

A COMPARISON OF BARBERSHOP AND CLASSICAL SINGING: SELECTED
CROSSOVER VOCAL TECHNIQUES FOR THE CURIOUS PERFORMER

by

Daniel Thomas Lentz

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Doctoral Committee

Daniel Melamed, Research Director

Patricia Stiles, Chair

Wolfgang Brendel

Mary Ann Hart

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To my many mentors.

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The barbershop style of singing offers many tools to enhance the knowledge and skills of the classically trained singer. And the barbershop singer can learn from the training a classical singer would receive at a music school or in private lessons. By studying both forms of singing, a performer can expand his or her arsenal of ways to express and communicate an idea. The African American historical roots of barbershop singing and European historical traditions of classical opera singing can commingle to help modern day classical performers gain beneficial skills, especially concerning improvisation. A newcomer to barbershop singing may discover that singing techniques already learned in classical singing can be utilized in barbershop singing as well. The techniques of overtone reinforcement and vowel matching used in barbershop singing can aid the classical singer's understanding of intonation, resonance, and beauty of sound. Through experimentation with the voice parts in barbershop, a classically trained singer can discover and narrow the determination of his or her own voice type, thus empowering him or her to choose repertoire better suited to his or her voice. Many performance practices from the classical *bel canto* school of singing are transferable to barbershop, and vice versa. A classical singer can learn performance-enhancing techniques from barbershop coaches and judges in competitions. By investigating historical roots and current practices of both classical and barbershop singing, a singer can gain enlightening concepts for the improvement of his or her performance craft.

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List of Abbreviations

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BHS- Barbershop Harmony Society.....	5
HU- Harmony University.....	44
IU- Indiana University	26
JRC- Jordan River Crossing (a barbershop quartet).....	10
NAACP- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.....	11
NATS- National Association of Teachers of Singing	77
SAI- Sweet Adelines International.....	14
SOI- Sounds of Indiana (a barbershop chorus)	27
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INTRODUCTION

It has been extremely enlightening to learn that the exacting standards and techniques of classical singing apply in many ways to the quite different discipline of barbershop singing. For many years, I have been captivated with classical composers such as J.S. Bach, Händel, Vaughan-Williams, Ravel, Debussy, Barber, and so many others. While learning classical vocal technique and repertoire I have also become intimate with the technical requirements of a very disparate art form known as barbershop. The former originated and evolved in the courts and concert halls of Europe, originally for the wealthy and privileged. Barbershop was first found in a vastly different environment (various parts of the United States, predominantly in the American South)—and is known as a more popular form of entertainment. Yet, the disciplines of vocal training and performance for the two quite different approaches to music have many similarities—especially concerning the philosophy of singing. It is the purpose of this document to show some of the different approaches to sound production between the two as well as show similar exacting standards and goals that are common to the two.

For the classical singer new to the art form of barbershop harmony, there are certain hallmark features that distinguish barbershop from other styles of music. Characteristics include syllabic homophonic chords, homorhythmic textures, mostly free tempi (this mainly applies to ballads), major-minor seventh chords, almost entirely American English texts, and standard song forms (ABA and AABA).¹ Barbershop harmony shares many of these features with the traditions of classical singing. In his *American Music* article “From ‘the Chord was King’ to ‘a Dynamic Journey’: Changes in the Barbershop Quartet Style in Contests Since the 1950s,” Robert G. Hopkins described characteristics of barbershop harmony as:

1. Four part *a capella* harmony,
2. A harmonizing part above the melody,

¹ Boeghold, Evan. (2017, July) “Parallels between Classical and Barbershop.” Class taught at the annual meeting of Harmony University and the BHS at Belmont University, Nashville, Tennessee.

3. A performance style freed from strict attention to meter and exact note values,
4. Emphasis on blending voices, and, usually,
5. Consonant chords for each melody note.²

Barbershop singing has existed for just over one hundred years, compared to several centuries of classical singing. Barbershop singing is rooted in American history and culture. The joy that barbershop singing produces for the listener and performer is evident today and has been since its creation. Barbershop singing can take place in competitions, at ice cream parlors, in pubs, schools, on street corners, or even on a rooftop on a hot summer day. Those who engage in the *a cappella* style of singing known as barbershop harmony can enjoy it at ten years old or at ninety. I believe barbershop singing can even improve the quality of solo classical singing. Barbershop singing is for both the beginner and the professional. The health benefits of singing are numerous but singing with three other people in a barbershop quartet or even in a choral setting multiplies the benefits. This “hobby art form” has generated more enjoyment and goodwill in the world than perhaps even the founders originally intended or imagined.

Classical singing techniques can assist barbershoppers in improving their performance craft. I refer to the term *bel canto* in this study. Since the mid-nineteenth century, scholars have used this term to refer to a particular Italian school of singing. Teachers introduce this functionally healthy method to students so that they have solid foundations of tools and techniques that will prepare them for careers of longevity in singing. Musicologist James Stark provides a more modern interpretation of this term:

Bel canto is a concept that takes into account two separate but related matters. First, it is a highly refined method of using the singing voice in which the glottal source, the vocal tract, and the respiratory system interact in a such as way as to create the qualities of *chiaroscuro*, *appoggio*, register equalization, malleability of pitch and intensity, and a pleasing vibrato. The idiomatic use of this voice includes various forms of vocal onset, *legato*, *portamento*, glottal articulation, crescendo, decrescendo, *messa divoce*, *mezza voce*, floridity and trills, and *tempo rubato*. Second, *bel canto* refers to any style of music that

² Hopkins, Robert G. “From ‘the Chord was King’ to ‘a Dynamic Journey’: Changes in the Barbershop Quartet Style Since the 1950s,” *American Music* 38, no. 1. (2020): 82.

employs this kind of singing in a tasteful and expressive way. Historically, composers and singers have created categories of recitative, song, and aria that took advantage of these techniques, and that lent themselves to various types of vocalexpression. *Bel canto* has demonstrated its power to astonish, to charm, to amuse, and especially to move the listener. As musical epochs and styles changed, the elements of *bel canto* adapted to meet musical demands, thereby ensuring the continuation of *bel canto* into our own time.³

In this document, I am mainly using the term *bel canto* in the context of classical singing techniques. As Stark describes, it also has to do with repertoire and style of music.

³ Stark, J. A. (1999). *Bel Canto: A History of Vocal Pedagogy*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press):

Chapter 1: THE “RING” CYCLE: HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS OF BARBERSHOP SINGING

The origins of barbershop harmony are linked with the beginnings of Tin Pan Alley in Manhattan. The Tin Pan Alley era itself lasted into the twentieth century circa 1895-1930. This name came from music publishers setting up shop in this Manhattan district. In a later era of Tin Pan Alley, composers like Irving Berlin, Harry Von Tilzer, Cole Porter, and Jerome Kern would give musical groups their music to perform in the streets.¹ Music-making around the piano and harmonizing on these popular melodies became a norm in American homes. We can attribute much of the standard barbershop repertoire still performed to this day back to the Tin Pan Alley era.

While barbershop songs were emerging in Tin Pan Alley, classical music was also booming in the United States. Many composers trained in Europe brought what they learned to the States. One of these composers was the American composer Edward McDowell (1861-1908). One of McDowell's hits “To A Wild Rose,” Op. 51, No. 1 includes a supertonic/II7 chord (major minor seventh) known to barbershoppers as “the barbershop seventh.” This was a popular parlor song at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The African American historical roots of barbershop singing and the European historical traditions of classical opera singing can commingle to help modern day performers gain beneficial skills, especially improvisation. We should remember that both the American popular and classical music culture inherited their roots from the European music culture, spanning many centuries from antiquity to the eighteenth century. Max H. Brandt wrote, “The barbershop arrangements we look at today are the result of this long tradition of European note writing, attributed in part to medieval monks who put religious melodies called plain chants to

¹ Boeghold, Evan. (2017, July) “Parallels between Classical and Barbershop” Class taught at the annual meeting of Harmony University and the BHS at Belmont University, Nashville, Tennessee.

parchment.”²

The organization most responsible for barbershop quartet singing today is known as the Barbershop Harmony Society or BHS. The BHS was formerly known as the Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Barbershop Quartet Singing in America (SPEBSQSA). The founders came up with the original long name and acronym as a joke. This parodied Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s long list of “New Deal” departments or “alphabet agencies” in the government.³ The Society changed its name in 2005 upon the recommendation of marketing consultants. The development of the microphone in the 1920s in radio broadcasting made way for crooners and barbershop briefly fell out of the mainstream. At the time of the Society’s founding (late 1930s), barbershop harmony was going through a revival.

Before this revival, barbershop singing had grown out of the American folk music tradition of the early eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Amateurs found this type of music predictable and easy to sing. Eventually, male quartets began singing this popular form of music in public places where men were known to gather. One of these places was the barbershop.⁴ Here is one historical approach to the beginnings of barbershop quartet singing published by the Society in 2007:

No one can say for sure when or where the first barbershop chords were sung. The expression “barber’s music” comes from England, where, during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and early eighteenth centuries, the barber shop was a center for music. A lute or cittern . . . hung on the wall for use by waiting customers or unoccupied barbers.⁵

² Kaplan, Max. *Barbershopping: Musical and Social Harmony*. (Rutherford [N.J.]: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1993): 37.

³ Clark, Diane M. and Billy J. Biffle, *So You Want to Sing Barbershop*. (MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017): 4.

⁴ *Ibid*, 1.

⁵ *An Information Manual for Barbershop Quartets*, (Nashville, TN: SPEBSQSA, Inc., 2007): 1.

In America, Black male quartets popularized the style known as barbershop in these folksong harmonizations. Thanks to the landmark article “Play That Barber Shop Chord: A Case for the African-American Origin of Barbershop Harmony” by Lynn Abbott in 1992, we can argue that the origins of barbershop harmony are attributed to African American music art forms from the beginnings of the nineteenth century.⁶ For much of the Society's history, prior to publication of this article, several White barbershoppers claimed barbershop originated in seventeenth- century England.⁷ Lynn Abbott’s article influenced prominent barbershop arranger David Wright to publish his own article on the subject in 2015. Wright cites Abbott several times in his article and quotes Abbott’s bold claim:

The tradition of close harmony practiced by black male quartets since plantation slavery and eventually spilling over into bars, school yards, street corners, railroad stations, and lodge halls would eventually become known as “Barbershop Harmony.”

Abbott’s article also influenced Dr. Jim Henry—Professor of Music at the University of Missouri and three-time barbershop quartet international champion—to publish his 2001 article on this very subject. In it he wrote that the African American origin of barbershop started out as a theory, but now there is strong evidence to support this theory. Henry outlined how the musical art form moved from the Black culture into the White and how the music transformed itself. Henry speaks of recordings: “Due to the popularity of these recordings, people - especially those in the white communities - came to associate the peculiar close harmony sound with the white quartets that recorded them, thus sealing the stereotype.”⁸

Gage Averill credits the important ground Abbott and Henry covered along with their predecessors. He also adds:

⁶ Lynn Abbott, “Play That Barber Shop Chord: A Case for the African-American Origin of Barbershop Harmony,” *American Music*, vol. 10, no. 3 (Autumn 1992): 291.

⁷ *Ibid*, 293.

⁸ Jim Henry, “The black musical roots of barbershop harmony,” *Harmonizer*, (July/August 2001): 14.

In general, they [Abbott and Henry] ascribe to the term “barbershop singing” too much solidarity. In contrast, I note that what became known as barbershop harmony embraced a number of different genres and can scarcely be said to have evolved outside of the realm of popular, mediated, commodified culture.⁹

Averill observes the tumultuous parallel histories of segregation and barbershop. He underscores the nature of racial disparity in barbershop resulting in segregation and oppression and how it influenced the musical style to grow into its present form. For better or worse, history always plays a hand in our understandings of current practices and traditional art forms.

Music theorist Clifton Boyd has invented the term “vernacular music theory” to describe Society-practical and unwritten theoretical work which has created a self-contained culture within the Society. I believe Boyd is saying the BHS has established its own set of rules for part-writing that a singer cannot find in an academic setting; rather, the singer can find these rules exclusively in the barbershop world. In his research, he discusses and seeks to answer the question of what the Society is seeking to preserve considering its past connections with segregation. He is interested in how segregation has played a part and continues to play a part in the music-theoretical style of barbershop, —perhaps in an unconscious way.

As evidence, I cite Society-published style treatises, which are prime examples of what I term “vernacular music theory”: music-theoretical work that is carried out by practitioners of the style who possess insider knowledge of their communities. While the academy would not traditionally consider these practitioners to be music theorists, their work nonetheless determines the rules of the barbershop style for an entire community of musicians... Vernacular music remains understudied in the field of music theory, due to both a general devaluing of music outside of the Western canon, as well as a devaluing of music-theoretical work carried out by those who exist outside of the academy. My research, therefore, contributes to recent efforts to redefine what counts as music theory, and what musical traditions are worthy of music-theoretical study.¹⁰

⁹ Averill, Gage. *Four Parts, No Waiting: A Social History of American Barbershop Harmony*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003): 10-11.

¹⁰ Boyd, Clifton. (2020, November). “What Are We Trying to Preserve?” Vernacular Music Theory in The Barbershop Harmony Society. (Paper presented at the 43rd annual meeting of the Society for Music Theory held jointly with the American Musicological Society 86th annual meeting virtual conference, Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, 1201 E Third Street, Bloomington, IN): 2, 11.

In Frédéric Döhl's 2014 article "From Harmonic Style to Genre: The Early History (1890s-1940s) of the Uniquely American Musical Term Barbershop," he argues for the term "barbershop" as a style versus a genre. Döhl argues the usage of the term as style because of its features of part-writing, chromaticism, secondary dominant chords, and circle of fifths progressions; widely accepted from the 1890s-1940s.

To avoid this type of terminological confusion it is necessary to start with a clarification between the harmonic style referred to as "barbershop" and the genre of "modern barbershop," as I will call it ...[it] consists of much more than just this harmonic style. Based on theoretical approaches by several scholars, I use the word "genre" in the wider sense as a bundle of orientations, expectations, and conventions within a distinctive cultural web of production, circulation, and signification that integrate—among other things—musical, social, economic, historical, and ideological factors to create a relatively stable genre world.¹¹

Döhl makes a valid point for the classification of modern barbershop as a genre. I agree that certain contributive factors make present day barbershop appear as a genre, but for me the most important features lie in arranging. Even though I participate in the current barbershop culture, I approach this study from a traditional standpoint and refer to barbershop as a style of arranging. Prominent members of the Society would agree with me, but not all. In the "About Our Music" section on the Society's website, there is an article published from November 11, 2019, in which it states, "Barbershop is a style of arranging in close, four-part, *a cappella* harmony; it is not an era, style of music, or genre."¹² This is the position that I subscribe to, but I acknowledge that not all barbershoppers will agree with me. Barbershoppers hold different points of view on this topic.

