

HISTORY OF BARBERSHOP

compiled by David Wright

Lesson 9: REFORM

1981 Convention, Detroit. Detroit became the first four-time convention city (Salt Lake City becoming the second in 2005). Louisville became a six-time chorus winner with a rousing performance of "Mardi Gras Medley", arranged by Ed Waesche, that exploited the use of props in a most creative way, and is remembered today as one of the most stirring moments in barbershop history.

In the Quartet Contest, the Chicago News stole the day, making bass Tom Felgin our third double gold medalist. Lyle Pilcher was the coach. Their tag of "Gang That Sang Heart Of My Heart" is simple, but a classic.

1982 Convention, Pittsburgh. The Dallas Vocal Majority won the Chorus Contest singing "You Can Have Every Light On Broadway" and "Redhead." The newly formed Rocky Mountain District asserted itself, providing the Quartet Champs. They were the Classic Collection from Denver, Colorado. Their arrangement of "Oh You Beautiful Doll" shows off the fine arranging abilities of Greg Lyne, who also coached the quartet.

Greg Lyne. He was the "boy wonder" of barbershop, entering the scene as a youth in Kansas City. One of his earliest barbershop experiences was getting to listen to the Buffalo Bills warm up as they prepared to perform at the state fair. Barbershoppers were amazed at his ability to discern chords. Greg has an impeccable ear for harmony, pitch memory, and a motivating personality. He wrote the arrangement of "Who'll Take My Place When I'm Gone," popularized by the Dealer's Choice and the Vocal Majority. Greg earned a Ph.D. in choral music, sang baritone in the Dealers Choice after Brian Beck retired, directed the Chicago area Lombard Chorus to several medals and an International Championship in 1987. He then moved to California, directing the Los Angeles area chorus Masters Of Harmony to the International Championship in 1990, 1993, and 1996. He is one of the Society's foremost coaches and chorus directors. He served as Musical Services Director from 1997 to 2005. Lyne was inducted into the Society Hall of Fame in 2013.

1982 Sweet Adelines Chorus Champion, Gem City. The chorus scene in Sweet Adelines has no one chorus that dominates as has the Dallas Vocal Majority has in the men's competition. But this chorus, directed by Jean Barford (who is also a judge and coach) has won gold more than any other, and they well demonstrate the big chorus sound that had developed in Sweet Adelines in only 12 years since their International Chorus competition had commenced in 1973. This chorus is known for its high-energy performances.

Bob Johnson retires; Joe Liles takes over. Bob Johnson, to whom we owe the quality of our present day music programs, including Harmony College, retired in 1982 after an illustrious career in barbershopping. His legacy will be with us always. That September, Joe Liles became our new Director of Music Education and Services. He eventually became Executive Director. He is a prolific arranger and composer of barbershop songs. He and colleague Frank Marzocca composed such contest standards as "Old Folks Barbershop Ball," "Goodbye Means The End Of My World," and "I Miss Mother Most Of All." An example is his composition "The Moment I Saw Your Eyes", popularized by the Gas House Gang in 1993. Like many of Joe's songs, this one is a favorite with both men and women. Joe also excels as a music educator and has brought many creative ideas and methods into barbershop craft (e.g. his "quartet method" for learning notes). He is one of the most influential Society men of modern times.

1983 Convention, Seattle. Brian Beck, baritone of the Dealer's Choice, became the fourth double gold medalist, and the second one to do it singing two different parts. In the Side Street Ramblers, Beck sang lead as they took the '83 championship. He is a talented arranger and composer. Their song "I'll Always Welcome Back My Sally" was composed and arranged by baritone Brian Beck. One of the memorable moments of the Seattle convention came when the Ramblers rendered the now famous "Cry" tag, with its gripping unison spread.

Chorus Champs: the Phoenicians, for the third time.

Dave Stevens delivers famous address. Harmony College had been opening the week with a keynote address. In 1983 it was given by Dave Stevens. His discourse "What Are We Trying To Preserve" has become one of the most memorable and beloved events in barbershop history. The speech was recorded on video and is linked to the Society's website at <http://barbershop.org/news-a-events-main/378-dave-stevens-qwhat-are-we-trying-to-preserveq.html>.

