

HISTORY OF BARBERSHOP

compiled by David Wright

Lesson 7: REFINEMENT

Other styles of vocal harmony. The "studio" style, a first cousin of the modern barbershop style, was developing under the influence of Gene Puerling, whose 50's group, the Hi Los, had set the pace. Puerling continued to sing and arrange in this style, with the group Singers Unlimited. This music has always held the fascination of barbershoppers because of its *a capella* style and its emphasis on tuning and good vocal production. Another group that has provided us with some fine harmony is the British concert group, the King's Singers.

The gospel style became more sophisticated, and eventually both the white and black quartets were largely displaced by solo singing and other vocal styles which depend heavily on instrumentation. Here are some samplings of fairly recent white and black quartets.

S. K. Grundy. Many of the Confederates' most memorable songs were arranged by the man from Springfield, Missouri, S. K. Grundy, one of our all time greats. He directed the orchestra of a Baptist College in Springfield, Missouri. He wrote lots of barbershop arrangements, many of which were considered daring, audacious, and unstylistic. They contained many unusual twists. One of Grundy's masterpieces was "A Nightingale Sang In Berkeley Square," which he arranged for the Confederates, and revived some twenty-five years later by the Vocal Majority. In hindsight, many feel that Grundy was ahead of his time. Those who heard his work didn't understand it and Grundy was written off as a "wild man." But he was a superb musician, and in the sixties he went to California to do vocal and instrumental arrangements for Lawrence Welk. Many of us recall quartets appearing on the show, usually featuring bass Larry Hooper and tenor Joe Feeney singing songs undoubtedly arranged by S. K. It seems that alcoholism cost him his job with Welk, at which time he returned to Springfield, where he continued to deteriorate from alcoholism until his death.

Society's headquarters moved to Kenosha. Ever since 1943 the organization's headquarters had been in rented offices in Detroit. In the late forties President O.H. (King) Cole had advanced the idea of a permanent home. A fund was established and over the years several plans were proposed. In 1955 a new campaign was developed and a search was initiated to find a location in the Chicago area. Eventually a mansion in Kenosha, Wisconsin, on Lake Michigan was purchased at a cost of \$75,000. On June 3, 1957, the Society moved its headquarters to this location. It was named Harmony Hall and remained the headquarters of our Society until the relocation to Nashville in 2007.

1957 Convention, Los Angeles. Quartet winners were the first from the South Western District since the early days of the Oklahoma dynasty. They were the Lads of Enchantment, from Albuquerque, New Mexico. Second place honors were taken by West Coasters, from Pasadena, (Barrie Best, future Executive Director, sang tenor) who were singing the arrangements of that music intellectual Val Hicks. One of their contest songs was "When I Leave The World Behind" with a tag (not the now famous one) that featured the II⁰⁷ to I finale, which was then controversial. This arrangement (later published by the Society) was Val's first big splash, and this Los Angeles convention was the first International he attended. He was on the judging panel.

Chorus champs were the Berkeley Californians, directed by Dave Stevens, the fellow who had caught the barbershop bug two years earlier in Miami.

The Buffalo Bills Sing In "The Music Man." In 1957, the Buffalo Bills, and the whole world of barbershopping, got a lucky break. Meredith Willson, who had a radio show in California, had written a musical about his hometown of Mason City, Iowa, and had incorporated a barbershop quartet into the script, patterned after a quartet from his boyhood called the Rusty Hinges. One day Willson sent his secretary to the store to buy some barbershop for his program. She returned with something that was not barbershop, so he sent her back. She returned with the record of the top five Society winners from the latest contest, and he said that was good, but she could do better. The third time she went to Schirmer's and asked. She was given one of the Buffalo Bills' record albums. This was what Willson was looking for. He became fond of their singing, and got in touch with them one day when he was appearing at a lecture date in Buffalo. He suggested they come to New York and

interview for his new musical, "The Music Man." They did, and got the part. Baritone Dick Grapes felt he couldn't leave his job in Buffalo, so they found a replacement, "Scotty" Ward (who had previously sung in the Great Scott's Quartet from Steubenville, Ohio), and took on the adventure. They sang several years on Broadway with this successful venture, and sang in the motion picture. Over the years, the Bills continued to sing in concerts and on chapter shows. Their last performance was on May 24, 1967, at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York City, booked by "an avid barbershopper from Chicago." (Vern Reed's words.) When their career finally ended, they had sung 728 concerts, 216 television shows, 1,510 performances on the legitimate stage, 626 conventions 675 radio shows, 672 nightclub and hotel appearances, 137 state fair performances, 15 record albums, and a major motion picture. Needless to say, this has never been equaled, nor is it likely to be.

