

A cappella singing in the Barbershop style

Barbershop Criteria

1. It has four parts - no more, no less.
2. It has melodies that are easily remembered.
3. Barbershop harmonic structure is characterised by:
 - a strong bass line
 - melody in an internal part
 - complete chords without any non-chord tones
 - mostly major triads, dominant 7th chords and dominant 9th chords with other chords used in passing as demanded by the implied harmony
 - traditional harmonic movement and resolutions
4. It has rhythmic interest as an important and vital part of an uptune.
5. It has clear, recognisable form.
6. It has lyrics that are clear and understandable.
7. It is challenging to perform because:
 - it requires great vocal skill and is usually sung by amateur singers
 - all chords must be heard with clarity requiring singers to sing precise intervals
8. Properly tuned barbershop chords are congruent with the physics of sound.
9. Energy and physical involvement are required from the singer in a degree of intensity not usually found in other choral forms.
10. The artistic potential is unlimited since we are not bound by the printed page.
11. It is emotionally satisfying to both the listener and the performer.
12. You can't do it alone.

Barbershop Definitions

Lock and Ring

The ultimate barbershop sound. To achieve it requires excellence in all phases of singing - a good musical arrangement, good vocal technique, well balanced and blended voices and accuracy of intonation. In combination, these qualities can create an audible overtone that sends a chill up the spine of singers and listeners alike.

Mass Sing

This is a public event integrated into the business of a convention. Everyone in attendance is invited to gather in a public place and present listeners with a sample of barbershop harmony. It is often used as a way to thank the city hosting the gathering.

Pitch Pipe

A chromatic scaled instrument which is blown to establish a pitch or key tone. The one most generally used by a cappella singers is small and round, containing 13 pitches.

A cappella

Choral music without instrumental accompaniment. Cappella (Italian) chapel; a cappella in the manner of the chapel.

Woodshedding

An impromptu gathering of singers who improvise the harmony of a song by ear. This is the very heart of barbershop singing and is the essence of barbershop's heritage.

Tag

The final portion of a barbershop arrangement, usually containing very interesting chord progressions that are fun to sing. Tags may be sung separately from the song and are often used both by quartets and choruses for the purpose of practicing to achieve complete chord excellence. Many barbershoppers may not remember entire songs, but many will memorise hundreds of tags.



Crossroads

A brief history of Barbershop singing

Barbershop music, with its close, unaccompanied four-part harmonies and ringing chords, is a uniquely American folk art. It evolved in much the same way as other forms of vocal music.

Although no one can say exactly when or where barbershop music began it is now generally accepted that barbershop singing originated in African American communities in the US around the turn of the century, where barbershops were, and remain today, social gathering places. The tight, four-part harmony of the form has its roots in the black church, where close harmony has a long tradition.

In the early years of American barbershop music, singers improvised harmonies. When the printing press was adapted to produce musical notation, there was further advancement of the barbershop idiom. Many early pieces of sheet music were printed with standard vocal line and piano accompaniment, and with an additional quartet arrangement on the final page.

The first uses of the term were associated with African Americans. The Mills Brothers learned to harmonize in their father's barber shop in Piqua, Ohio. Several other well-known African American gospel quartets were founded in neighbourhood barber shops, among them the New Orleans Humming Four, the Southern Stars and the Golden Gate Jubilee Quartette.

Although the Mills Brothers were primarily known as jazz and pop artists and usually performed with instrumental accompaniment, the affinity of their harmonic style with that of the barbershop quartet is clearly in evidence in their music and most notably, perhaps, in their best-known gospel recording, "Jesus Met the Woman at the Well", performed a cappella. Their father founded a barbershop quartet, the Four Kings of Harmony, and the Mills Brothers produced at least three records in

which they sang a cappella and performed traditional barbershop material.

At the turn of the century amateur singers, usually men, could often be heard singing improvised barbershop harmony at parties and picnics. Minstrel shows also featured barbershop quartets, who sang in front of the curtain as an "olio" act while performers and stage hands prepared for the next act. It was convenient to use a quartet for this purpose, since no props or instruments were required.

Barbershop harmony's four voice parts are still called by their traditional names - tenor, lead, baritone and bass - whether referring to men's or women's vocal groups. One of the distinctive qualities of barbershop harmony is that the melody, sung by the lead voice, is below the tenor harmony. This follows the pattern of many early American hymns written for men and women, with the melody in the male tenor voice and the women singing harmony above. The barbershop harmony of today is a highly stylized art form requiring the same high degree of singing skill as other types of choral music.

As the popularity of barbershop harmony has grown, so has the type of participation. Barbershop singing is no longer restricted to male quartets; there are many women's quartets, and both men's and women's choruses now enjoy this unique art form. Choruses ranging in size from 15 to 150 or more members have found this singing style a challenging and exciting musical experience.

Source: Barbershop Harmony Society



Barbershop Harmony Society

What is the Barbershop Harmony Society?

Putting a song in the heart of every person on earth just might be the key to harmony in international affairs, and "Keep the Whole World Singing" — the motto of the Barbershop Harmony Society, might be the key to peace in our time.

The Barbershop Harmony Society is committed to the cause of world harmony through song. Thanks in part to the outreach efforts of Society and other barbershop organisations, more than 70,000 people around the world are active in the barbershop movement today.

Barbershop harmony is an American art form, dating back to the tonsorial parlours and minstrel shows of the late 1800's.

The Barbershop Harmony Society was founded in 1938 by two men from Tulsa, Oklahoma, who were nostalgic for the days when four-part harmony was a natural part of contemporary popular music. The organisation quickly grew from coast to coast, and became international in stature in 1944, when a chapter was chartered in Windsor, Ontario.

Today, the Barbershop Harmony Society has more than 30,000 members in North America. Another 4,000 men and women enjoy the hobby in eight affiliated organisations worldwide of which AAMBS (Australian Association of Men Barbershop Singers)

The pleasure of close-harmony singing is not restricted to men only; independent organisations for women in the United States, Canada and abroad number more than 30,000 active participants. All told, there are more than 70,000 aficionados of barbershop-style harmony in the various organizations that together make up the World Harmony Council.

Barbershop harmony was pretty much restricted to North America until the late 1950's, when Harry Danser of Sussex, England, vacationed in New York City and heard the famous

Buffalo Bills perform in Meredith Willson's hit musical, *The Music Man*. On his return to England, filled with an infectious enthusiasm and an armload of recordings, he formed a barbershop quartet.

In 1964, he founded the Crawley Barbershop Harmony Club. Subsequent visits to England by Barbershoppers encouraged the formation of more clubs, and in 1974, the British Association of Barbershop Singers (BABS) was established.

Other national organisations formed throughout the world in the years that followed, and have established affiliation agreements with the Society, and the movement continues to grow. Reports of barbershop activity continue to come in from all parts of the world.

Barbershop is found wherever there are American expatriate communities, including Japan, Saudi Arabia, Korea, Brazil, Italy, Israel and elsewhere. In 1988, the spirit of glasnost gave rise to the formation of the Quiet Don Quartet, a Russian barbershop group from the city of Rostov, located on the Don River near the Black Sea. The Quiet Dons toured the United States in 1990, making a number of appearances, including performances at Carnegie Hall in New York and at Disneyland in California.



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