1984 Convention, St. Louis. The Chorus Championship was once again taken by the Louisville Thoroughbreds, for the seventh time. The Quartet winner was the Rapsallions, from Ohio, coached by the veteran Don Clause. The tall, young bass Jeff Oxley was indeed a commanding figure on stage, which, together with their aggressive style and forceful singing, gave this quartet an imposing image many of us will never forget.

One quartet, the Harrington Brothers of Louisville, received from one Interpretation judge a perfect score of 100 on their rendition of "I Wouldn't Trade The Silver In My Mother's Hair". (They replaced "I" and "my" by "we" and "our.") It was indeed a magnificent performance.

Judging system reacts to oversinging, sets range limits. The Gateway City's third barbershop convention has been called "the year of the scream." Many felt that loud singing was being rewarded over finesse. Also extremely high voicings were sung by both quartets and choruses, some choruses asking their leads to sing high B-flat and even C. At the Category School at Chicago's DePaul University in August there was much reaction. The Arrangement Category, under Category Specialist Al Baker, set explicit upper bound limits on register for quartets and choruses as follows: D for tenor, G for lead, F for baritone, C for bass; notice of such was sent out to all quartets.

Dave Stevens retires; Burt Szabo takes over. In 1984 Dave Stevens, who had been in charge of the Society's publications since 1969, retired. He left a legacy of accomplishment, including the Arrangers Manual, a virtual encyclopedia of barbershop arranging techniques. To take over these duties, the Society hired Dr. Burt Szabo, an experienced music educator, director, and Arrangement judge. As we noted, Szabo had been the prime leader in creating the Arrangement Category in 1971.

1985 Convention, Minneapolis. This convention was the scene, on July 5, 1985, of the first barbershop wave, a phenomenon that recurs whenever the crowd gets bored. Also this was the first year of the "Sing with the Champs" fund raiser, in which a barbershopper pays to sing a song with his favorite International Championship quartet.

And in the chorus competition, it was the Vocal Majority, for the fourth time.

But it was the quartet winners who stole the week, and created much discussion. In a set that exploited the visual aspect far beyond anything done before, the New Tradition of California took the prize. In their final routine they sang in the roles of the Marx Brothers, and most memorable performance. Their song "Mother, Kiss Your Boy Goodbye", arranged by Tom Gentry, became a classic. Bass John Miller became our fifth double gold medalist. He had sung bass in Grandma's Boys.

Tom Gentry. Arranger Tom Gentry, who arranged "Mother Kiss Your Boy Goodbye", "No One Knows You Any Better Than Your M-A-Double-M-Y", and "Smile", has been an influence in barbershop, not only as arranger, but as Music Category Specialist, coach, and harmony College faculty member.

Rules change regarding props, time limits. At the Mid-Winter meeting it was decided that sound-producing props could be used by quartets and choruses. In another significant move, the time limits established some thirty years ago were changed. Singing time was now to be limited to not less than three and one half minutes and not more than six and one half minutes. These new limits remain intact until time limits were abolished in the reforms of 1993.

1986 Convention, Salt Lake City. The second convention to be held in Salt Lake City had the first quartet contest to which were invited a quartet representative from BABS, the British association, and SNOBS, the Swedish society. Gilt Edge, representing BABS, placed 48th (of 50), and the Happy Nite Quartet, representing SNOBS, placed 41st. The quartet winner

was the Rural Route 4, of Kansas City, Missouri. They epitomized quiet, refined singing, which seemed to be the order of the day in contrast to what many viewed as excessive gimmickry and loudness of the preceding few years. The Rural Route Four had been competing at International since 1976, with a couple of years missed. They warmed the hearts of listeners with their beautiful rendition of "Tie Me To Your Apron Strings Again". Thirty five years ago this same song had been sung by another Central States District quartet, the Four Teens, in their championship bid.

Chorus Champs were the Alexandria Harmonizers, of Alexandria, Virginia. It was the first championship to be won by Bud Arberg's old chapter, where barbershop craft was first introduced nearly four decades before.

The Osmond Brothers appeared on stage as special guests of the Society. They entertained the conventioners with several of their old songs, recognized their old friend and coach Val Hicks, then brought on four young Osmonds, who sounded just like their fathers 25 years earlier. Needless to say, they brought down the house.