Walter Latzko. During this period, the Buffalo Bills had many professional opportunities. They sang on Arthur Godfrey's radio and television show, where they met a talented CBS staff arranger named Walter Latzko, who was to provide them with musical arrangements for their records and performances over the years. He also arranged for the Chordettes, who also sang on the Godfrey show. Latzko became a barbershopper and certified Arrangement judge, and provided those audacious arrangements sung by the Sun Tones (e.g. "West Side Story Medley"), and later, the Blue Grass Student Union (e.g. "The Music Man" songs).

Connett becomes first field man. At the Mid-Winter meeting of 1958, Floyd Connett was hired as our society's first "field man". He had been, as we have discussed, a prominent director, coach, arranger, judge, and Voice Expression Category Specialist. Floyd did much to development the quality of barbershop music education. He drove a Society owned Dodge Sierra station wagon that he literally wore out, traveling around the country visiting chapter meetings and holding workshops. Those who recall this man say that he possessed a truly remarkable ability to teach craft. He had fellows doing things they never imagined they could do. He was perhaps the first (certainly one of the first) to emphasize vowel matching. Floyd worked for the Society about three years, after which time he went to work full time for the Sweet Adelines, a job he maintained until his death in 1967 of heart failure. He was instrumental in the design of the Sweet Adelines judging categories, which remain intact today. In 1962 he helped set up a four category system consisting of Sound, Expression, Music, and Showmanship. It is of interest that, ten years later, the Society's system would change to four categories.

Val Hicks recalls that at the time of the 1957 Convention, the judges had a card numbered 1 to 200 on which they marked off the total score for two of each competitor; they were thus expected to avoid doublings. Val recalls that after forty or so competitors, all the slots filled up, so that judges were prone to slot a quartet so as to fill in an unmarked number. Val recalls Chairman of Judges Joe Jones, a somewhat dictatorial character, getting up at the judges briefing and emphatically telling the judges, "Okay, no tie scores. Any questions?" Floyd Connett then stood up and said, "I have something to say to the Voice Expression judges: Gentlemen, let the chips fall".

Semi-finals, finals changed. In 1958 the format of the International Quartet Contest was changed. Previously there were 15 semi-finalists and five finalists in a "medalist" contest. In '58 there were 20 semi-finalists and ten finalists, a format that remains intact today.

1958 Convention, Columbus. Our new quartet champs were again from the South Western District, this time from Mecca itself — Tulsa, Oklahoma. They were the Gay Notes, coached by Floyd Connett. Bass Mo Rector, who did much of the group's arranging, was the first gold medalist who would later win another gold medal ('69, Mark IV). In the following example note the skill with which the quartet executes volume changes. This was in the trend set by the Confederates two years earlier.

Chorus champs were from Memphis, Tennessee, directed by Buzz Busby.

Bob "Moose" Haeger. He is the brother of Buzz Haeger, and like his brother, was a talented arranger and coach. Some time in the late fifties a very unfortunate series of events marred the history of our society. Bob owned a restaurant in the Chicago area to which he invited prominent quartets like the Buffalo Bills and the Confederates, promising to pay them a fee plus expenses in order to create exposure for barbershop. This did not turn out to be a financially sound endeavor, and he soon was in the red to the point that he could not pay the quartets to whom he owed money. The quartets complained to the society that not only had they not been paid, but that Bob seemed to take a cavalier attitude regarding the default. Concurrently, it seems there were charges that Bob had pocketed profits from a show to raise money for International qualifiers. These issues became so bitter that Bob Haeger's membership in SPEBSQSA was revoked by the International Board. Not until (1986) did the Board reverse this decision, largely through the influence of well-known arranger Jack Baird. In the meantime, Moose continued to do some arranging and coaching.

