaf's iconic "Paradise By The Dashboard Light" enthralled some Performance judges with brilliant theatricality, storyline, and incredible performance chops. Others were concerned about the semi-graphic and overtly sexualized staging of an interlude during which Meatloaf and his female duet partner passionately kiss. After a lot of healthy back-and-forth, we came down with the judgment that this would warrant a medium-level penalty at least.

**Attire affects the equation.** While

In judging conferences, category members can immediately discuss potential issues within the set before assigning scores. The judging community is now providing more formal guidance to performers before contests, as well as including performers in its biannual discussions of tastes and standards.

attire is not specifically referenced in our Position Paper (see link in Taste Resources sidebar), it contributed to our decisions for many of these examples. We looked at attire that might be considered overly suggestive, revealing, or inappropriate for a barbershop contest, which generally aligns with contemporary standards. “Know your audience” continues to play a role. People going to a **Slipknot** or **Madonna** or **GWAR** concert have a whole different set of expectations regarding attire than an audience going to see a barbershop event.

We view this process of review and training as a healthy one and not as anything too revolutionary—it’s the price of admission for us as Performance judges. Hopefully, this exercise sparked some thoughts or maybe even caused some light bulbs to flash.

## MOVING FORWARD

The judging community has long engaged in informal reviews of controversial contest material that touches on matters of taste, patriotic

BECAUSE OUR AUDIENCES TEND TO APPROVE OF A WIDE VARIETY OF SONGS THAT DEAL WITH ADULT THEMES AND THE HUMAN CONDITION, AT BEST WE CAN SAY THAT WE ARE NOT A G-RATED HOBBY. BEYOND THAT, MUCH IS UP FOR DEBATE AND INTERPRETATION.

and religious concerns, and musical suitability. A more formal process will now take place twice a year, or more frequently if required. The performers, who are in fact the drivers of artistic change, will now partner and participate.

Again, contemporary standards for taste are always changing—what was once deemed acceptable may now be problematic. (See link to *Position Paper*.) The Society’s more recent

concerns regarding brand and public perception have long been an implicit element of our discussions; periodic reviews and adjustments will ensure that brand alignment is now an explicit element of this discussion.

Going forward, the C&J guidance will provide context and reference for standards of acceptability, but cannot extend outside BHS-sanctioned contests. There is no facility to track or address performers’ choices made at afterglows, private shows, etc.; however, C&J can react to such situations after the fact through education and consultancy.

C&J is already set up to provide education and consulting regarding taste and religious and patriotic matters in advance of performances. The Contestability Suitability Committee will now do so in questions of musical suitability for contest. A link to submit questions is on the Taste Resources page.

The ultimate goal here is alignment, education, and support. We want to both encourage risk-taking and artistic creativity while also supporting the BHS brand. ■

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# Mike Senter's best

This is my favorite tag. I had been saving it for ... well, I don't know what. But suppose I were to be hit by an bus, you out there in Tagland would have been deprived of this wonderful Mike Senter creation. That would be highly ungood.

Mike, of course, was the bass of our 1972 champ, the **Golden Staters**. We have featured his work before: "It Must Be That Look in Her Eyes," written for his lovely wife, Nancy.

Astute readers of this column may recall that this is the third tag from "I'm Always Chasing Rainbows" to be published. (The first two were by the **Buffalo Bills** and Earl Moon.) Member of the Songwriters Hall of Fame Harry Carroll adapted the melody from Chopin's "Fantaisie-Impromptu," so that was a pretty solid start. Lyricist Joseph McCarthy penned such hits as "Alice Blue Gown" and "You Made Me Love You (I Didn't Want to Do It)."

Now on to the tag. Actually, measures 1-4 of what you see before you are the end of the song proper; the tag itself is 5-8. You might want to sing (or teach) the latter before tackling the whole thing.

The first chord in 4 is truly special, with the bari and tenor in unison, after which they peel off chromatically in opposite directions to form a flavorful  $b^7$ . And then the  $i^7$  after that creates just the right feeling of melancholy.

True Confessions Department: Mike did not write the third-from-last chord. I did ... sort of. You see, my fingers slipped. So try the tag with and without this interesting intrusion. But with is quite cool, for even though the lead and tenor stay put, the root of the rogue chord moves from lead to tenor in the penultimate chord. Magic!

Yes, the tag is a bit long, but it is worth the time and effort to master it. Enjoy this special creation! ■



## "I'm Always Chasing Rainbows"

TTBB voicing

Mike Senter (1975)

SSAA voicing

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