1986 Sweet Adelines Champions, *Ambiance*. The Sweet Adelines' quartet champions would be one of the most influential quartets. *Ambiance*, in their first try, became Queens of Harmony in 1986 in Philadelphia. Their ability to handle unusual material with extreme voicings gained admiration from the barbershop world and attracted the attention of the greater world of *a cappella* music. An interview aired on National Public Radio's Morning Edition on April 10, 1990 elicited a huge response upon playing a portion of *Ambiance's* recording of Gershwin's "Rhapsody In Blue", adapted, lyricized, and arranged by David Wright.

1986 Mid-Winter Convention. The Mid-Winter Convention that year heralded the first International Seniors Quartet Championship, held every year since during this convention. Winners since 1986 are:

- 1986 George Bagish memorial Quartet
- 1987 Close Harmony Tradition
- 1988 Silvertones
- 1989 Bayou City Music company
- 1990 Grandma's Beaus
- 1991 Old Kids On The Block
- 1992 One More Time
- 1993 Rockies IV
- 1994 The New and Improved Industrial Strength Mini-Chorus
- 1995 Reminisce
- 1996 Fatherly Advice
- 1997 Saturday's Heroes
- 1998 Jurassic Larks
- 1999 Tri-County Reclamation Project
- 2000 Over Time
- 2001 Harmony
- 2002 Chicago Shuffle
- 2003 The Barons
- 2004 Downstate Express
- 2005 Texoma Sound
- 2006 Antique Gold
- 2007 Friendly Advice
- 2008 Eureka!
- 2009 Audacity
- 2010 Resisting-A-Rest
- 2011 Over Easy
- 2012 Rusty Pipes
- 2013 Border Patrol
- 2014 Faces 4 Radio
- 2015 Saturday Evening Post
- 2016 High Priority
- 2017 Party of Five

1987 Convention, *Hartford*. The first International Contest ever held in Hartford, Connecticut was taken by the Interstate Rivals of Louisville and Cincinnati, who were second in '86 and third in '85. They exuded an unusually smooth

singing style.

The chorus contest featured a new format this year — a second round for the top six finalists. And the contest was won (at last!) by the West Towns Chorus from Lombard, Illinois, under the directorship of Greg Lyne. This chorus had placed second in the previous three International Contests.

Joe Liles becomes Executive Director. Since 1978 the Executive Directorship had been in the capable hands of the highly respected and beloved Hugh Ingram. In 1988 Hugh, 60, fell ill and died. Joe Liles expressed interest in the job and was hired, marking the first time a person of such musical credentials has occupied the office. Mel Knight, formerly an Arrangement Judge from the Evergreen District, replaced Joe as Director of Musical Services.

1988 Convention, San Antonio. This was the Society's fiftieth convention. It was marked by a parade honoring all the gold medal quartet personnel who could attend and a colorful historical display at which manikins were dressed in costumes of the various championship quartets.

This was the second and final year of the chorus finals. The Board voted it down at this convention.

Quartet champs were the Chiefs of Staff, of Chicago. They bested second place medalist quartet Second Edition by 19 points — the smallest margin ever in a quartet contest at that time.

Chorus champs were the Dallas Vocal Majority, for the fifth time. Their first set had seemed a little lackluster, perhaps due to poor amplification, which plagued this convention. However their second shot was a landmark performance. The up tune, David Wright's arrangement of "Waiting For The Robert E. Lee", brought an immediate standing ovation and declared the Vocal Majority to be the obvious winner once again.

Other 1988 notables: The Heritage Hall Museum of Barbershop Harmony opened in Kenosha "to collect, preserve and share the rich and varied heritage of barbershop and the Society". The first Buckeye Invitational was held in August 1988 in Columbus, Ohio, followed in September by the first Bolton Landing festival on New York's Lake George. The latter took place every year thereafter until 2004, when financial problems forced its cancellation.

1989 Convention, Kansas City. Quartet champs were the Second Edition, one of the best singing champions ever. Their rendition of "Jeannie With The Light Brown Hair" — Ed Waesche's arrangement — was immaculate, though controversial in the Arrangement Category. One of its controversial features was the use of the thirteenth chord (now dubbed the "Waesche 13th") in the tag.

Chorus champs were the Alexandria Harmonizers, for the second time, directed by Scott Werner.

The Vocal Majority, in their performance as outgoing chorus champions, gave us a landmark display of virtuosity and received two standing ovations.