Barbershop can also be more than style, genre, or culture. This is the key—barbershop does not so much describe a kind of piece as it does a musical culture. Sometimes barbershop can quite literally be a family of singers. Clark and Biffle wrote,

To say that barbershoppers are a family is true, literally and figuratively. The bonding that occurs while working to perfect the harmonies and elevate the individual and

¹¹ Döhl, Frédéric. "From Harmonic Style to Genre: The Early History (1890s-1940s) of the Uniquely American Musical Term Barbershop," *American Music*, 32(2), (Summer 2014): 126.

¹² Barbershop.org accessed November 1, 2020.

collective performance skill level that is central to most chapters' missions creates a feeling of family that usually doesn't exist in traditional choral groups.¹³

I imagine that both the nineteenth-century African American quartets and the barbershop revival White quartets in the 1930s shared this sense of familial bond.

One could make a case that barbershop is a sibling or progenitor of early blues and jazz. Vic Hobson's book *Creating Jazz Counterpoint: New Orleans, Barbershop Harmony, and the Blues*, makes this very claim. Wright quotes Hobson in his article: "According to Jazz scholar Vic Hobson, barbershop and the blues were very entwined with the beginnings of jazz, and in that fact [sic] might have had a formative influence on the beginnings of jazz."¹⁴

The average person may not know that Scott Joplin, Louis Armstrong, Jelly Roll Morton, and W.C. Handy, among other jazz musicians, were singers in barbershop quartets. In his article, Abbott describes how Jelly Roll Morton (first arranger of Jazz music) would sing spirituals at wakes and funerals. Abbott also describes how Louis Armstrong's early life as a singer taught him how to play his trumpet later. Scott Joplin even wrote an opera *Treemonisha* (1911) featuring a barbershop quartet.

These American musical art forms dominated areas of the United States such as New Orleans, St. Louis, and Kansas City. In his article Wright wrote, "New Orleans Jazz - and this really was the birth-place of Jazz - was based on what singers sang when they harmonized in their quartets."¹⁵

The famous vaudevillian Billy McClain from Kansas City remarked on the street life: "About every four dark faces you met was a quartet."¹⁶ Vaudeville is just one of barbershop's

¹³ Clark and Biffle, 130.

¹⁴ David Wright with David Krause, "The African American Roots of Barbershop (and why it matters)" *Harmonizer*, (January/February 2015): 11.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 13.

¹⁶ Abbott, 291-292.

many historical roots. In fact, the history of vaudeville runs parallel with barbershop. Barbershop quartets were often used in vaudeville acts, as Kara Kovalchik states:

How did the oversized mustaches, striped jackets and straw hats become synonymous with the genre? It started with Vaudeville. Barbershop quartets were often used in front of the curtain to entertain while other acts were setting up. In order to be seen by those in the “cheap seats” they donned distinctive costumes.¹⁷

I can personally attest that my own quartet Jordan River Crossing (JRC) was recently used as one of the acts in the 2019 show “Va Va Vaudeville” at the Buskirk Chumley Theater in Bloomington, Indiana. We did not wear the striped jackets and straw hats, however. I was the only one with an oversized mustache.

In late nineteenth-century America, concert hall directors barred Blacks from performing in their venues. As a result, informal singing became a national pastime and amusement for Black culture. In Vic Hobson’s book, he writes:

An early report of African Americans singing together comes from Frederika Bremer, who traveled through Virginia in 1851. “I first heard the slaves, about a hundred in number, singing at their work in large rooms; they sung quartets... in such perfect harmony, and with such exquisite feeling, that it was difficult to believe them self-taught.”¹⁸

Homemade music became the norm. One can compare this casual music to the famous *Liederabend* or *Liederspiel* of early nineteenth-century, German-speaking Europe. These informal social gatherings, centered on acting and singing, were a reaction to Italian opera at that time. Italian opera dominated the concert halls of Europe, and German folk-singing had no place in it. As a society constricts its people, the people tend to find a way around the constriction and improvise a solution.

¹⁷ Kovalchik, Kara. “Why are they called “Barbershop Quartets?” September 30, 2013. Mentalfloss.com. Accessed September 30, 2020.

¹⁸ Hobson, Vic. *Creating Jazz Counterpoint: New Orleans, Barbershop Harmony, and the Blues*. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014): 47.

Black male quartets used the improvisation technique in the 1840s American South. Quartets improvised harmonies around familiar tunes and ballads. Jim Henry wrote, “Geoffrey O’Hara’s attempt to accurately transcribe what he had heard sung by early African American barbershop quartet singers resulted in the publication of ‘The Old Songs,’ which we still sing today as the theme song of SPEBSQSA.”¹⁹ Minstrel troupe quartets also became popular around this time.

The Society gave a name to this technique of improvising harmonies on old favorites; they called it “Woodshedding.” A chartered organization grew within the Society called the Ancient Harmonious Society of Woodsheddors (AHSOW). Today, the homepage of AHSOW’s website states:

Woodshedding is how barbershop began on a rooftop in Tulsa. The Ancient Harmonious Society of Woodsheddors (AHSOW) was formed in 1977 with the purpose to preserve the skill of woodshedding as an art form within The Barbershop Harmony Society. Woodshedding is three individual voices (tenor, bari, and bass) creating barbershop harmonies by ear to a lead’s melody, without any written arrangement. The melody is introduced by the lead so all can become familiar with it, but should not have a well-known arrangement. This art harkens back to over a century ago, to the origins of barbershop quartet singing, where four men would gather (frequently at the local barber shop) and harmonize to the familiar tunes of the day.²⁰

We can clearly see that woodshedding came from the earlier form of African American *a cappella* quartet singing in the nineteenth-century American South. In David Wright’s groundbreaking article “The African American Roots of Barbershop and why it matters,” he quotes James Weldon Johnson, the executive secretary of the NAACP from 1925:

I have witnessed . . . these explorations in the field of harmony and the scenes of hilarity and backslapping when a new and rich chord was discovered. There would be demands for repetitions and cries of, ‘Hold it! Hold it!’ Until it was firmly mastered. And well it was, for some of these chords were so new and strange that, like Sullivan’s Lost Chord, they would have never been found again except for the celerity in which they were captured.²¹

¹⁹ Jim Henry, “The black musical roots of barbershop harmony,” *Harmonizer*, (July/August 2001):14.

²⁰ Ahsow.org, accessed July 9, 2020.

²¹ Wright, 11.

This chord that they stopped on and held would later be dubbed the “Barbershop 7th” (major minor seventh or dominant seventh chord) by the Society. One song gave rise to this term: “During the summer of 1910, a Tin Pan Alley song called ‘Play that Barber Shop Chord,’ exploded on the American vaudeville scene.”²² This song was also the first popular song to be about the art form and became the title for Lynn Abbott’s article. In this article, Abbott wrote, “...It has been credited as a major factor in ameliorating the term and disseminating it into the American mainstream.”²³ James Weldon Johnson not only led the NAACP in the 1920s but also was a member of the Atlanta University Quartet in the 1890s. In David Wright’s article, he quotes Johnson:

Pick up four colored boys or young men anywhere and chances are 90 out of 100 that you have a quartet. Let one of them sing the melody and the others will naturally find the parts. Indeed, it may be said that all male Negro youth of the United States is divided into quartets.²⁴

At the turn of the twentieth century, barbershop quartets had assimilated into the American culture and were one of the most popular forms of musical entertainment and performance. This entertainment would lead to the formation of other kinds of quartets as well. The Mills Brothers, a quartet known for their gospel recordings, had their beginnings in barbershop. Lynn Abbott quotes L. Herbert Hennegan in his article:

America's best-known quartet, the Mills Brothers, were fathered by an "old trouper" who "taught the boys their harmony around his barber shop in Piqua, Ohio." Since about 1915, "Papa Mills had been a singer, doing both solo and quartet work between periods of barbering."²⁵

²² Abbott, 312.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Wright, 12.

²⁵ Abbott, 292.

Gospel quartets inherited the spirit of barbershop quartet singing. They enjoyed the camaraderie of just singing together and having fun.

Even the trade of barbering was predominantly Black American before it was taken over by White culture after the Civil War. Proprietors of Black barbershops used their places of business not only for socializing and fraternity, but also as a space for musical rehearsal and performance. Hunter C. Haynes reported in 1902:

In the early part of the 18th century the Negro barber was a prominent factor in the barber's world. At that time he owned the finest shops in the country, and two-thirds of the hair cutting and shaving was done by Negro barbers, but it is not so today I will admit that there are yet a few up-to-date barber shops in the United States that are owned by colored men for white patrons, but opposition and public sentiment is becoming so great that I am afraid that within the next few years he [the "colored barber"], too, will have to "go back to the wood."²⁶

We have another recorded instance from the 1929 book *They Still Sing of Love* by Sigmund Spaeth:

[F]rom Jacksonville, Florida, where all the barber-shops were originally manned by colored barbers, with each shop naturally developing its own quartet. These negro singers harmonized by ear, and they took more delight in the discovery of a new chord than a whole day's tips could produce. It was through experimentation and the tentative expression of common instincts that the modern art was developed.²⁷

Black-owned barbershops continued to dominate the landscape of North America well into the nineteenth century. We also know that Presidents Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Jackson frequented Black-owned barber shops.

People used the term "barbershop" in a different context in the early twentieth century as compared to today. In Wright's article, he wrote, "When professional white quartets began recording, they were simply 'male quartets.' Early on, they never used the term barbershop, even

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid, 294.

though that's what it was. 'Barbershop' would have been interpreted as an African American reference."²⁸

On April 11, 1938, two White businessmen from Tulsa, Oklahoma (Owen C. Cash and Rupert Hall) met at a convention in Kansas City. While conversing at their hotel, they discovered that they both loved to harmonize. Later, they tipped a bellhop to roam the halls looking for a tenor and bass to form a quartet.

Once the bellhop found the missing parts, the foursome harmonized (woodshedded or improvised) the "old songs" (folk tunes) all night long. (This activity of improvising all night is now known as an "after glow" in the Society. It usually follows a concert or performance). Cash and Hall would unintentionally spark the creation of the Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Barbershop Quartet Singing in America (SPEBSQSA) and many other organizations: SPEBSQSA for the men (now BHS, founded in 1938), Sweet Adelines International (SAI) for the women (founded by Edna Mae Anderson in 1945) and another sororal organization, Harmony Incorporated (founded in 1959).

The Society was founded on the premise of people gathering to sing for fun. Fellowship and singing continues to be their goals today. A Society core value has been and continues to be the joy of singing for all people. Music education and preservation of singing are significant values that the Society hopes to expand across all borders. In her book *The British Barbershopper*, Liz Garnett provides an explanation of the culture surrounding the activity of barbershop singing,

The music that [barbershoppers] meet together to make is both a symbol of and a medium through which they construct and negotiate social values, and these values, in turn, provide the discourses through which they understand their musical praxis.²⁹

²⁸ Wright, 12.

²⁹ Garnett, Liz. *The British Barbershopper: A Study in Socio-Musical Values*. (England: Ashgate, 2005):19.

Gage Averill makes an important distinction between the formation of barbershop harmony and how it relates to race relations in early twentieth-century America:

An analysis of the interplay of white and black aesthetics, musical forms, repertoires, performance styles, motor behavior, and choreographic practice reveals closeharmony to be a music of racial encounter, of a profound cultural intimacy, a short circuitin the hard wiring of racial separation and segregation, and the product of the convoluted history of cultural transgressions, borrowings, mimicry, miscegenation, and cross-culturalhomage that has characterized black-white relations in North America.³⁰

In the early days, the Society discouraged Black quartets from competing. Even the founder, O. C. Cash telegraphed the NY office sometime around 1941: “Relative colored quartets competing St. Louis. Board of Directors decided some time ago such procedure would be embarrassing and ruled it out. None has competed in the South and West. Best regards.”³¹ This instance involved the Red Caps quartet, who were barred from competing by the Society. Times have certainly progressed towards inclusion since the early days of the Society. The Society has since publicly apologized and posthumously inducted the Red Caps into their Hall of Fame.³²

The Society began inducting women as full members in 2018. Sweet Adelines International and Harmony, Inc. would no longer be the only barbershop organizations in which women could sing and compete. For the past few years, the BHS motto has been “Everyone in Harmony.” To quote Clifton Boyd: “Given that the BHS was an all-male institution for the eighty years prior, this announcement is one of the most substantial changes that has been made in the Society’s history.”³³

The Barbershop Harmony Society’s mission statement is “To bring people together in harmony and fellowship to enrich lives through singing.”³⁴ Important benefits of group harmonizing listed on their website are:

³⁰ Averill, 11.

³¹ Abbott, 296.

³² Beals, Matthew. “The Grand Central Red Caps,” *Harmonizer*, November/December 2017, 19-26.

³³ Boyd, 1.

³⁴ Barbershop.org, accessed July 22, 2020.

improvement of physical and emotional health, healthier communities, young people becoming healthier adults, forging of inter-generational bonds, reduction of barriers across diverse cultures and groups, and the building of healthy self-identities.³⁵

To reiterate, I believe a BHS core value is to have people singing together no matter what age, race, gender, organization, or level of training. Everyone is welcome. And I believe the world benefits from our practice of group singing. The style of barbershop has gone through many variations over the years. David Wright said it best when he asserted: “[O]ur style is not monolithic. It’s a broad style of music. When we understand that, we’ll become wiser as we face the future.”³⁶ Barbershop’s humble origins gave rise to many musical genres today, and now any song from any genre can be arranged in the barbershop style for an *a cappella* quartet. At the same time, it is fitting that barbershoppers have not lost touch with their roots.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Wright, 14.

Chapter 2: “MY WILD OPERA ROSE”: CLASSICAL VOICE TYPES AND BARBERSHOP VOICE PARTS

Out of the vast and diverse history of classical singing have emerged many different voice types and their subcategories, usually describing the characteristics of a person’s singing voice. Classical arrangers utilize SATB, SSAA, and TTBB scorings for choirs. Traditionally, the voice parts in barbershop arrangements for both men and women are tenor, lead, baritone, and bass.

Table 1.1 Comparison of Barbershop and Classical A Cappella Scorings

	Classical		Barbershop
Soprano	Tenor 1	Soprano1	Tenor
Alto	Tenor 2	Soprano 2	Lead
Tenor	Bass 1	Alto 1	Baritone
Bass	Bass 2	Alto 2	Bass

The soprano part in a classical choral arrangement correlates with the tenors in a barbershop arrangement. The sopranos, like the tenors, cultivate a lighter, narrower, and more focused sound quality. The alto part correlates with the lead and they have the same quality of sound. Whereas the altos sing harmony, the sopranos and leads sing melody.

The choral tenor part shares its role with the barbershop baritone. Their primary job is to fill in the harmonies. These voice parts also share the same *tessitura*- “the part of the singer’s overall range in which he [or she] sings with most ease and beauty of tone.”¹ Finally, we arrive at

¹ Andreas, Esther and Robert M. Fowells. *The Voice of Singing*. (NY: Carl Fischer, Inc., 1970): 36.

choral and barbershop bass. Again, their roles are shared for the primary purposes of singing the roots or fifths of chords.