1959 Convention, Chicago. The Chorus Contest was won by a fantastic little chorus from Pekin, Illinois. This remarkable group, under the direction of Jim Moses, would win again in 1963 and 1968, making them one of only five choruses ever to win three or more times. (Other four: Louisville Thoroughbreds, Dallas Vocal Majority, Santa Fe Springs, CA, Masters of Harmony, and St. Charles, MO, Ambassadors of Harmony.) In addition, they placed second in 1958 and 1962. Incredibly, this chapter no longer exists. Winners of the Quartet Contest were the Four Pitchikers, from Springfield, Missouri. One of their notable songs was "Lora-Bell Lee", arranged by S. K. Grundy, in which the quartet sustained a swing tempo, without feeling the urge to break it up with *ad lib* passages. This is somewhat anachronistic and probably reflects the musical instincts of the quartet's coach, Grundy, who was becoming known more for his arrangements than for his coaching. Grundy had "hand picked" this quartet. The Four Pitchikers also sang two other Grundy classics; "That Tumble Down Shack In Athlone" and "Alexander's Ragtime Band."

Harmony, Incorporated, is formed. In February 1959, a second female barbershop organization, Harmony, Incorporated, was formed. This organization was split-off from Sweet Adelines triggered by dissatisfaction over certain issues. One had to do with the governance of Sweet Adelines, which some felt was not sufficiently democratic. Another issue was the discriminatory clause, which excluded women of color. (The Society also had such a clause until 1964.) By 1959 five chapters in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Ontario had withdrawn from Sweet Adelines over the latter policy. These women established the new organization, which embraced the Society's judging system while Sweet Adelines developed their own in the early 60s. Harmony, Incorporated, is today a thriving but small organization, with about 2000 members in 60 chapters, concentrated mainly (but not exclusively) in the U.S northeast and Canada.

1960 Convention, Dallas. When the winners were announced at the Dallas convention, some were surprised. When fifth through second place medalists were announced many felt that the popular Nighthawks had won. But to their astonishment it was the Evans Quartet, from Salt Lake City. The Evans brothers' father was a vaudeville quartet man, from whom they learned and gave to us many old tidbits, including the familiar "stutter chorus" to "Ida, Sweet As Apple Cider". But the song most associated with the Evans Quartet is "I'd Love To Fall Asleep And Wake Up In My Mammy's Arms."

Chorus champs were from San Antonio, Texas.

More uses by arrangers of stylistic devices. The new school of arrangers, men like Grundy, Hicks, Stevens, Latzko, Rector, and some great woman contributors like Renee Limberg (later Craig — over the years Renee arranged for many great groups, including the Livingston, N. J. Chorus when they won in 1967 and 1970), the traditional devices began to be exploited more and more, so that there was a rich variety of truly novel and interesting ideas coming forth. It was as if these folks had a newfound freedom, and sometimes they went to excess. Here are some examples:

"Somebody Stole My Gal," sung by the San Diego Serenaders (successive key changes)

"Nobody's Sweetheart," sung by the Sun Tones
(fancy half step key change)

"Roll Out Of Bed," sung by the Nighthawks (bell chords and swipe)

"Last Night On The Back Porch," sung by the Gaynotes
(bell chords — this is presumably Mo Rectors arranging)

Over the years it the duty fell to the Arrangement Category and later the Music Category to sort out artistry from excess, tastefulness from gaudiness.

1961 Convention, Philadelphia. The Chorus from Dundalk Maryland, directed by Bob Johnson, won with 164 men on stage. To this day this is the largest chorus ever to compete in the International Chorus Contest. And in the quartet contest, the society was swept off its feet by a quartet champion that gave us a whole new standard of excellence.

Suntones. They represented a whole new generation of class. They were young; they were handsome; they were smooth; they were tuned; they were fantastic. They became our most admired and emulated quartet ever. When barbershoppers heard them sing this song they just couldn't believe their ears. In subsequent years the Sun Tones would make about ten record albums, astounding the barbershop world with their smoothness and vocal agility. These records are now considered to be classics. Their exotic arrangements were done by Walter Latzko, who had done many arrangements for the Buffalo Bills.