1989 Sweet Adelines Champions, Growing Girls. The first quartet from outside the United States to win an International Quartet Championship made their mark in 1989. Four young girls, who had had been singing together since childhood, stole everyone's heart at the Sweet Adelines Convention in Miami. This quartet sang many shows with Second Edition, with some numbers sung by both groups singing as an octet. This led to two marriages: Doug Harrington to Suzanne Frolen and Jamie Meyer to Naima Roos.

1990 Convention, San Francisco. Once again the Cow Palace hosted the grand event. A novel feature of this convention was the first World Harmony Show, featuring representatives of the various foreign affiliates. Of particular interest was the Quiet Don Quartet from the Soviet Union. Also, for the first time, a women's quartet was invited to perform at International. They were the 1989 Sweet Adelines Champs, the Growing Girls, from Sweden, who performed with the Second Edition as an octet on the World Harmony show.

The winning quartet, the Acoustix from Dallas, Texas, featured a magnificent ringing sound. Jeff Oxley, bass, became the seventh double gold medalist. He had won with the Rapsallions in 1984. Tenor Todd Wilson, son of the Suntones' baritone Harlan Wilson, became the first second-generation gold medalist. Their rendition of Ed Waesche's arrangement of "That's

"An Irish Lullabye" shows the Acoustix' fine fidelity. This is one of many arrangements by Waesche that have become classics. In 1997 Joel Rutherford replaced Jeff Oxley on bass. Over the years they have been a popular show quartet and they are still active today.

Directed by Greg Lyne, the Chorus Champs were the Masters of Harmony of Foothills City, California, near Los Angeles. This was a very close contest, as the top two choruses, Foothills and the Louisville Thoroughbreds, ended up with a point tie. Adhering to the rules of the four-category system in place at that time, the tie was broken by the Sound Category.

1990 Sweet Adelines Champions, Panache. This quartet, from Los Angeles, was truly one of the great champions. They sang "Sweet Adeline", arrangement, by Jay Giallombardo, which had special significance to many members of Sweet Adelines because it came at a time when the organization had made an ill-advised name change to Harmony International. Many members did not support this change. After a threatened lawsuit from Harmony Incorporated, Sweet Adelines returned to being Sweet Adelines, adding "International" to their name.

1991 Convention, Louisville. This was the first International Contest judged under an experiment by which Sound scores are multiplied by a factor of 1.5. This was an attempt to assuage the persistent criticism that good singing did not carry enough weight in the scoring.

Quartet Champions were The Ritz, representing the Johnny Appleseed District, from the Toledo, Ohio area. Every member of this quartet was a music teacher.

To no one's surprise the Dallas Vocal Majority won the chorus contest, for the sixth time. Their performance of Irving Berlin's classic "Alexander's Ragtime Band" was a typically marvelous display of artistry, though some felt it lacked electricity.

The second World Harmony Show featured representatives a number of barbershop organizations, foreign and domestic, male and female. The Village Vocal Chords, from the Chicago area, represented Harmony Inc.; Sweet Adelines International was represented by the 1986 Champions, Ambiance.

Judging reforms brewing. A significant amount of interest in judging reform was now in the air. A subcommittee of the Future II Committee, under Chairman Rob Hopkins, had suggested a two-category system. David Wright had circulated a letter calling for a 100-point performance based Arrangement Category. Much discussion of these ideas was transpiring.

1992 Convention, New Orleans. Keepsake, of Orlando, Florida, won the quartet contest. Larry Ajer and Jim Casey had coached this very popular quartet, admired for its quintessential sound. This was Joe Connelly's second gold medal, the first being with Interstate Rivals in 1987.

Chorus Champs were the Southern Gateway Chorus from Western Hills (Cincinnati), Ohio, under the direction of the veteran Jim Miller, who had directed the Louisville Thoroughbreds to six championships.

Joe Connelly. This man with the golden voice would become the first triple gold medalist in 2000 with PLATINUM. He then bested this winning his fourth gold with Old School in 2011. Joe has become one of the most popular coaches in barbershop, both men's and women's, and in 2003 directed the Toast of Tampa chorus (Sweet Adelines) to a fourth place medal.