I have surveyed the barbershop voice parts and now come to the classical categories and subcategories or the *Fach* system. In the broad sense, the *Fach* system is used by opera singers worldwide to maintain healthy singing within a specific repertory of opera roles. The *Fach* system comes from the German opera theater and the word *Fach* can be translated as “compartment.” Here is music educator Richard Miller’s explanation:

The word *Fach* refers to any specialized work or skill...In the professional world, *Fach* designation is a device for the contractual protection of the singer so that he or she will not be forced to sing roles that require unhealthy modes of phonation to accomplish.²

In the Italian school of singing— *bel canto*— the soprano voice type is a category used for younger singers who are not sure of their *Fach* yet; however, great Wagnerian (Richard Wagner) sopranos could start their careers as mezzos (mezzo-soprano) or contraltos. A young soprano might develop into a mature dramatic soprano or *spinto*- “(Italian). A voice which has been ‘pushed’ into more forceful singing.’ Butterfly [Puccini] is an example of a *spinto* soprano role.”³ For the alto voice, the choral singer might change his or her label to mezzo-soprano for solo singing. For the lower female voices, contralto is an appropriate designation for the singer to use. Alto is usually the name of the choral part, and contralto the soloist’s *Fach*.

In general, the male voice categories are tenor, baritone, and bass. This list can be expanded to include countertenor or male alto and male soprano, which usually have their roles in the Early Music repertoire. There are many subcategories of these voice types, and I have provided some examples below.

² Richard Miller, *On the Art of Singing*. (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996): 200.

³ Kennedy, Michael and Joyce Bourne (editors). *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Music*. Rev. ed. NY: Oxford University Press, 2004. 692.

The *Fächer* (plural of *fach*) within these general voice types are plentiful and we should understand how they fulfill a specific purpose for professional operatic singers. Examples of *Fächer* include, but are not limited to dramatic soprano, lyric soprano (medium vocal weight and capable of long flowing phrases), *soubrette* (French, a lighter soprano), *coloratura* soprano (flexible and agile voice capable of challenging ornamentation such as *cadenze*, trills, etc.), *Heldentenor* (dramatic tenor), lyric tenor, Verdi baritone (dramatic), bass-baritone (baritone with low extension), etc. Kennedy defines *Fach*: “In an operatic context it denotes the classification of parts—the ‘voice-category’—for all opera roles in German opera houses.”⁴

I will describe my own *Fach* as an example.⁵ In the roles described above, the lyric baritone, whether young or mature, must possess a flexible voice. He must be able to sing fast-paced *coloratura* while also being able to sing warm, rounded *legato* in longer, slow-building passages and phrases. Kennedy defines *legato*: “(Italian). Bound together. Performance of music so that there is no perceptible pause between notes, i.e., in a smooth manner.”⁶ The lyric baritone must also possess a wide range anywhere from G2 or A2 to G4 or above. According to Andreas and Fowells, the extreme range for a baritone would be two octaves from G2-G4.⁷ For most opera roles, his *tessitura* would sit approximately between the B2-G3 range.⁸ A lyric baritone must possess a rich, warm, and round *chiaroscuro* (light and dark) quality in his voice. He must have depth in the mid to low range and strident brilliance in the mid to high range.

Richard Miller, in his book *On the Art of Singing* states:

Although it is plausible to determine relatively early on the general category to which a talented singer belongs, it is approaching foolhardy to try to determine subcategories before the vocal instrument itself has become free to function in the technical areas essential to all good singing, and until the singer has arrived at some level of maturity.⁹

⁴ Kennedy, 239-240.

⁵ For further *Fach* descriptions, see Pearl Yeadon McGuinness’s “The Opera Singer’s Career Guide: Understanding the European Fach System.”

⁶ *Ibid*, 415

⁷ Andreas, 36.

⁸ *Ibid*.

⁹ Miller, 201.

I agree with Miller that no undergraduate student of voice should be trapped in the box of the *Fach* system. Even with a graduate student, the prudent teacher is cautious as to how they approach this idea; patience is key. The undergraduate and graduate student both need time to allow the voice to adjust, and the development of the voice is different for every single person.

For teachers of singing, current classical singers, and potential barbershoppers, I provide my own inauguration into formal voice training as an example. My experiences and discoveries are the inspiration for this document. My hope is that my experiences serve as a guidepost for my readers.

I began voice lessons at age seventeen, having just graduated from high school. Mentors from high school suggested I take voice lessons, but they always suggested I take them in the future and not at that time; they believed my voice was still developing; they were correct. I was still going through puberty. The previous year, I switched from tenor to bass in my high school choir. I believe my age was appropriate for starting voice lessons. At age seventeen, I believe my voice was starting to settle into what it would sound like for many years to come. This has proven to be true, as it has been for many singers. In his book *Great Singers on Great Singing*, Jerome Hines interviews Joan Sutherland, who talks about her mother's influence on her musical upbringing:

As a little child she would sit on the piano bench and imitate her mother's singing. Mrs. Sutherland constantly corrected her daughter's mistakes and gave her special breathing exercises, but she would neither teach her voice nor have her take lessons, maintaining that a youngster should not be formally taught until the age of eighteen.¹⁰

Voice teachers who are pressed to give lessons to young people below the age of eighteen would be wise to consider Sutherland's words. The teacher must remember that the young student can only be given music fundamentals in singing, and no advanced technique or pedagogy until

¹⁰ Hines, Jerome. *Great Singers on Great Singing*. (New York: Doubleday, 1982): 324.

the student's adult voice starts to develop. Controversy surrounds this last statement. Voice science continues to open doors for younger students by showing them how the vocal mechanism functions. In my experience I reserve the teaching of classical vocal technique for high school and college students, especially if they aspire to sing opera.

There are dramatic differences in the sound qualities of classical voice types compared to the barbershop voice parts. For example, a curious classically trained tenor might discover *falsetto*-dominant (mostly *falsetto*) singing from the barbershop tenors in a chorus during his first visit to a barbershop rehearsal. As a classically trained lyric baritone, I discovered at my first barbershop rehearsal that the barbershop voice part of baritone was written or arranged too high for me to sing for an extended period of time; the length of a normal Sounds of Indiana (SOI is the Bloomington chapter of the Cardinal district) barbershop chorus rehearsal is usually two hours with a fifteen-minute break. Therefore, I switched to singing bass in barbershop and have continued singing that part to this day. The barbershop bass part made more use of my complete or extreme range as a classically trained lyric baritone. However, the barbershop baritone's extreme range can lie anywhere from C3-G4 or higher, depending on the arranger—closely resembling the classical baritone.

Vocal writing for solo *Fächer* is fundamentally different from writing for barbershop and classical choral parts. Composers tend to write for solo *Fächer* as they would for a solo instrument—using the entire range of the instrument, to showcase the artist. Composers traditionally write for choral and barbershop parts in the opposite manner—filling in harmonies with the non-melodic parts and arranging them to sing in a certain area of their range most of the time, rather than using the entire ranges of the singers.

The classical voice types and barbershop voice parts are characteristically and aesthetically different; however, crossover knowledge helps the modern singer make informed decisions pertaining to performing. There is a place for the *Fächer* in barbershop. A *Heldentenor* might discover that lead is the perfect part for his voice in a barbershop chorus or quartet, with a

few adjustments, of course. A lyric *mezzo* might discover that bass is the perfect fit for her voice in a barbershop chorus or quartet. Given my lyric baritone *Fach*, I discovered my place in a barbershop chorus or quartet was not necessarily baritone. The singer can discover endless possibilities.

Chapter 3: *SENZA VIBRATO?* THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PHENOMENON OF THE “RING” AND *VIBRATO*

As a classically trained singer of opera and art music, I sing with *vibrato* without having to think about it. Some barbershop experts think that if all four singers utilize non-constricted straight tone (minimal *vibrato*), they tune better in just intonation (tuning of musical intervals according to whole-number ratios¹) and produce the “ring” or overtones that are so desirable in the barbershop sound. Classically trained singers would know the “ring” as the “singer’s formant.” Singing with pitch fluctuation (*vibrato*) in the tone can enhance the production of overtones. The phenomenon or ideal of the “ring” in barbershop relates to classical singing in that overtones are desired in both forms of singing. Overtones are what causes the voice or voices to travel far distances and echo in an acoustic space. In classical singing, more *vibrato* is desired to access those overtones or “singer’s formant.” In barbershop, less *vibrato* is desired because more than one singer is reinforcing the fundamental causing the overtones to exist.

A classically trained singer new to barbershop singing may discover that techniques learned in classical singing can be utilized in barbershop singing as well. The classical technique of *vibrato* can be transferred to the learning and practice of barbershop singing. Adjustments still need to be made. Consider the analogy of a carpenter shaping a piece of wood to make something completely new. As the carpenter adjusts in his or her craft, so does the singer. Dean Atlee Snyder compared the art form of barbershop harmony to a medieval guild when he wrote:

The craft of barbershop music is an art form wherein we are constantly creating and recreating an artistic product. Our members are practitioners of the art form and, as such, our Society may be compared to the concept of a “guild” as it was known in

¹ Gann, Kyle. *The Arithmetic of Listening: Tuning Theory and History for the Impractical Musician*. (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press): 21.

medieval times.... Guilds were societies of artisans (stone masons, silversmiths, wood carvers, etc.). Their members were skilled in production and enormously proud of their specialized product. Based on this concept, one of our early and greatly admired SPEBSQSA chapters in the 1940s described and advertised itself as “A guild of quartet singers.”²

This is a useful analogy from Atlee Snyder in terms of thinking of our singing endeavor as a craft.³ There is also an element of “museum culture” in the existence of standard repertory with strict rules about what is permissible. In both worlds of barbershop and classical music, the singer toils year after year seeking perfection in the craft, but never attaining it. The process is the reward. Progress is made along the way while many singers purport to get ultimate satisfaction in the act of singing itself. The singer will make presentable to the consumer an eventual polished product that is improved upon over time.

Modern performance practices of Early Music and barbershop singing share overlapping vocal ideals and techniques concerning minimal *vibrato*. I know from personal experience singing in various churches over the years that the technique of minimal *vibrato* is extremely helpful to get several Latin words within a liturgical phrase out into the acoustic space.⁴ Though no recordings exist from the Medieval Music period, we have many modern historically informed ensembles performing plainsong from this period *senza vibrato*. Some examples of modern performing ensembles that use minimal *vibrato* include Lumina Vocal Ensemble, Anonymous Four, Pomerium, and The Cambridge Singers. Additionally, I believe current practices of *fauxbourdon* share common traits with woodshedding in barbershop. Both singing styles are *a cappella*. Michael Kennedy defines *fauxbourdon* (Fr.)/*faburden* (Eng.)/*falsobordone* (It.):

² Kaplan, Max (Editor). *Barbershopping: Musical and Social Harmony*. (Rutherford [N.J.]: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1993):16.

³ There is a double entendre in referring to barbershop singing as a craft, especially when woodshedding is involved.

⁴ Notes from class at Harmony University 2017 “Parallels between Classical and Barbershop” taught by Evan Boeghold.

“literally, false bass, or drone.”⁵ He gives as his first definition: “In very early use, the accompaniment in parallel thirds and sixths of a plainsong melody.”⁶ The manner in which I am accustomed to singing *fauxbourdon*, is defined by Kennedy: “Plainsong melody in treble accompanied by two lower parts, one in parallel sixths, the other a fourth below melody.”⁷ In the past, I have sung the lower part. The way I have sung *fauxbourdon* sounded improvisational to my ears, even though there were prescribed directions to follow. In the same vein, woodshedding follows similar prescriptive directions, while the result sounds like improvisation. Many singers still create overtones in this technique of singing with minimal *vibrato*, versus a single singer who would need to use steady and consistent *vibrato* to create overtones that travel a far distance.

As a child, I always thought of *vibrato* as decoration or style that only opera singers used for singing. In James Stark’s book *Bel Canto: A History of Vocal Pedagogy*, the author cites important studies:

The vibrato came under intense investigation by Carl Seashore and his associates at the University of Iowa in the 1920s and 1930s. Seashore regarded the vibrato as a vocal ‘ornament’-that is, a feature ‘not indicated by the regular score or demanded by the melodic, harmonic, qualitative, or temporal constitution of the song’ (Seashore, 1932, 108; see also 1938, 33). He did not think of vibrato as an ornament in the ‘add on’ sense, but rather as something that ‘occurs in practically all the tones of artistic singing.’⁸

Prominent voice scientist D. Ralph Appelman also describes the *vibrato* as an ornament:

Correctly produced, the vocal vibrato is a vocal ornament that is directly related to the sensation of support. It is physiologically controlled by the muscles of respiration, and is thereby, basically, a respiratory function assisted by coordinated laryngeal controls.⁹

⁵ Kennedy, Michael and Joyce Bourne (Editors). *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Music, Rev. ed.* (Oxford:Oxford University Press, 2004): 239.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid, 245.

⁸ Stark, J. A. *Bel Canto: A History of Vocal Pedagogy.* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999): 138.

⁹ Appelman, D. Ralph. *The Science of Vocal Pedagogy; Theory and Application.* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967): 23.

Appelman's description gives classical and barbershop singers a unique perspective on the function of *vibrato* and how it is causally related to the mechanics of breathing for singing. He goes into greater detail concerning the cause of the rate of pitch fluctuation,

The rate at which the pitch fluctuates depends upon the balance of the suspended tension of two muscle groups, (a) the antagonist musculature of inspiration and the abdominal musculature of expiration and (b) the infrahyoid and the suprahyoid muscle groups for laryngeal stabilization... The singer who does not sing with abdominal support is not able to control the vibrato rate. (An acceptable vibrato rate is between five and seven pulsations each second.) ... This action is directly related to expiration; the breath pressure must be even and uninterrupted to produce an evenly undulated vibrato. Quick surges of the breath or sudden pressures and relaxations will bring to the sound an unevenness that is most unpleasant to the musically trained ear.¹⁰

Appelman has observed this undulation process in the walls of the phonatory tube through studies in radiography and cinefluoroscopy. Sometimes, in a performance, I have felt the unevenness of *vibrato* in my own voice when my breathing was inconsistent or uneven. This observation is of enormous value to both the barbershop and classical singer and will inform them on how to improve their craft—especially when it comes to stamina in singing.

Singing in choirs from an early age, I thought that the more natural way of singing was *senza vibrato* (without *vibrato* or *s.v.*). I was first exposed to live operatic singing in my brief experience as a high school student working for the Ohio Light Opera Company in my hometown of Wooster, Ohio. At that time, I thought straight tone singing (*s.v.*) was more pleasing to my ear, more familiar, and easier to produce.

I came to barbershop later in life than most of my peers, who were exposed to the art form at an early age. It was 2012, I was twenty-seven years old, and I had just started my Doctorate in Voice at Indiana University. My friend and current lead in our quartet JRC, Stephen Chambers—invited me to my first barbershop meeting. Stephen, who also attended IU, is classically trained in voice. After I was hooked on the barbershop style, the overtones, and the fun

¹⁰ Ibid, 24.

close harmonizing with other men of multiple generations, I joined the Society. Eventually, Stephen and I formed JRC around 2013.