They did incredible medleys from Broadway Musicals, typified by the "West Side Story Medley". Much of the material on their records was not contest-worthy barbershop (according to the Arrangement Category's definition), prompting some criticism amongst the admiration. By and large, though, the Suntones won the admiration of the barbershop world.

Many barbershoppers cut their teeth on the Sun Tones' music (the author, for example). Most agree they were the greatest quartet up to that time and for years to follow. Some would say the greatest till this day. The Suntones continued to sing into the 1980's, with Drayton Justus (lead of the '71 champs, Gentlemen's Agreement) replacing lead Bob Franklin in the later years. In the early 1990's the latter foursome came out of retirement to make some select appearances. They appeared at the 1991 AIC Show in Louisville where they sang one of their songs with Bob Franklin — a special moment.

Rudy Hart, the Hartsmen. and the first HEP school. In August of 1961, at Winona, Minnesota, the first HEP (Harmony Education Program) school was conducted, by the Rudy Hart, from Michigan City, Indiana, who was head of the Musical Activities Program and had conceived the idea of HEP. Registration at this school was approximately five hundred, to everyone's surprise. Courses were conducted in arranging, quartet coaching, chorus directing, stage craft, lighting, and barbershop craft. On the faculty was Bob Johnson. This eventually developed into Harmony College. Rudy was a prolific arranger, inspired early on by Bud Arberg. He joined the Society in 1946, served on the International Board from 1957 to 1963, and directed the Michigan City chorus to the International Championship in 1956. In 1962 he organized an *a cappella* (non-Society) chorus of 16 men called the Hartsmen. They made their debut on the AIC. show of the 1963 convention in Toronto, and received an incredible five-minute standing ovation. This chorus is still performing today. Regrettably, Rudy Hart withdrew from the Society in the mid sixties. He should be remembered as one of our great early arrangers and one of the fathers of our educational program.

Bob Johnson. In the late fifties, Dean Snyder had recommended Bob Johnson to be on the Society's Music Committee, and in January of 1962 he was offered, and accepted, the job of Director of Musical Activities. This was a position he was to occupy until 1982. Under this dedicated and strong-willed person, our Society's music programs and Harmony Education Program would improve drastically. Although the first annual HEP schools had already commenced, he developed the concept into what today is Harmony College. Bob Johnson's forceful, sometimes overbearing personality is an unforgettable memory for anyone who knew him, or to anyone who attended Harmony College in the 70's. He was an outspoken advocate of the "keep-it-barbershop" ideology that sprung up in the sixties in reaction to the musical diversity which was spreading through the Society at the time, most notably epitomized by the repertoire and recordings of the Suntones. To his credit, he forged a strong, competent, and active music staff in Kenosha, a tradition of excellence that remains today.

1962 Convention, Kansas City. This was the second convention to be hosted by the city in which O. C. Cash and Rupert Hall had first conceived the Society. The Muehlebach Hotel was the headquarters. The Suntones must have been a hard act to follow. The winning quartet was the Gala Lads, from Alhambra, California.

In the Chorus contest, the Thoroughbreds won the first of seven victories they would capture to date. The director was Jim Wise. All subsequent Thoroughbred victories would be directed by Jim Miller, who also directed Cincinnati's Southern Gateway Chorus to gold in 1992.

Val Hicks brings the Osmonds. Back in 1959, on February 6, Val Hicks, who was directing a Sweet Adelines chorus in Salt Lake City, took his chorus north to nearby Brigham City, Utah to sing at a church fund-raising event. (Val is a devout Mormon.) One of the other acts at this event was four little boys from Ogden, Utah, four, six, eight, and ten years old, singing in harmony. They were singing three part harmony, with two of them singing melody. Val, who was an elementary school music teacher at the time, was very impressed with the quality of their voices and their ability to stay in tune. It so happened that this day was Val's birthday, and after the show his Sweet Adeline ladies gathered near the stage to sing "Happy Birthday" to Val, after which they presented a cake. While they were cutting the cake Val noticed the little boys eying it hungrily, and offered them some. The parents of the boys came up and talked to Val, and the mother asked him where he bought the four part arrangements. Val responded that he did them himself. The mother asked him if he felt her boys could sing four part harmony, and Val said it depended on how vocally independent the four year old was. Could he hold his part? She asked him to work with her boys, and Val agreed to do so. He found that indeed the littlest was able to sing the melody by himself, and he taught them their very first four part arrangement, "I Want A Girl." These boys were the Osmond Brothers. Val became their arranger, coach, and local booking agent, and proudly introduced them to the barbershop world.