Youth Quartet Contest. Introduced in 1992, the Youth Barbershop Quartet Contest, held every summer at International Convention, selects a national champion from talent representing colleges across the continent. Winners since 1992 are:

1992 Waterstreet Junction
1993 Heritage Station
1994 The Real Deal
1995 Stop the Presses
1996 Four Voices
1997 Freefall

1998 Prime Cut
 1999 Station 59
 2000 Millennium
 2001 Reprise
 2002 Catfish Bend
 2003 HEAT
 2004 Vocal Spectrum
 2005 Men In Black
 2006 Musical Island Boys
 2007 Road Trip
 2008 Ringmasters
 2009 Vagrants
 2010 Swedish Match
 2011 Prestige
 2012 Lemon Squeezy
 2013 The Newfangled Four
 2014 The Academy
 2015 Trocadero
 2016 Pratt Street Power

Lynn Abbott's Article. The autumn, 1992, issue of the scholarly journal *American Music*, published by University of Illinois Press, contained an article by Lynn Abbott, curator of the jazz archives at Tulane University in New Orleans. The paper is entitled "Play That Barbershop Chord: A Case for the African-American Origin of Barbershop Harmony". Abbott was not a member of BHS, and the article became known to us only when Val Hicks discovered it. Val Hicks acknowledged that this work puts all our historical efforts to shame. It lays out the case, referencing dozens of newspaper articles, books, and interviews, that barbershop harmony was commonly practiced by African-Americans in the late 1800s and early 1900s, and moreover was sung by early jazz and blues greats such as Louis Armstrong, Jelly Roll Morton, Sidney Bechet, and W. C. Handy. This article completely changed our view of the origins of barbershop harmony, leaving no doubt that African-Americans had a formative role in the beginnings of our music.

1993 Convention, Calgary, Alberta. The Gas House Gang, from St. Charles, Missouri, took the honors this year. Perhaps their most famous song was "Bright Was the Night", arranged by David Wright. The song had rocked the convention the year before in New Orleans, where the Gas House Gang placed second. Barbershoppers had only known this song as a "polecat song". The tag became the subject of some discussion because of its length.

Charming on stage, the Gas House Gang demonstrated impressive musicality without gimmickry. Tenor Kipp Buckner garnered his second gold medal, having won his first with the Interstate Rivals in 1987. This quartet has remained arguably the most popular performing quartet for over a decade, combining excellent singing with an entertaining performance style.

The Chorus Contest was won by the Masters of Harmony of Foothill Cities, California, their second time, again under the direction of Greg Lyne.

Also in 1993 Joe Liles' concept of Harmony Explosion is initiated, promoting barbershop harmony through youth clinics, student a cappella groups, and arrangements tailored for young voices.

1994 Convention, Pittsburgh. Native sons the Joker's Wild were Quartet Champions. From both Shenandango Valley (Pittsburgh) and Columbus, Ohio, Joker's Wild won with the second narrowest margin over a top contender, Nightlife, by just 19 points.

The Joker's campaign for the gold was spiced with a bit of risk taking, with songs like "Stars Fell On Alabama" (sung in the 1991 finals, where they placed 10th) and "South Rampart Street Parade", sung in their finals round in Pittsburgh.

Current three-category judging system begins. This was the first year the International Contest was judged under a new judging system, which was put in place in the fall of 1993. It replaced the 25-year old categories of Sound, Interpretation, Stage Presence, and Arrangement by a three-category system consisting of Music, Singing, and Presentation. The main reform acknowledged overlap amongst the categories. This new system was headed by a committee that consisted

of Rob Hopkins (International Contest and Judging Chairman), Larry Ajer (Presentation), Ron Black (Singing), and David Wright (Music). This system is credited (or blamed) for a gradual widening of the style to today. It should be noted, however, that the chord vocabulary did not change (in fact has not changed since the institution of the 1951 five-category system).

1995 Convention, Miami. Quartet winner was Marquis, heralding from Cincinnati, Ohio, and Louisville, Kentucky. For baritone Paul Gilman and bass Jay Hawkins, this was their second gold medal won together, both having sung in the 1987 Champions Interstate Rivals. This made the Rivals the first and only quartet for which all four members went on to a second Quartet Championship. Lead Randy Chisholm's dominating vocal presence made Marquis a favorite to win. In August 1997 Randy died, succumbing to complications from a staph infection, leaving barbershop fans worldwide devastated by the tragic loss.

Chorus Champs were the Alexandria Harmonizers, under the direction of Scott Werner, their third victory in ten years. Their sensitive rendition of "I'll Be Seeing You", arranged by Rob Hopkins, made the difference in a close contest, and the arrangement has become a classic.