I had a rude awakening while reading the sheet music in my first barbershop chorus rehearsal with the Sounds of Indiana or SOI (Bloomington barbershop chorus). Stephen remembered his first meeting in a similar fashion. The chorus did not strictly adhere to what was written on the page. To quote Barbossa (played by Geoffrey Rush in the film, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, 2003): “They be more like guidelines than actual rules.” I discovered in ballad songs that *tempi* and time signatures were completely subjugated to the rhythm of the words. The singers employed *parlando* or speech-like singing as the preferred method of delivery. We frequently stopped on certain chords (Major minor sevenths and major triads) to “ring” them. I prefer to describe my first experience of singing from the sheet music (referred to as “charts” in barbershop) as “freely, in a *rubato* fashion.” An edition of the *SPEBSQSA Contest and Judging Handbook* states: “Barbershop interpretive style permits wide liberties in the treatment of note values—staying within proper musical form—and uses changes in *tempo* and volume to more effectively create a mood and tell a story artistically.”¹¹ This last point reminds us of the roots and similarities between barbershop harmony and jazz improvisation discussed in Chapter One. This rude awakening that Stephen and I experienced was not unique to us. Other classically trained musicians have experienced this over the years as well. In their book, Clark and Biffle describe:

Sometimes singers come into the barbershop world having had experience singing other styles of music. Many have sung in school or church choirs or have had solo experience in classical or pop venues. Some have had years of voice lessons and sing very well in certain styles or genres of music. This does not automatically make them good barbershop singers. In fact, they often have to shift gears quite significantly and change some of their vocal habits in order to become good barbershop singers.¹²

¹¹ Kaplan, Max, *Barbershopping: Musical and Social Harmony*. (Rutherford [N.J.]: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1993): 32.

¹² M. Clark, Diane and Billy J. Biffle. *So You Want to Sing Barbershop*. (MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017): 26.

When I first started singing barbershop, I had to keep making mental adjustments for how I was breathing through the speech-like phrases. I did not require as much breath, and I found that the breath I was accustomed to managing for my classical singing was too much. In his article “Barbershop and the pro-level singer: transitioning between techniques” from the *Harmonizer* (March/April 2020), Dr. Philip Grant writes:

Healthy singing requires both styles to begin with a relaxed inhalation following the release of the abdominal muscles; a significant difference in breath management exists. Referred to as the *appoggio* technique, the operatic tradition requires high breath flow with a high degree of vocal fold closure. Concurrently, it requires the singer to use a low-to-moderate degree of subglottic pressure. Comparatively, the barbershop style, which is closer to normal speech, requires less breath flow and lower subglottic pressure.¹³

Subglottic pressure is the singer’s resistance of airflow leakage at the vocal folds. The airflow is generated below the glottis or vocal fold opening. From my classical technique I kept the relaxed breathing, the *legato* phrasing, and the pure vowels (including maintaining the target vowel when singing diphthongs). I used these techniques in barbershop to ring more overtones. One can ring overtones more often by employing the technique of “resonance matching,” which I discuss in Chapter Five.

After I had been singing barbershop for a few years, I discovered in later voice lessons that I did not have to change the way I managed my breath as much as I expected. My energy and steadiness in the flow of air was the same. To approach this systematically, for both barbershop and classical singing, I thought in terms of circular phrases—I inhaled the amount of breath required for large or small, connected and rounded or circular phrases, and exhaled while imagining a semicircle or circle during a phrase of music I was singing; the result of *legato* phrasing should be the effect to the listener. Barbershop coach Paul Ellinger calls singing in

¹³ Grant, Philip. “Barbershop and the pro-level singer: transitioning between techniques,” *Harmonizer*, March/April 2020, 26.

circular phrases “wave box singing.” We as singers need to think in terms of circular or semicircular phrases.¹⁴ Rounded phrasing informs how we breathe. We should not think of breathing for one or two words, but for entire phrases. The difference between the two methods—singing in one big, connected phrase versus singing in many subdivided, shorter phrases—is dramatic.

At times while I was singing a barbershop chart with my quartet or chorus, even though it may have sounded to the listener as though I were utilizing straight tone (minimal *vibrato*), I was, in fact, still singing with the same techniques I used in operas. I think that the words in certain barbershop songs (“up-tunes” or up-tempo songs) are so speech-like that they go by much faster for the singer and listener than opera arias. Therefore, the listener is hard-pressed to pick out the *vibrato* in the singer until the singer is singled out or the quartet sustains a chord. W. Stephen Smith wrote: “My theory is that the biggest difference between classical, Broadway, country, R&B, and popular music—or any style of music for that matter—has more to do with the use of language than the use of the voice.”¹⁵

I think that a listener can pick out the *vibrato* of a singer more easily in opera. *Vibrato* is pitch fluctuation. In barbershop, a singer uses *vibrato*, but does not need as much air to sustain the phrase. I would suggest the barbershop singer think in terms of minimal *vibrato* for musical phrases.

In Figure 1.1, I show on the spectrogram two examples of one musical phrase.¹⁶ I chose the familiar barber polecat¹⁷ “Down Our Way” (polecats are twelve songs every barbershopper learns upon becoming a Society member) and sang the first line of the bass part first with *vibrato*

¹⁴ Notes from Harmony University 2017 class “Wave box singing/Music on Steroids” taught by Paul Ellinger.

¹⁵ Smith, W. Stephen and Michael Chipman. *The Naked Voice*. (Oxford University Press, NY, 2007): 125.

¹⁶ Free downloadable app SpectrumView 2.0 by Oxford Wave Research via the App Store.

¹⁷ Cassidy and Hall’s “Dictionary of American Regional English,” vol 4 (1985-2013) p.250, gives one definition of “polecat” as a derogatory term for a Black person. The origins of the word “polecat” in barbershop traditions and repertoire might be worth further examination.

and then with minimal *vibrato* or non-constricted straight tone. I started on the pitch B-flat 2. The clusters of energy on the graph are arranged into columns which represent the words I am singing. The frequency measured in Hz is on the left side of the graph and the time measured in seconds on the bottom of the graph. You will see that in the first example, there are more areas or clusters of acoustic energy (formants) in each pitch than in the second example. You can see this especially in the last four words “both night and day” as I ascend in pitches for the end of the phrase. Here, the formants that lie between 2000-3000 Hz (second and third formants) are gathered more closely together than in the second example.¹⁸

A helpful *bel canto* technique that encourages *vibrato* in the voice and involves breath management is *raccolto*—an Italian term for the gathering of sound in the singing voice.¹⁹ Singing in *raccolto*, there is more vocal fold closure in relationship to subglottic pressure that produces more ring in the sound and therefore more distance that the sound travels in the acoustic space. *Raccolto* is important because if classical and barbershop singers utilize this technique, they will generate more partials or overtones enabling their voices to travel further in a large space.

¹⁸ *Raccolto*-Italian, meaning ‘gathered’ or ‘collected’ when used as an adjective; term used in *bel canto* technique to gather the core of the sound to produce more resonance and carrying power of the singing voice.

¹⁹ Early Music singers can have managed breath control while maintaining minimal *vibrato*/straight tone.

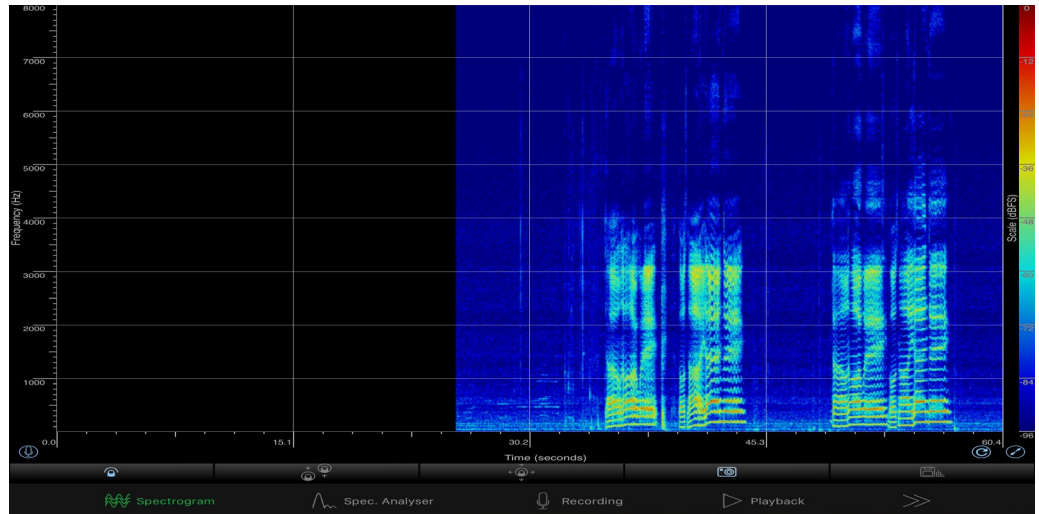


Figure 1.1. Spectrogram of first line of Bass part for “Down Our Way” in vibrato followed by straight tone starting at B flat 2.

The spectrogram is a useful tool that confirms the teaching of the singer’s formant and the results of that teaching (assuming healthy technique is taught). This spectrogram experiment can be performed by any singer with internet access and a computer or smart device, and I encourage the curious singer to try. In the first example (Fig. 1.1), more overtones are present in the more solid representation of clusters of acoustic energy versus the sparse representation in the second example. The spectrogram does not replace the musical ear or sensory perceptions of the student but affirms the *bel canto* techniques of *raccolto* and *appoggio*. It also affirms the techniques of resonance and vowel matching in barbershop singing.²⁰ Miller writes, “Spectrographic analysis does not replace the musicianly ear, but verifies what the ear discerns. The spectrogram can identify unwanted features of a sung phonation.”²¹

I did not dismiss the classical or *bel canto* techniques of *vibrato* that I acquired in private and academic lessons for the style of barbershop singing. Instead, my *vibrato* was modified

²⁰ Italian, from *appoggiare* meaning “to lean upon”; in *Bel canto* it is a term used for breath support.

²¹ Richard Miller, *On the Art of Singing*. (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996): 280.

towards less pitch fluctuation and a slower degree of vocal fold closure. I was less concerned with amplitude than I would be as a soloist. Resonance is not dependent on one person in a quartet. This is the main point—classical singers are trained to be their own amplification systems through *bel canto* technique. Imagine how much resonance and amplification would result from a barbershop quartet of singers all trained in the *bel canto* techniques I have discussed.

The adjustments that a singer makes from one art form to another can be fraught with challenges. I have discussed the adjustments that I and my colleague made from classical to barbershop singing. It is my hope that the recounting of my journey into a different world of singing techniques and repertoire will help the reader adjust along the way as well.

Chapter 4: “GOOD CLOSE HARMONY”: THE BARBERSHOP

TUNING METHOD

Barbershop singers use a precise method of tuning, and a classical singer’s tuning can be improved through knowledge of this method. Equal temperament tuning is used in keyboard instruments and most of the classical singing repertoire. This tuning system makes it possible for any number of singers to sing in an approximated key with any number of instrumentalists and to easily modulate between different key signatures. A different tuning system is used in barbershop.

Barbershoppers use the just intonation system, which is based on Pythagorean tuning that was used by singers throughout most of history up until the sixteenth century.¹ Some barbershoppers also call the just tuning system “vertical tuning.” This means the harmony singers tune with the melody note being sung and not with the note that came before it.² The Pythagorean tuning system is based on the purity of the perfect fifth interval. Jim Richards writes:

The Greek philosopher, Pythagoras (c. 540-510 B.C.) ...discovered the numerical relationships between the harmonics and the ratios and the string lengths [monochord instrument] that produced them ...that a series of twelve pure fifths *almost* landed on the same tone as did a series of seven octaves.³

Richards defines Pythagorean tuning as:

A system of tuning based on frequency ratios of 2:1 (octave), 3:2 (perfect fifth), and 4:3 (perfect fourth). It is characterized by having very sharp minor third, major sixth degrees of the scale which suit it well for unaccompanied melodies to the western ear...⁴

¹ Benward, Bruce and Marilyn Nadine Saker, *Music: In Theory and Practice, seventh edition*, 2 vols. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2003. Vol. I: p. 56.

² Clark, 95.

³ Richards, Jim. *The Physics of Barbershop Sound*. (Barbershop Harmony Society, 2001): 15.

⁴ Ibid, 32.

Jim Richards defines just intonation as: “A system of tuning based on acoustically pure perfect fifths and major thirds. The ‘natural’ tuning preferred for singing barbershop chords...Just-intonation [sic] has very limited utility for melodies.”⁵ The Society’s *Contest and Judging Handbook* has this to say:

Barbershop singers strive for more precise tuning than is possible with the fixed 12-tones-per-octave of the equally tempered scale of fixed-pitched instruments, such as the piano. Barbershop singers adjust pitches to achieve perfectly tuned chords, and yet sing a melodic line that remains true to the tonal center. Essentially, we use just intonation for harmonic tuning while remaining true to the established tonal center.⁶

One can say that barbershop singing is the definitive example of just intonation in performance. Experienced competitive quartets know that many microtonal adjustments need to be made in rehearsal to be successful on the stage. The composer and author Kyle Gann has written,

It could be said, I think, that the leading American tradition of just-intonation [sic] performance practice is barbershop quartet. This tradition of singing started in the late nineteenth century with a strong African American influence and soared to popularity in the early decades of the twentieth century...They don’t practice with a keyboard, because the notes they sing aren’t on the keyboard, and a piano would throw them off...In any case, barbershop quartets find their pitches intuitively through intensive rehearsal, and it would be of interest to study via recordings what adjustments tend to be actually made...The tradition certainly deserves more serious study as a body of phenomenally well-performed vernacular microtonal music.⁷

Since barbershop is *a cappella* singing, the voices need only tune with each other. This is where vowel and resonance matching come into play. Singers sometimes must adjust major thirds or other intervals to tune more precisely with each other. In my own quartet, I have found that I have had to tweak my pitches and vowels brighter or darker to match with the lead. The baritone and tenor have found that they must adjust accordingly to match my bass sound. Some coaches say

⁵ Ibid, 30.

⁶ Ibid, 16.

⁷ Gann, Kyle. *The Arithmetic of Listening: Tuning Theory and History for the Impractical Musician*. (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press): 116, 118.

that the bass is the “lead” of the quartet—they mean the bass is the foundation or quality of the quartet’s sound. Quartets will find that tuning their voices to the bass results in a more unified sound. Classical singers can discover that the barbershop quartet is a good model to imitate for the sound they want to produce; to balance the tweeter (tenor voice part) with the subwoofer (bass voice part) is analogous to balancing the *chiaroscuro* (bright and dark) in the classically trained voice. The practice of just intonation while singing in a quartet enhances the awareness of the classical singer to be more precise in his or her own tuning, especially if he or she is collaborating with an ensemble. In my own experience I have found this to be true.