Osmonds sing for Molly Reagan and Doc Nelson. At the 1962 Kansas City convention, on the mezzanine of the Muehlebach Hotel, Val was talking with two grand old gentlemen, Molly Reagan and Doc Nelson, then in their sixties,

reminiscing about how their junior high school teacher, a woman, had introduced them to harmony. (Recall, they were both from Canton, Illinois, where they had sung in the Stair Step Four.) they mentioned a song called "Take Me Back To Baby Land" which they had sung together as youths. It so happened that Val had brought the Osmond family with him to Kansas City, and this was one of the songs in their repertoire. He went to a hotel phone, called Mr. Osmond, and asked him to bring the boys down. Then he took Molly and Doc to an empty ballroom to hear the boys sing. He instructed the boys to sing their opener, followed by "Take Me Back To Baby Land." A crowd of fifty or more people gathered around. As the two elderly men listened, tears filled their eyes.

The Osmonds sang their first big barbershop show in Pasadena, California, in 1963, an event that made the front cover of the Harmonizer.

1963 Convention, Toronto. Recognizing the importance of the Canadian contribution in our growth, our society held its 25th Convention in that great country, for the first time. The Canadians were rooting for their native sons, the Nighthawks. The Nighthawks did in fact win one round. Another was taken by California's Sidewinders. And the third was won by some upstarts from Chicago called the Four Renegades. But although they won none of the battles, the Town and Country Four, from Pittsburgh, won the war.

The little chorus from Pekin, Illinois won the Chorus Contest, for the second time.

It was at this convention that the rule barring blacks from membership was revoked. It was too late. The black tradition of harmonizing had long since migrated toward soul music.

Nighthawks, and other greats who "never made it." Through the years, there have been great quartets that, for one reason or another, never won a gold medal, although it seems they were deserving. The first great "also-ran" was Glenn Howard's Capitol City Four who placed second at the very first contest in 1939. Another great quartet from the forties was the Serenaders from Kansas City, who placed second several times. But probably the most lauded non-winner was the Nighthawks, who placed second in 1963, medaled four times, and placed in the top ten as late as 1968. They had the brightest of the bright sounds, which may have prevented them from winning; they could peel paint. They gave us the haunting ballad "Brother Can You Spare A Dime".

Other great "almost" quartets: Capitol City Four (1939,1941), Gipps-Amberline Four (1944), Sundowners (1966 - 1971), Pacificaires (1970-1974), Vagabonds (1975-1977), and the remarkable 139th Street Quartet (top ten every year from 1976 to 1993, with the exception of 1978 when they did not compete).

Use of props allowed. In 1964 limited and reasonable use of props was allowed for both choruses and quartets.

1964 Convention, San Antonio. The home state representatives from El Paso won the Chorus Contest, directed by Lou Laurel. Quartet Championship was captured by the high and bright sound of the very popular Sidewinders, from Riverside, California. Their singing exuded the smoothness and finesse of lead singer Joe Daniels. (Joe died in 1987). One notes also the brilliance of their sound. There seemed to be a number of treble sounding quartets emanating from the west, which some referred to as the "west coast sound."

HEP has three schools, five courses. In July and August of 1964, three weekend schools were held around the country offering courses in Quartet Training, Chorus Directing, Arranging, Public Relations, and Bulletin Editing. Bob Johnson was in command, and taught Chorus Directing. Val Hicks taught arranging. Students could take one class only. Enrollment cost was \$25.