To illustrate, I provide an example of a solo bass aria I performed by J. S. Bach with accompanying violator *basso continuo* from the cantata *Gelobet sei der Herr, mein Gott*, BWV

129. Michael Kennedy defines *basso continuo* as

(Italian). Continuous bass. Figured bass from which in concerted music of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the cembalist or organist played. Doubled the lowestvoice part. Term often shortened to continuo. To ‘play the continuo’ does not mean to play a particular instrument, but to play this variety of bass.⁸

In this solo bass aria, the cellist doubled my melody part as well as playing harmony underneath my melody. For the more florid, *coloratura* parts of my solo I would often have to anchor myself in the sound of the cello. The cello was my foundation. I was tuning my voice to the cello. I picked the cello as my subwoofer, and my voice—which acted as both subwoofer and tweeter—sometimes matched the cello and adjusted accordingly to it when it did not match. In effect, I was never listening to myself, but instead listening to my outside environment. The organic ensemble sound is achieved by doing this.

In another example from Bach, in a cantata with a chamber ensemble with singers on four parts and small orchestra, I would most often tune my voice with the organ continuo or the double

⁸ Kennedy, Michael and Joyce Bourne (Editors). *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Music*, Rev.ed. (Oxford:Oxford University Press, 2004): 53.

bass player—depending on which part was playing (sometimes both). As the bass singer (subwoofer) in the Chorale - usually last movement - of a Bach cantata, I would assert my voice to align with the bass instruments (*continuo*), while at the same time adjusting accordingly or tweaking my notes to the tweeter - usually the soprano voice part.

The examples I have provided illustrate how a singer could tune in a Baroque ensemble. Many trained musicians know that the word “Classical” has several meanings. It can mean an all-encompassing type of music that includes all the time periods of music history leading up to the modern era that is not “popular music.” Or it can also refer to a specific period of music history. Kennedy defines “Classical” music as

(1) music composed roughly between 1750 and 1830 (i.e., post Baroque and pre- Romantic) which covers the development of the classical symphony and concerto... (4) ‘classical music’ is used as a generic term meaning the opposite of light or popular music.⁹

In this document, I have used the latter definition of the term to compare it with the popular form of music that is barbershop. Kennedy defines Baroque as

(French). Bizarre. Term applied to the ornate architecture of Germany and Austria during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and borrowed to describe comparable music developments from about 1600 to the deaths of Bach and Handel in 1750 and 1759 respectively.¹⁰

A singer today can use barbershop tuning techniques in the broader sense of classical music repertoire—in all its periods.

I use several techniques in my classical singing to help me tune better with an orchestra or accompanist. First, I imagine the center of the pitch for every note I sing. I am constantly adjusting that with any surrounding ensemble until I can feel like I am in the same frequency as the ensemble. I literally imagine myself and the ensemble as two wavelengths that should

⁹ Ibid, 148.

¹⁰ Ibid, 49.

combine to flow more freely. We should feel as if we are all synced together. Second, I loosen up my body by intentionally not listening to myself and listening to a foundational *basso continuo* or subwoofer instrument. My singing at once becomes much freer and open. It is amazing to think just how much tension a singer can hold on to if one listens to him or herself too much (Another reason why voice teachers are so important—they provide objective ears). A third technique that I use to tune with an ensemble is agility. I need the agility to sing much of J.S. Bach’s repertoire since it involves fast-moving *coloratura*. (I find that my experience singing Bach repertoire helps me sing *bel canto* repertoire as well since they have matching characteristics for a lyric baritone). Exercises that involve agility include singing an entire aria on an open, tall, and neutral vowel. This also helps the singer achieve *legato* in phrasing. I imagine drawing in my sound versus pushing it out. I think of my vocal apparatus as a long cylindrical tube that stretches vertically in both directions. I will sometimes take an exercise rubber band and physically stretch it downwards while I am singing an ascending passage. In addition to drawing in the sound, I imagine a lighter sound that is not so weighed down. A tired voice is automatically heavy. An exercised voice has a lighter quality and can move—just like our physical bodies. To the listener, the singing sounds easy. Pavarotti’s *passaggio* exercise in Chapter 7 (Fig. 1.4) is a good exercise for agility. I also like to sing scales going up to a major ninth as freely and smoothly as possible.

These are only a few of the myriad of possible techniques that a classical singer can use to tune better with an ensemble. I hope the examples I have provided and the comparison of barbershop tuning or “vertical tuning” has been a useful analogy for the classical singer. The model of the barbershop quartet balancing the tweeter (tenor) and subwoofer (bass) is also a useful analogy for the classical singer in practice with an orchestra or accompanist.

Chapter 5: THE FIFTH VOICE: ENHANCING VOCAL RESONANCE

The techniques of overtone reinforcement and vowel matching used in barbershop singing can aid the classical singer's understanding of intonation, resonance, and beauty of sound. Barbershoppers usually pair the term "ring" with "lock" as in "lock and ring." This means the four voices of a quartet sustain a chord (major triad, dominant seventh, dominant ninth), match in vowels and resonance, and wait for the overtones to appear.

The fifth voice is another name for the overtone or undertone produced by four singers in a quartet (i.e., a pitch heard, but not sung, at an interval above or below a sung pitch in the harmonic series). Members of the Society collaborated on a book titled *Sound for Ensemble Singing*. It illustrates the principle of the harmonic series:

The harmonic series is a family of tones produced by the vibrations of the vocal folds. These tones are whole-number multiples of the fundamental frequency. For example, the second harmonic (partial), or 1st overtone produces a pitch which is one octave higher than the pitch of the fundamental. It has a frequency twice that of the fundamental. Similarly, the third harmonic (partial), or second overtone produces a pitch which is one octave plus a perfect fifth higher than the pitch of the fundamental. Its frequency is three times that of the fundamental. The series is infinite but the energy of each partial, generally, is inversely proportional to the frequency. That means that only the first few harmonics significantly contribute to the quality of the resultant sound.¹

The classical soloist uses physiological phenomena such as the "singer's formant" (third formant), to project the sound over an ensemble or orchestra. The singer's formant generates overtones. The voices of a quartet use similar methods to sing at full potential as well as boost acoustic resonance. This can be referred to as "expanded sound."

¹ Liles, J. Rashleigh, B., and Jim Richards. (Eds.) *Sound for Ensemble Singing*. (SPEBSQSA, Inc., Stock #4086. Copyright 1989. Rev. 10/91): 5

A formant is a concentration of acoustic energy that can be seen on a spectrogram.² Some define a formant as a high energy peak in the frequency spectrum.³ The first through third formants are heard by the ear and measured on the spectrogram in hertz (Hz). This is the frequency or the consistency of waves that one can see on the graph (Figure 1.1, Chapter 3). For the purposes of this document, I have used the free downloadable software application “SpectrumView” by Oxford Wave Research. This is one of many free online spectrograms that a singer can download. I have analyzed my own voice with this digital tool.

The first formant is responsible for the depth of the sound in the singing voice. The second formant is responsible for enhancing resonance and vowel definition. The third formant is the vehicle that carries the voice over large forces in a big space. Richard Miller wrote:

The consistent darkness in the upper portion of the spectrogram between 2500 Hz and 3300 Hz indicates a third important concentration of acoustic energy called the singer’s formant, which is characteristic of trained “classical” singers. The singer’s formant produces the “ring of the voice” that permits vocal sound to “carry” over orchestras and in large halls.⁴

I discussed the *bel canto* technique of *appoggio* earlier. I believe this to be one of the most efficient methods for production of resonance and carrying power for the singer (classical or barbershop). Richard Miller writes, “...the term *appoggio* includes concepts of breath management, it unquestionably also relates to resonance sensations as well, which are in *petto*, in *testa*, or in both simultaneously...”⁵ He is referring to chest (*petto*) and head (*testa*) resonance.

For the singer’s voice to carry any substantial distance, the pharynx (the chamber for resonating), for example, must be completely open. Prominent voice technician William Vennard wrote,

² Miller, *On the Art of Singing*, 281.

³ Scott Kitzmiller, Harmony University class, “Resonance Matching,” 2017

⁴ *Ibid*, 279.

⁵ Miller, Richard. *English, French, German and Italian Techniques of Singing: A Study in National Tonal Preferences and How They Relate to Functional Efficiency*. (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1977): 79.

Since the pharynx is subject to rather accurate control if the singer is patient enough to learn it, this resonator is most important. It is so near the larynx that it has the first, and therefore the most potent effect upon tone quality. There is more agreement among teachers of singing upon the fact that the pharynx must be as open and free from constrictive tension as possible than upon any other principle of singing. Even those teachers who do not speak of the throat, and who minimize its importance, still have empirical suggestive methods that indirectly achieve the same end.⁶

This open resonator allows the breath to vibrate or flow freely within the space. The singer thereby generates enough cycles of air at such a fast rate (frequency measured in Hz on a spectrograph) that the sound or air moves outward past the singer's body towards the audience member's listening ears. Some pedagogues of the Italian school may refer to the openness of the throat as *gola aperta*.⁷

Bel canto soprano Joan Sutherland has described her feeling of *gola aperta*:

I think you should feel nothing in the throat...If I feel anything in the throat, I know I'm singing badly. Open throat means to me a feeling of complete relaxation in the throat.

The most I would feel would be that the chin was dropped.⁸

Joan Sutherland was known for her beautiful high notes and her powerful sound. She had control over her singer's formant. The way she controlled it was by thinking in terms of projection: "...So you should preserve that fat sound until you get to the *acuti* [high notes], and then you should sort of flip back...Well, you should feel that the sound projection flips to the back of the soft palate and the sound travels out through the back of the top of the head."⁹ Sutherland was referring to the physiological sensation that a classically-trained singer could feel when the larynx is stable, tension is absent from the upper portion of the body, and the back and abdominal muscles are engaged. The throat and nasal cavity should feel completely open. A singer (both classical or barbershop) needs as much open space as possible in the throat for the sound or air

⁶ Vennard, William. *Singing: The Mechanism and the Technic*. Rev. Ed. (NY: Carl Fischer, 1968): 52.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Hines, Jerome. *Great Singers on Great Singing*. (NY: Doubleday, 1982): 327.

⁹ Hines, 330.

vibrations generated in the vocal folds to reverberate back and forth in the resonator cavity and then travel outward a great distance.

The faster the rate of *vibrato* generated by a singer, the more overtones are created, or clusters of acoustic energy are shown more obviously on a spectrogram. This knowledge is helpful for the solo classical singer as well as the barbershop singer—knowing that *vibrato* generates overtones will help the barbershopper adjust the amount of *vibrato* he or she produces to unify with the other quartet singers for a complete sound. Physics determines that higher voice types carry farther distances than middle to lower voice types. We know this because resonance causes sound waves to grow in amplitude. Jim Richards provides the harmonic series as an example:

Vibrations in a stretched string [vocal folds] represent a special case of resonance in that only those waves that make a complete round trip in such time as to exactly match up with its own reflected wave are ‘permitted.’ All other frequencies are ‘forbidden’ and quickly die out. The ‘permitted’ waves form a harmonic series.¹⁰

These physiological aspects of singing explained in classical terms relate to barbershop because a singer who is introduced to the culture of barbershop singing will have names for the processes he or she will go through to achieve expanded sound. Both classical and barbershop singers have this result as a goal—projection. Projection is achieved through these *bel canto* methods. A barbershop singer trained in these methods has more opportunities and greater potential of singing with expanded sound or projection than a singer not trained in these methods.

This classical analytical approach to expanded sound simply gives singers more tools to use in both rehearsal and performance. In my own experience, I have witnessed firsthand the results of this training—in my own quartet with both lead and bass trained in the *bel canto* technique—and in other award-winning quartets with one or more members similarly trained.

¹⁰ Richards, Jim. *The Physics of Barbershop Sound*. Nashville, TN: Barbershop Harmony Society, 2001. 7

A person's singing voice is unique to him or her and no other person's voice can replicate it. In an ensemble every person's voice matters. In an article from *The Harmonizer*, 2015 international quartet champion Theo Hicks writes:

Remember that your voice rings not only with overtones, but with love with your brothers and sisters in harmony. Remember that your voice brings healing to those in need. Remember that you bring light into the world. Your voice can make a difference.¹¹

In this article, Hicks recounts memories of how he never thought he would sing barbershop. Because some key mentors and teachers persistently encouraged him along his journey, he became the singer he is today. Hicks sings lead in the quartet Instant Classic. Instant Classic has been coached by Scott Kitzmiller. Kitzmiller is the father of two of the members of this quartet, Kyle (bass) and Kohl (baritone). My quartet Jordan River Crossing first encountered Instant Classic at a Sounds of Indiana concert at the Buskirk-Chumley in the Summer of 2013. Instant Classic was our guest headliners. I could tell at the time that they were being groomed for their eventual international championship in 2015. Their sound was completely polished and different from ours (they were synchronized with each other, or rather, they sounded like one voice singing chords). We (JRC) were new to barbershop, and three of the four of us had never sung in a registered quartet. Instant Classic rang every single chord. The men of Instant Classic had a profound influence on me and my quartet, as we continued to collaborate and engage with them in learning and singing for years after that initial meeting. Now Theo Hicks, as the director of Circle City Sound barbershop chorus in Indianapolis, is educating the youth of the next generation in barbershop.

Resonance matching is a technique developed by barbershop coach Scott Kitzmiller that propelled Instant Classic to the 2015 international championship.¹² Many subsequent quartets (Forefront in 2016, for example) used this technique and won the international competition as

¹¹ Hicks, Theo. "Every Voice Matters," *Harmonizer*, November/December 2019, 27.

¹² Kitzmiller, Scott. "Resonating with Instant Classic," *Harmonizer*, May/June 2016, 18-19.

well. In a particularly inspiring moment in my performance history, my quartet - JRC - had the fortuitous opportunity to go to Harmony University at Belmont University in Nashville, TN; we also had the honor and privilege of attending HU on full scholarship during the summer of 2017. While there, we were assigned to the Quartet College category. This meant that we could, as a quartet, attend classes of our choosing. We also received regular coaching on a weekly basis, culminating in our performance at the end of the program in front of the entire student-faculty body. One class that stood out to me was the resonance matching class taught by Scott Kitzmiller.

In this class, JRC learned many enlightening concepts, including the idea of complementary vowel sounds. We were also able to perform in front of the class as “guinea pigs” for experimentation and demonstration. Other volunteer or pick-up quartets (four singers harmonizing together who have previously never sung together) also demonstrated in front of the class to show that the concepts could work on people who are not used to singing together. At the end of the class, we all gathered into a full chorus and demonstrated the techniques that we learned.

Resonance matching is a specific form of vowel matching. The connection between the classical pedagogue Richard Miller and barbershop coach Scott Kitzmiller is that they both use fine-tuning methods to achieve ring in the sound. My experience has shown that by using the *bel canto* techniques to achieve the singer’s formant and then adding to that the technique of resonance matching in a quartet—the results of a consistent, unified, ringing quartet sound are more successful—and more thrilling for the audience. Here is Kitzmiller’s explanation of his theory that we learned in class:

The basis of the system is the idea that certain groups of vowels have formants that compliment [sic] each other mathematically. For instance, both the first formant of [u] (OO) and the second formant of [i] (EE) resonate around 320 Hz, meaning they essentially set up the same overtone series. The theory is that we can draw those two vowels together (the exact middle would be the German mixed vowel [y], which we don’t use [in standard American English]), and further fine tune them to create and reinforce the harmonic series they are already setting up. Further, this can be modified based on the natural

tendencies of the individual voices in the quartet. Generally, we ask brighter-voiced singers to add more [u] (OO) in the [i] (EE) sound, and ask darker-voiced singers to do the opposite. Sometimes individual voices have a balance, and need little or no adjustment.

Usually, the vowels we sing in the Barbershop world are universally too pure, that is to say, too much O in the O, too much AH in the AH, etc. They can be modified toward their specific complimentary [sic] vowel sounds (without changing the vowel production), which keeps us [singers] more consistent, helps with pitch, and rings...

Resonant groupings:

Short A (last), AH (lost), AW (long)EH (let), UH (love), o (low)
IH (lift), UR (learn), short oo (look)EE (we), [y], oo (you).¹³

The resulting overtones and undertones that we produced in the room were palpable and consistently heard. As a quartet, we absorbed these concepts from HU and reused them in our own quartet and chorus rehearsals. Our local chorus members were excited about this new skill and began tuning better with each other because of it. I have included some slides (Figures 1.2 and 1.3) from this class that are particularly useful. These charts continue to be beneficial in my rehearsing and performing. In this trapezoid-shaped diagram, the outlying obtuse lines incline from the center of the diagram with the target IPA vowel of [a] as in “lost.” On the top of the outlying line the target vowel migrates through a succession of IPA vowels from the open front unrounded vowel [a] as in “last” to closed [i] as in “we.” On the other side of the diagram on the other outlying line, the target vowel migrates on a decline from the open mid-back rounded vowel [ɔ] as in “long” to the closed back rounded vowel [u] as in “you.” One can see that the outlying lines of IPA vowels migrate away from the middle line of vowels—the top towards brighter vowels and the bottom towards darker vowels. The middle line of vowels is a marriage of the outermost lines of vowels. The vertical lines that intersect the three horizontal lines of vowels are lines that a singer can travel up or down (brighter or darker) to tweak with a singer standing right next to him to better meld together. The second slide provides reflection and valuable instructions

¹³ Kitzmiller, Scott. “Resonating with Instant Classic,” *Harmonizer*, May/June 2016, 19.

to the singer to get the most use out of the vowel chart.

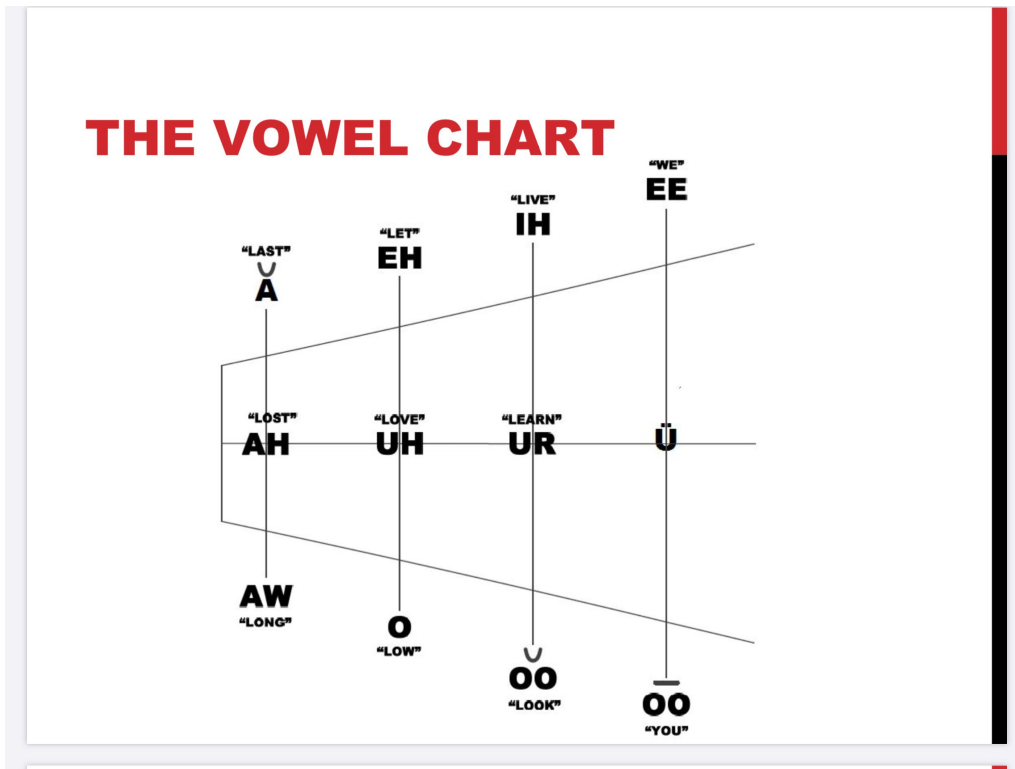


Figure 1.2. Slide from Scott Kitzmiller's PowerPoint presentation on Resonance Matching. Used with permission.

THE RECAP

- Shift your philosophy from matching vowels to alignment within the vowel family
- Keep your vowel choices as close to center as possible while still keeping the feeling of that vowel intact
- "Sing to the ring" and practice on your own to find where the ring lives in your own voice
- Have fun ringing!

Figure 1.3. Ibid.

Kitzmiller literally brought students to the front of the class one by one. First, he analyzed the level of brightness or darkness present in a student's voice. Then he added another voice to sing with the first voice. He repeated the first step with the second voice. Then he balanced the two voices until they sounded more like one voice by adjusting or tuning levels of brightness or darkness. He continued adding voices until the whole class was singing together. It was like watching the tuning or adjusting of a knob on an old stereo or a steel string on a guitar.

Kitzmiller has told me that his theory is not particularly relevant to the solo singer. "Be aware that this has no real relevance to the soloist, other than to make aware [sic] of the relationship among complimentary [sic] vowel sounds."¹⁴ In addition to the new awareness of complementary vowel sounds I received, I also discovered I had increased awareness of which vowels in my voice had more ring and which vowels had less. I respectfully and enthusiastically disagree with Kitzmiller that his theory is not relevant to the soloist—which is part of the overall point of this essay. His theory provided me powerful tools that shaped how I sang from then on to the present. For instance, I learned to experiment by singing to the ring for every single vowel I sang as a soloist. I would then mold the rest of my vowels in an aria to the resonance of the vowel that rang the most. I tested this theory by remembering when my ears buzzed or vibrated the most from the overtones being produced. Also, I listened to recordings of myself performing this experiment. Usually, the results of my experiments almost always ended with me producing more ring consistently throughout a piece of music. I have only continued to improve from then to the present. These concepts brought my singing to a whole new level of performance in the realm of "High Art" as Kitzmiller likes to call it. Knowing these concepts, I have improved both in quartet and in solo singing, and I believe that any solo classical singer would improve with this knowledge.

¹⁴ Personal communication, Scott Kitzmiller, April 18, 2019.

As a singer with multiple degrees in performance, I had learned about formants and overtones long before this class at HU; however, I never really comprehended the concepts of ring and resonance until Kitzmiller's class. In Kitzmiller's article "Resonating with Instant Classic" from *The Harmonizer* (May/June 2016), he talked about his coaching of the 2015 quartet champions: "More and more, they started to sound like one voice on four parts."¹⁵ Where else can one get advanced mathematical tuning techniques for singing while also singing in the class?¹⁶ Most music school voice pedagogy classes do not have this level of participation—all members singing in front of the rest of the class. In this class at HU, we were literally singing every day. We were amazed and delighted by our results. Additionally, Kitzmiller told the class he came to this theory by way of reverse engineering. Results first, then figure out how he arrived there. The enjoyable presentation and my active participation in the class made these concepts come alive. I believe that this class should be offered at every conservatory and music school.

In summation, as a prospective voice pedagogy teacher, I would teach from a traditional course of materials and resources from well-known classical voice teachers that I have provided in this chapter. In addition, I would perform the resonance matching experiment with the entire class, as I have described with Kitzmiller. My syllabus would cover reading materials, class discussion in a round table format, slide show projections, videos of singers; each student giving another student a sample voice lesson, and a final exam at the end of the course covering all the topics we investigated. This course would be an integration of healthy *bel canto* voice technique with different styles of singing—especially barbershop. My hope is that the students would discover how to apply that knowledge to any musical environment, as I have.

¹⁵ Kitzmiller, 18.

¹⁶ Scott Kitzmiller is also a piano tuner in addition to being a world class barbershop coach and competition judge.

Chapter 6: SWITCH PARTS: DETERMINING VOICE TYPE WITH BARBERSHOP REPERTOIRE

Today singers have available a wide array of musical selections that makes it difficult for them to choose the right repertoire; singing barbershop can help the classical singer make better choices. Through experimentation with the voice parts in barbershop, a classically trained singer can discover and narrow the determination of his or her own voice type, thus empowering him or her to choose repertoire better suited to his voice. I have discovered through my years of barbershop singing that I have become better acquainted with the unique arranging style. My ear can sense where my part is going, even if I am looking at a new arrangement. This aural skill is also useful for woodshedding. This perception that I gained from barbershop has made me aware of the capabilities of my voice for solo classical singing, in that I have discovered the parts of my voice in which I am most comfortable (*tessitura*) and that are the most beautiful to the listener. A brief analysis of the barbershop arranging style can provide the classical singer insight into the function of his or her voice.

American Songbook standards have been arranged by members of the Society for most of its history; pop songs have recently been arranged in the barbershop style. Barbershop arrangers must adhere to specific requirements for their charts to be considered barbershop and therefore promoters of “lock and ring.” The point is that barbershop is more an arranging style than it is a genre. Many American popular songs spanning the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are arranged in the barbershop style. Published and unpublished examples available for use on the Society’s website include: composer and lyricist Spencer Williams’s “Basin Street Blues” (1928), composer Jimmy McHugh and lyricist Dorothy Fields’s “On the Sunny Side of the Street”

(1930), composer Josef Myrow and lyricist Mack Gordon's "You Make Me Feel So Young" (1946), composer and lyricist Meredith Wilson's "Goodnight Ladies" (1957), composers and lyricists Dean Kay and Kelly Gordon's "That's Life" (1964), composer and lyricist Freddie Mercury's "Bohemian Rhapsody" (1975), composers and lyricists Magne Furuholmen, Morten Harket, and Pal Waaktaar's "Take on Me" (1984); composer Elton John and lyricist Tim Rice's "Can You Feel the Love Tonight?" (1994), composer and lyricist Jason Mraz's "I'm Yours" (2007), etc. New songs are being arranged in the barbershop style every day.

Adhering to the established "rules" of arranging may increase the likelihood of the arranger's getting his or her chart published. Some rules are more important for contest scenarios. Here is a definition of barbershop music from an edition of the *SPEBSQSA Contest and Judging Handbook*:

Barbershop music features major and minor chords and barbershop (dominant-type) seventh chords, resolving primarily on the circle of fifths. Sixth, ninth, and majorseventh chords containing the minor second interval are not used. The basic harmonization may be embellished with additional chord progressions to provide harmonic interest and rhythmic momentum, to carry over between phrases, or to introduce or close the song effectively.¹

Sometimes these rules are broken, and not all arrangements are suitable for contests. Sometimes arrangements are geared towards ticketed themed concerts and community engagements held at holidays and throughout the year. Another excerpt from the *Judging Handbook* gives us clear ideas about what an arranger is supposed to do with the voice parts in a particular arrangement:

The melody is consistently sung by the Lead, with the Tenor harmonizing above the melody, the Bass singing the lowest harmonizing notes below the melody, and the Baritone completing the chord either above or below the melody. The melody may be sung occasionally by the Bass, but not by the Tenor except for an infrequent note or two to avoid awkward voice leading, and in introductions or tags (codas).²

¹ Kaplan, Max, *Barbershopping: Musical and Social Harmony*. (Rutherford [N.J.]: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1993): 32.

² Ibid.

Several songs exist that have tenor and or baritone melodies, perhaps because an arranger finds that the key in which he or she is arranging causes the melody to be better suited for the tenor or baritone part in that song. The explanation of barbershop arranging also gives singers ideas about how to woodshed a song if it has not yet been arranged; or even if it has been arranged. A singer's ability to improvise a harmony on an established melody is invaluable. Barbershop provides the environment for the singer to establish this important skill—especially in the form of woodshedding. One benefit includes an ear for composition—the singer would be able to choose out of a vast array of composers the songs best suited for the voice with the singer's range and technique in mind.

Both the new and experienced barbershopper can download from the Society website a great deal of free sheet music ranging from Society classics, birthday, patriotic, and holiday songs. Simply go to barbershop.org, click on the “Get music” tab, and then click on the “Free sheet music” tab.³ Also included in this section of the website is the *Heritage of Harmony Songbook*, available for free download. “It has 66 memorable arrangements of Barbershop gems...preceded by a story about the song, providing interesting emcee material for your performances.”⁴ A word of caution to the new-to-barbershop singer: be aware that the TTBB designation on the covers of BHS published sheet music is not the same as TTBB in the traditional choral world of publishing. In his *Harmonizer* article “The challenges of barbershop sheet music,” BHS director of music education Donny Rose writes,

Traditional men's music is typically (not always) presented only with bass clefs. Barbershop sheet music has the bass clef and the vocal tenor [sic] clef [treble clef with an 8 underneath] (that little 8 means sing an octave down). This type of treble clef is less common outside of barbershop arrangements. People new to our style might confuse it with SATB. In addition, because TTBB charts in the choral world are intended *only* for men, new-to-barbershop folks and music teachers would not be aware that women can typically sing the top 1, 2, or even 3 parts of our music. Our TTBB charts (sometimes

³ Barbershop.org, accessed September 8, 2020.

⁴ *An Information Manual for Barbershop Quartets*. (Stock No. 4093. SPEBSQSA, Inc. 2007): 10

pitched up, with a few alterations) are what most mixed harmony barbershop groups perform all over the world today.⁵

It is important for the classically trained singer to be versatile in reading different clefs.

Barbershop provides an environment for exercising that skill. Classical performers are continually provided opportunities to sing in less familiar clefs than what they are accustomed to.

In the case of barbershop, singing (and harmonizing) a song without a written arrangement, as I discussed in Chapter One, is called woodshedding. Max H. Brandt wrote,

Among barbershoppers today the term Woodshedding has a more particular connotation, referring to any spontaneous harmonizing without the aid of a prescribed arrangement, often by a spontaneous “pick-up” quartet, composed of four people who do not normally sing together. It is not unlike a group of jazz musicians who, meeting each other for the first time, take out their instruments to do a little informal jamming, not necessarily for public consumption, but for fun among themselves.⁶

This discussion provides us with yet another reminder of why we sing. Sometimes it is for us as much as for other people.