1965 Convention, Boston. This year provided us with one of our most exciting quartets ever — the Four Renegades, from Skokie and Oak Park, Illinois, and Gary, Indiana. This was the first of several championship quartets to be coached by the great Lyle Pilcher. Tenor was Buzz Haeger. This quartet had been formed in 1956 when Buzz Haeger was asked to join a quartet called Up 'N Atoms who had lost their baritone. Buzz wanted a name change and suggested "Four Renegades." This quartet included veteran quartet man Joe Sullivan singing tenor. Coach Lyle Pilcher rotated the top three parts, which resulted in Haeger singing tenor and Sullivan lead. In late '59 or early '60 Jim Foli joined the quartet as baritone. This combination

medaled in 1962 and 1963. Early in '64 Ben Williams replaced Sullivan as lead and this combination won the gold on their second attempt. Many have remarked that they didn't have exceptional voices, but somehow it all went together well. Audiences loved it. One of their most memorable show tunes was "That's A-Plenty".

This quartet became one of the busiest and most popular of all time. They sang 40-42 weekends a year and had two to three times that many inquiries. They sang the circuit of chapter shows for six years after their victory, and would have continued, had not Buzz Haeger begun losing his tenor voice. His falsetto began to deteriorate as early as 1969 when the quartet sang a string of 41 shows in 17 days on a USO tour in the Far East. They retired at the 1971 Convention in New Orleans, and many tears were shed in Lloyd Steinkamp's hotel room as they sang their last songs. Bass Tom Felgin would later become our third double gold medalist, with Chicago News, in 1981.

The chorus contest was won by Miami.

Keep it dry. At the International Board meeting in Boston, the word went out that District Officers and Area Councilors were to urge their chapters not to allow alcohol to be consumed during meetings. (Interesting contrast to the first few meetings in 1938, when the press reported that beer was flowing freely.)

1966 Convention, Chicago. The Louisville Thoroughbreds won their second International Championship in 1966. They were directed by Jim Miller and coached by Ed Gentry, who was a judge in the Arrangement Category. He remained for many years an influential coach and sound expert.

Quartet winners were Lyle Pilcher's second major male quartet success, the Auto Towners, from Dearborn, Michigan, near Detroit. Tenor Al Rehkop wrote the song "In My Brand New Automobile". In the recording one notes how well they ring the open chord of "cold." The lead was in full command, with a pleasant vibrato. The phrasing was smooth, reflecting the musicality of the great coach. Pilcher's hallmark was finesse. Tenor Al Rehkop and lead Glen Van Tassell would become the second and third double gold medalists, singing with the Gentlemen's Agreement in 1971. Van Tassell would sing baritone in the Gentlemen's Agreement, becoming the first double gold medalist to win singing two different parts.

Picked choruses. At the urging of Musical Services Director Bob Johnson, the Board strongly disapproved of "picked choruses," resulting when a chapter or chapter chorus is formed by allowing only highly qualified singers to participate. Today auditioning processes are commonplace.

"Shading" is out. And in a Harmonizer article, Voice Expression Category Specialist Howard Mesecher formally buried the term "shading," saying it was meaningless as a musical term outside the barbershop world, and within that realm it was ambiguous. He proposed the term "interpretive dynamics."

1967 Convention, Los Angeles. The quartet winner this year was the first to win from the North Eastern District — the Four Statesmen, with members from four states: Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Connecticut, and Massachusetts. This quartet was formed at a quartet workshop in the Northeastern District. This group continues, to a lesser degree, the smooth, lyrical, singing style of the Auto Towners.

Livingston, New Jersey won the chorus contest.

Lou Perry. A man who was doing a lot of arranging in those days was Lou Perry, a trumpet player and jazz musician of the forties who developed an interest in barbershop harmony. Lou had helped the Four Statesmen to organize, and later was coach and mentor to the Boston Common. He served with distinction as an Arrangement judge from the Arrangement Category reformation of 1972 until 1990 and was a most influential musical spokesman and philosopher through the 70's and 80's. Lou developed an elegantly simple arranging style and strongly urged other arrangers to "respect the song." Even today his arrangements are probably sung in contest more often than those of any other single arranger.