A person new to barbershop will find variety in the repertoire of any BHS chapter he or she visits. The singers can be versatile in their repertoire. A typical chapter chorus tends to sing in their community for several different functions. Dean Atlee Snyder wrote,

With few exceptions, every local chapter now sings together as an organized chorus with frequent opportunities in the local community to entertain the public, perhaps substitute for a church choir during summer vacation, or to sing the national anthem at an athletic or patriotic event. The typical chorus repertoire contains tuneful popular melodies, patriotic and sacred numbers, and songs from the musical stage—always with emphasis on those songs that will adapt to the barbershop style.⁷

⁵ Rose, Donny. “The challenges of barbershop sheet music,” *The Harmonizer*. (January/February 2019): 12-13.

⁶ *Ibid*, 34.

⁷ *Ibid*, 30.

I agree with Atlee; to illustrate this point, my quartet has sung the national anthem at an IU baseball game which was broadcast on the Big Ten network. My barbershop chorus has served at my current church for several summers singing spiritual numbers. My quartet and chorus have sung at retirement homes with full shows of Broadway tunes as well as winter holiday songs. We consider the retirement home shows to be community outreach. We have also charged admission for themed shows. The proceeds go into our budget to pay for chorus expenses (purchasing sheet music, risers, etc.) Sometimes we are invited to perform for dinner meetings, and the sponsors make a charitable donation to our organization. Many chapters function this way, as is typical for a non-profit organization. Proceeds are never for personal gain. Community involvement is extremely important for chapters of the Society.

At my first barbershop rehearsal years ago, I was given a song book of barbershop standards. This book of sheet music contains twelve songs that every person new to barbershop learns and every experienced barbershopper knows. This book is affectionately known as the “Barber Polecat.” Interestingly, Society members use both terms “Barberpole Cat” and “Polecat.” It would seem both are correct.

Here is an excerpt from the 1992 edition of that book:

In 1971, International President Ralph Ribble launched a new Society activity known as the Barberpole Cat Program. Its purpose is to encourage as many Barbershoppers as possible to become involved in quartet singing. The goal is not necessarily the formation of registered quartets, although that would be a great result, if it were to happen. Rather, the program introduces men to the joy of singing with three otherguys. Since then, the Barberpole Cat Program has been consistently successful. The current list of 12 songs was selected in 1987 by a vote of Society members. We hope the Barberpole Cat will become your favorite animal.⁸

As the history of this book illustrates, its purposes are clear:

- To encourage quartet activity at chapter meetings.

⁸ *The Barberpole Cat Program and Song Book*. Stock no. 6053. Published by SPEBSQSA, Inc. Copyright 1992.

- To provide Barbershoppers with a common repertoire of songs that they can sing together, with any three Society members, at inter-chapter activities, conventions and other barbershopping events.
- To enable Barbershoppers to gain confidence in performing in a quartet in an informal, supportive atmosphere.
- To teach Barbershoppers a repertoire of easy arrangements that a beginning quartet can perform.⁹

Here are the twelve songs from that book, some of which are performed more than others. I italicize the ones I have personally observed to be more popular or performed more often. The popularity of each song depends on what local chapter you are in. A singer new to barbershop will soon find that he or she will quickly learn most of these songs.

1. *My Wild Irish Rose*, 1899. Words and Music by Chauncey Olcott (1858-1932). Arranged by Floyd Connett.
2. *Wait till the Sun Shines, Nellie*, 1905. Words and Music by Andrew B. Sterling (1874-1955) and Harry von Tilzer (1872-1946). Arranged by Warren “Buzz” Haeger.
3. *Sweet and Lovely (That’s What You Are to Me)*, 1971. Words and Music by Norman Stark. Arranged by Mac Huff.
4. *Down Our Way*, 1927. Words and Music by Al Steiman and Fred Hughes. Arranged by Floyd Connett.
5. *Honey/Little ‘Lize Medley*, 1898-Traditional. Arranged by Floyd Connett.
6. *Let Me Call You Sweetheart*, 1910. Words by Beth Slater Whitson and Music by Leo Friedman.
7. *Sweet, Sweet Roses of Morn*, 1941. Words and Music by Oscar F. Jones (1892-19??) and Martin S. Peake (1894-19??). Arranged by Floyd Connett.
8. *Shine on Me*, 18—. Words by B. B. McKinney. Traditional. Arranged by Floyd Connett.
9. *The Story of the Rose (Heart of My Heart)*, 1899. Words by “Alice.” Music by Andrew Mack (1863-1931). Arranged by SPEBSQSA, Inc.
10. *You’re the Flower of My Heart, Sweet Adeline*, 1903. Words by Richard H. Gerard (1876-1948). Music by Harry Armstrong (1879-1951). Arranged by SPEBSQSA, Inc.
11. *Down by The Old Mill Stream*, 1910. Words and Music by Tell Taylor.
12. *You Tell Me Your Dream*, 1899. Words by Seymour A. Rice and Albert H. Brown. Music by Charles N. Daniels (1878-1943). Arranged by Phil Embury.¹⁰

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Seven out of the twelve songs are in B flat Major. Those not in B flat Major are often in closely related keys (F Major or A flat Major). One of the reasons for this is that B flat Major is an easy key for any of the four voice parts to warm-up in; it is a comfortable key for the male voice that requires minimal effort when vocalizing for the first time during the day. Much of the time chapter choruses warm up with polecats. Another reason that most of the songs are in B flat Major is that the pitch-blower in a pick-up quartet does not have to keep getting out the pitch pipe if they decide to sing many polecats at an afterglow or convention. Perhaps the compiler of the polecat book intentionally chose mostly B flat songs. Finally, I personally find the pitch B flat easy to remember (in case I have forgotten to bring my pitch pipe to a barbershop function). One can more easily recall B flat from his or her pitch memory, especially if one sings the polecats week after week for several years.

In my chorus rehearsals or meetings, we ritually open and close with two songs. First, to signal the beginning of the rehearsal, our designated pitch-giver blows B flat and off we go with “The Old Songs.”¹¹ Once rehearsal is concluded, we end our time together, usually in a semicircle with arms on each other’s shoulders, singing “Keep the Whole World Singing.”¹² The song book *Just Plain Barbershop*, published by the Society (2004), states that “Every chapter meeting should open with ‘The Old Songs’...and close with ‘Keep the whole world singing’...the Society motto,...at official meetings.” Not only are these songs traditional to the Society, but they are a constant reminder to us why we keep showing up to sing together - camaraderie and the joy of singing.

Repertoire should be chosen based on the quality and strengths of a person’s voice. A person with a more balanced voice (having *chiaroscuro* or depth and ring) has more options with

¹¹ Words and music by Geoffrey O’Hara. Theme song is taken from the introduction to “A Little CloseHarmony,” a choral piece by the composer published in 1921 by Boston Music Company. *Just Plain Barbershop Songbook*. BHS, 2004. 1

¹² Words, Music and Arrangement by Willis A. Diekema. Ibid.

the repertoire he or she chooses. In my experience my teachers have chosen repertoire for me, but this is not always the case for teachers and students. Younger singers often choose repertoire or music that is advanced beyond their years. The danger of this should be obvious. Singers can damage their voices too soon by choosing repertoire that is too challenging and has the potential to cause permanent vocal problems. Consider this analogy. A student who is new to track and field and has been successful for a year decides to compete in the 100-meter dash at the Olympics. Students sing repertoire too advanced for their age or voice type time and time again. The voice teacher acts as a Sherpa or guide to the student. Ultimately, the students decide which paths to take in their singing careers.

I have been categorized by my teacher and coaches as a lyric baritone. As a younger lyric baritone, I sang such operatic roles as Elviro in *Serse* by Händel, Haly in *L'italiana in Algeri* by Rossini, Count Almaviva in *Le nozze di Figaro* by Mozart, Leporello in *Don Giovanni* by Mozart, and Papageno in *Die Zauberflöte* by Mozart, among several others. As a more mature lyric baritone, someday I could sing Valentin in *Faust* by Gounod, Marcello in *La bohème* by Puccini, and Germont in *La traviata* by Verdi, among several others.

Like many singers, I have learned and improved by making mistakes. While taking voice lessons in my undergraduate studies, I frequently sang repertoire too advanced or dramatic for my *Fach*. I had never heard of the *Fach* system until graduate school. This is not a criticism of my previous teachers, simply a fact that I learned later in time when I was ready.

Another mistake I made was studying with three different voice teachers within a period of four years. They all had different analyses of my voice; though they all agreed I was a baritone, they did not agree on what kind. This led to problems in selecting my repertoire.

An anecdote from my own life was the time I sang something too dramatic for my voice—the title role of *Gianni Schicchi* in Puccini's opera at the College of Charleston in South Carolina in 2009. Granted, this was a student production. As a developing lyric baritone, I would not be able to sing this role at an "A-House" like the Metropolitan Opera in New York. A more

experienced, dramatic baritone or even bass-baritone is required for this role. Perhaps my teacher at the time thought my voice possessed a darker color or heavier weight than it really did. To be honest, I may have manufactured that sound in my voice, when I needed to be producing a natural, healthy sound appropriate for my age. I was twenty-four years old. I do not believe I should have sung that role at that age, although it was a good learning experience. I am grateful I have not had any vocal repercussions.

Therefore, I advocate that younger singers (approximately 18-25 years of age) should be cautious when it comes to learning repertoire. A good rule of thumb could be for the beginning singer to start studying and performing repertoire from the earlier periods of Music History and gradually working his or her way forward. For instance, an 18 to 22-year-old could sing repertoire from the Baroque Period (approximately 1600-1750). Repertoire from this period does not require the same stamina that later operas of Verdi or Wagner require from a professional opera singer. A 22-25-year-old could sing music from the Classical Period (approximately 1750-1820) and so on. Teachers can and will make exceptions depending on the ability of their students. This is not to say that a student should not privately study more dramatic repertoire to build stamina—on the contrary, it can be informative in helping the student discover hidden potential. The student should still exercise caution when auditioning for a role and studying entire roles.

In Berton Coffin's book *Historical Vocal Pedagogy Classics*, he quotes important vocal pedagogue Francesco Lamperti concerning the young voice student versus the professional singer:

He warns against the teaching of dramatic operas, which he found were destructive of voice in general and to female voices in particular; instead he recommended the operas of Bellini, Donizetti, and especially Rossini, with the possible exception of the baritone—"a register of voice so to say, created by Giorgio Ronconi, by

the combination of the tenor-serio and basso-cantata...The old repertoire will always be found more fruitful results, and less dangerous.”¹³

Concerning the roles of the student and teacher play in the voice studio, Francesco Lamperti’s son Giovanni Battista, wrote,

...the chief requirements of the singer are “voice, musical talent, health, power of apprehension, diligence, and patience.” Those of the teacher are “experience, a sensitive ear, the gift of intuition and individualization.”¹⁴

G. B. Lamperti knew that no two voices are alike. A person’s voice cannot simply be fitted into a generalized mold too soon by his or her teacher. Age is only a fraction of the whole in relation to opera singing. Matters of voice size, range, color, timbre, and previous training must also be considered.

By singing the various barbershop voice parts, the singer can figure all of this out. All my years of classical training were put to the test when I experimented with singing the four parts of barbershop. I learned different skills in each part to incorporate into my solo technique. Singing all four barbershop voice parts is essentially exercising all the voice registers—and doing it over time is more beneficial.

A singer not only learns something about his or her voice by singing every barbershop voice part, but he or she also learns what is required for healthy classical singing and can choose his repertoire accordingly. I have found that singing the bass part in barbershop for eight years has equipped me with the confidence to settle into my voice type of lyric baritone. By singing other barbershop voice parts like baritone and tenor, I have discovered that my voice needed more flexibility and elasticity. Male singers often employ the *falsetto* register to sing tenor. When I sing in *falsetto* I am again stretching or flexing my voice to make it more nimble and agile—this skill makes it possible for me as a lyric baritone to sing high notes with greater ease. Working to gain

¹³ Coffin, Berton. *Historical Vocal Pedagogy Classics*. (The Scarecrow Press, Inc., Metuchen, N.J., & London, 1989): 61.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 63.

this elasticity has been useful in my classical training. By singing baritone in barbershop (the part with the “left-over” notes of a chord), I was often singing at the point where my *primo passaggio* (place where low register breaks into middle register) breaks into my *secondo passaggio*—not a comfortable spot to stay in. Prior to this, I was accustomed to singing the entire gamut of my range. I learned to employ a lighter mechanism such as head voice or mixed voice (combination of chest and *falsetto*) that had no weight to it. I no longer felt like I had to lift any heavy weight or push up to the notes on middle C and above; singing up to them and coming back down is one thing, to sit and hover in that spot is another. I have enormous respect for natural barbershop baritones. They inhabit that lighter quality of voice that makes it easy to move in often strange intervals (to complete the chord in barbershop voice leading). That lighter mechanism of voice made it possible for me to explore and cement my foundation in the classical lyric baritone repertoire. I no longer felt uncomfortable when I had to sing long passages in my *secondo passaggio*. Lyric baritones must live up there on those notes and the barbershop baritone part was the perfect training ground for me.

Chapter 7: “THE BARBERSHOPPER OF SEVILLE”: A COMPARISON OF PERFORMANCE PRACTICES

Classical and barbershop singers have different methods of talking about the same concepts. Many performance practices from the classical *bel canto* school of singing reinforce barbershop practices, and vice versa. BHS provides several resources on best practices for both choruses and quartets. Over the years, I have learned several performance practices from expert barbershoppers that have helped reinforce my singing of classical repertoire. Also, classical singing techniques that I have learned from teachers and academic study have helped my quartet and chorus improve their singing techniques in the community and in competition.

To illustrate this point of reinforcement, I continue to use different stylistic choices for singing posture in performance that I learned in both barbershop and classical training. Richard Miller calls it noble posture. Barbershop coach Paul Ellinger calls it regal posture. The result is the same. In a performance I use the technique of imagining that I am a King and I do not need to move closer to my audience of subjects—they must draw nearer to me. This air of confidence straightens my alignment. I feel taller and look taller to the audience. A confident performer on stage usually commands the attention of an audience. Noble, regal, or tall posture is good and healthy technique for the vocal mechanism to properly function.

Breath control is important for good, healthy singing and is not explicit to either barbershop or classical techniques. As a teacher of a functional method or approach that can be applied to many styles of music, I believe it is useful to focus on a student’s breath management skills before I move on to phonation because I believe breathing to be the foundation of athletic singing. Some voice teachers of different styles (i.e., Contemporary Commercial Music or CCM) focus mainly on registration of their students’ voices. “Jeannette LoVetri, founder of Somatic

Voicework™—the LoVetri Method, teaches that register balance is the key to good singing (healthy functional singing). She advocates isolating each register and doing exercises to strengthen it.”¹ I agree with LoVetri that register balance is incredibly important for singing; however, I believe register strengthening exercises should be added after breathing exercises in the classical singing teaching style because intense breathing exercises prepares the student for more athletic, full body singing in operatic repertoire.² The singer and author William Shakespeare (not the playwright) was a student of voice pedagogy pioneer Francesco Lamperti. Shakespeare provided some good breathing exercises in his breakthrough book *The Art of Singing*.

[H]alf fill the lungs through the mouth and then breathe in and out small amountsof air, quickly and noiselessly “until you feel yourself panting, yet doing nothing with thechest, and without filling the lungs.” When this is done there is a pulsation of the soft place underneath the breastbone. “The breaths must be taken with the mouth open and noiselessly.” The throat should feel open and the shoulders and the chest free. “Now extend this quick, noiseless panting or quivering until it is felt not only at the soft place, but at the sides and back near the shoulder blades.” Then expand from this action to a full breath and pronounce a long “ah” for ten or fifteen seconds. Stop the note with breath to spare so that “the throat is still wide open and natural.”³

This approach to breath management is a useful tool for stamina in both barbershop and classical techniques.

In his book *Great Singers on Great Singing*, Jerome Hines interviews well-known operatic coloratura soprano Joan Sutherland, who summarizes her breathing technique as such:

Originally I was taught to breathe through the nose. But because of my repertoireit just cannot be done. When I have to sing that florid type of music, I don’t have time to close my mouth. I have to breathe through my mouth most of the time.... I was taught to breathe deeply through the thorax with...let’s say, the diaphragm, as everyone does—but

¹ M. Clark, Diane and Billy J. Biffle. *So You Want to Sing Barbershop*. (MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017):75.

² I am not trained in the Contemporary Commercial Music (CCM) method of singing. LoVetri is trained inthis method.

³ Coffin, Berton. *Historical Vocal Pedagogy Classics*. (The Scarecrow Press, Inc., Metuchen, N.J., &London, 1989): 74.

it feels like the pit of the stomach, or the abdomen, really. It's deeper than the stomach, it's the pit of the abdomen. Many singers breathe much too high.⁴

Joan Sutherland is known for her title role in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, the role that launched her career at Covent Garden and the Metropolitan Opera. Her repertoire mainly consisted of the *bel canto* roles of Donizetti, Bellini, and Verdi. This repertoire requires much vocal stamina, which accounts for why Sutherland spoke of her full body breathing technique and breathing through both the nose and the mouth. This technique of breathing in through the mouth and nose simultaneously can be useful to the barbershopper who may be singing in a competition in which the singer needs much vocal stamina to sing difficult charts; or this can also be helpful to the barbershopper who must sing many songs with his or her quartet outside for a long period of time. I know that I have used this technique of open-mouth inhalation in my quartet when we have performed at gigs outside for durations of thirty to forty-five minutes. I discovered that I was less tired when we finished singing, because I used this breathing technique.

An opera singer may use the *bel canto* technique of *appoggio* for breathing. This technique can be adapted by a pop or barbershop singer. In Richard Miller's book *Training Tenor Voices*, the author gives an insightful explanation of what should happen to the singer when correctly utilizing *appoggio*:

The singer must find the "noble posture" ...by raising the arms straight upward over the head while inhaling silently and deeply. The arms are then brought back to the sides of the body while the chest remains in a relatively elevated posture, shoulders relaxed...The key to elongating the breath cycle lies in the ability to sing short detached notes while silently replenishing the breath between them so that the muscles and organs of the trunk remain for extended periods of time quite near the inspiratory position (*la lotta vocale*). The large abdominal muscles...are thereby trained to avoid habitual immediate contraction following inhalation. The external intercostals do not make an early surrender to the internals. The sternum neither rises nor falls. The diaphragm descends more completely and ascends less rapidly. Breath expulsion is minimal in the short onset, and breath renewal takes place at the moment of termination of the brief phonatory event. *The new breath is the release of the phonation.*⁵

⁴ Hines, Jerome. *Great Singers on Great Singing*. (New York: Doubleday, 1982): 326.

⁵ Miller, Richard. *Training Tenor Voices*. (New York: Schirmer books, 1993): 25-26.

I find this last sentence by Miller to be particularly useful to both the classical and barbershop singer; by making the release of phonation the next inhalation, the singer does not stop the flow of air, thereby causing a continuous flow of air which also helps the singer sing more *legato* phrases. Another way to employ *appoggio* is to hiss for one or two-second intervals. While doing this, I monitor my breathing by placing one hand on the abdominal region and the other hand on my side and back. I try to feel and be aware of how much air I am expelling and of minimizing the exhalation. Then I expel air while hissing for four, eight, and twelve-second intervals while keeping my chest in the same position and not getting rid of too much expansion too quickly in my abdominal muscles and back. Sutherland describes support or *appoggio*,

It's like a floor holding an air-filled balloon...without tying the top of the balloon.... You must control the passage of the air. You must control it so it deflates slowly. That way you prevent the air from escaping too rapidly. And then you sing *on* the breath, not with it.⁶

I have found the easiest way of achieving *appoggio* is by singing an entire song or aria on a tall open [O] vowel. My entire body is immediately engaged, and I am no longer singing from just my larynx (old habits tend to re-surface). Barbershoppers also sing entire passages on a neutral vowel, but may not know they are achieving *appoggio*, per say. They know they are singing connected phrases—also achieving *legato*. The *bel canto* technique of *appoggio* is useful for barbershoppers in that by engaging their entire bodies for singing they are opening more resonating chambers inside—thereby making their voices travel farther (expanding) and not needing additional amplification. I find this to be a powerful tool the singer can use to thrill audiences.

Another useful term for barbershoppers to know about is *passaggio*. The *passaggio* exists in all singing voices, not just that of an opera singer. The 2004 edition of the *Oxford Concise*

⁶ Hines, Jerome. *Great Singers on Great Singing*. (NY: Doubleday, 1982): 327.

Dictionary of Music defines the *passaggio* as, “(Italian. ‘Passage’). (1) The point at which two of the three vocal registers (high, middle, and low) meet.”⁷ W. Stephen Smith and Michael Chipman define the *passaggio* in a female’s voice as, “the transition area between the speaking voice and the sighing voice.”⁸ Richard Miller defines it as, “*zona di passaggio* (passage zone), an area also termed *voce media* (middle voice) that lies midway between regions of the voice traditionally designated as *voce di petto* (chest voice) and *voce di testa* (head voice).”⁹ The famous operatic tenor Luciano Pavarotti, well known for his smooth, almost imperceptible transition from the middle voice to high voice, described his process in detail in an interview with Jerome Hines,

[T]he critical sound...the crucial part of the voice...which is the *passaggio*. By hearing you become aware of the change of sound - let’s call it covering. If you don’t do this [cover], the voice becomes very white, white, and whiter...and more tired...and you don’t reach the end of the performance. If you cover the sound, the position and the voice are solid...The muscles must be very relaxed, like you’re yawning. But you must really make the voice more squeezed...I think I give less space when I go through the *passaggio*, and then more space after I’ve left it... It doesn’t mean the sound comes out like that [squeezed]. The sound should be even, but inside there is a kind of...almost a suffocation of the sound. Also, you use very much the resonance in the *passaggio*-more than usual.¹⁰

Here is one Pavarotti exercise for *passaggio* in F Major from the Hines interview. The duration is in sixteenth notes. The vowel that I prefer is open [O] as in the word “law.” Start on scale degree one, ascend to scale degree nine, and come back down to one. Repeat this a second time in one continuous phrase of four measures. Pavarotti used this exercise (Fig. 1.4¹¹) throughout the entire range of his voice.

⁷ Kennedy, Michael and Joyce Bourne (editors). *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Music*, Rev. ed. (NY:Oxford University Press, 2004): 549.

⁸ Smith, W. Stephen and Michael Chipman. *The Naked Voice*. (NY: Oxford University Press, 2007): 82.

⁹ Miller, Richard. *On the Art of Singing*. (NY: Oxford University Press, 1996): 11.

¹⁰ Hines, 219.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 216.



Example 1.1. Pavarotti's *Passaggio* Exercise.

The skill of navigating between both registers of the voice with smoothness and ease is pertinent to any voice part in barbershop. By vocalizing in the full range of the voice, the barbershop singer strengthens his or her voice for long durations of singing. The voice is also more malleable and pleasing to hear.

The *chiaroscuro* (the balance of bright and dark) sound so desirable in the Italian school of singing is different way of describing the well-balanced voice Kitzmiller spoke of in his resonance matching class. A quartet should build their character or quality of sound on the person in the quartet who exemplifies both light and dark qualities in his or her voice.

Vowel modification makes it easier for classical singers to sing high notes, especially if they are singing closed vowels. When I am in my *zona di passaggio*, I think of a rounder or taller vowel, no matter what the vowel is; this gives the impression to the listener that less shifting is happening between registers, especially middle to high, and makes the singing sound like one voice or one large register—which is the goal of most singers in any style or genre. I think that the *passaggio* is more useful to leads in barbershop. The lead is the voice part most responsible for singing the melody.

For several years in my own private teaching studio and as assistant director of my barbershop chorus, I have found two methods of learning a song or piece of music to be valuable. The first is simpler with fewer steps; I have frequently used this one. However, the second is more comprehensive, which I found to be more revealing in that my pitch accuracy was not as accurate as I perceived it was once I listened to the recording of myself.

In the appendix of Clark and Biffle’s book on barbershop singing, they describe methods of learning a song. One of these, the method I have used, was developed by barbershop arranger Jay Giallombardo. In this method there are roughly three steps: “1-pitches, 2-word sounds, and 3-integration.”¹² In this first step, Giallombardo advises the singer to learn the notes on a neutral vowel. He also says something fascinating about the function of the human brain in the learning process: “If given a chance to focus on a single task, the brain will actually record the pitches, and they will remain in memory in the subconscious.”¹³ I agree with Giallombardo and have found this step especially helpful. When utilizing this method, my brain was not multitasking and therefore not working as hard to learn words and music at the same time, often leaving room for mistakes. The act of recording in the brain made the song learning process more efficient for me, but it did not negate consistent practicing day after day. This barbershop method of song learning is obviously useful for the classical singer—they are not learning bad habits along the way. Instead, good habits are ingrained in foundational separate processes.

The second step involves silent “audiation.” The singer *hears* the pitches in his or her head. The singer mouths the words in time and rhythm, while not actually singing. This is a learning technique that I also learned in music school but never realized the importance of until later. While the singer is “mouthing” the words, —the brain makes another recording. And finally, the third step is putting the first two steps together with words. The singer can repeat steps one and two as many times as he or she wishes. I imagine most singers find that single tasks are easier to process. For instance, the production of an opera is built in layers. The creative team cannot begin the process by rehearsing the finished product. A period of discovery in the learning and rehearsing process must be allowed. And collaboration between the production staff and the

¹² M. Clark, Diane and Billy J. Biffle. *So You Want to Sing Barbershop*. (MD: Rowman & Littlefield,2017): 180.

¹³ Ibid.

performers must be allowed to arrive at an organic and cohesive product. Giallombardo provides a good analogy for vocal athletes—especially opera singers.

Lanny Bansham, Olympic sharpshooter, the first to score a perfect 400 (all bullseyes) and to win the Olympic gold medal, was unable to go to the practice range to shoot six weeks before the Olympics. So to keep in shape, he practiced the motions of shooting bullseyes without firing a shot. He steadied himself, cleared his mind, aimed, squeezed the trigger, and imagined the perfect shot, every time. In that six week period, he never even fired a rifle. At the Olympics, he just repeated what he had practiced “silently” before. Such is the nature of the mind, use of imagery, and training the muscle memory.¹⁴

The second comprehensive song learning method (developed in 1986) comes from Sweet Adeline Carolyn Sexton.¹⁵ It has twelve steps, most of which involve NO SINGING!¹⁶ I find these steps to be a journey of discovery, especially step # 11.

1. Listen to the music while you close your eyes. (This will familiarize you with the general feel and flavor of the song.)
2. Watch the notes on your music while you listen. Don't sing yet!
3. Again, watch the notes while you listen. Don't sing yet!
4. Watch the words on your music while you listen. Please-no singing yet!
5. On a separate piece of paper, write down all the lyrics (you can refer to the music if needed). Now, watch your paper to check all you've written while you listen once again. Nope-no singing yet!
6. Watch the notes again while you listen.
7. Watch the words again while you listen.
8. Try to write the words down again on another piece of paper without looking at the music. If you have trouble, listen to the track again while you watch the words. Then return to writing it again without looking.
9. Hurray! Finally, you can add your own voice! Now watch the notes on your music while you hum along. Hum-singing is next!
10. Watch the words on your music while you sing along. Can you believe it-you're singing! However, if you have any difficulty, circle the spot on your music as you go through. Then go back and listen to those parts again.
11. Record yourself singing your part all the way through without looking at your music.

¹⁴ Ibid, 181-182.

¹⁵ Ibid, 178.

¹⁶ These methods are centered around learning tracks (recordings of all four parts of a chart played back separately and together in a full mix for the song learner) for singers who don't read music. Learning tracks can be purchased online at barbershop.org. These learning methods can also be adapted for singers who do read music. In any case, learning tracks are helpful, especially for interpretation.

12. Watch your music and listen to your own recording to see if you are correct. You'll probably be outstanding! But if you have any doubt, goback and check your part again on the master recording.¹⁷

I submit that this last learning method is tedious and exhaustive. However, it is not tiresome on the voice! The more the singer takes the time to single-task the learning process in layers, the fewer mistakes he or she will make in the future. I have found that I have saved time by learning *all* parts of a piece of music *accurately*, rather than impatiently singing notes and words in the second step of the process! These tools should be useful to *all* singers (especially classical) along their journey, no matter where they are in their level of training.

Over the years, Jordan River Crossing has had difficulties in finding time to rehearse. All its members have full-time jobs. This is true for many quartets within the Society. Some quartets have members living in different states and only rehearse once a month! Much of the work in the quartet must be done on an individual level. The learning process, along with the story and the character development, must be done outside of the rehearsal. Once all members finally assemble, there is a mingling or merging of ideas taking place to form a newer, more organic product. I consider the rehearsal process as play once the hard work of preparation has been done. Lack of preparation is why many colleagues and former students have told me they find the rehearsal process to be grueling. It need not be that way.

In the rehearsal process, singers can make warm-ups as formal or informal as they desire. For JRC, our warm-ups are mostly informal. We usually begin the practice session with an up-tempo tune that we all enjoy and in which we can ring an abundance of chords. Most of all, we like to sing "Lazy River" by Hoagy Carmichael.¹⁸ It is a laidback swing song with much imagery

¹⁷ Clark and Biffle, 178-179.

¹⁸ "Lazy River," Words and music by Hoagy Carmichael and Sidney Arodin. Arrangement by Tom Gentry. Copyright by Peermusic Ltd. 1998.

and an extremely fast bridge section that is particularly challenging because of all the words that we must synchronize together.

Sometimes, before my quartet even sings a chart, we warm up on certain harmonized phrases we learned at HU like “We sing late at times” or “We could go all night” to better match resonance. The words in these phrases employ vowels from the vowel chart (Fig. 1.2) in Chapter Five. I will provide the *solfeggio* for each voice part in this exercise and image below (Fig. 1.4). The bass sings do-so-fa-re-do, the lead (up one octave from bass) sings do-do-do-ti-do, the tenor (up one octave from bass) sings mi-mi-fa-fa-mi, and the baritone sings so-te (flatted seventh scale degree)-la-so-so. This is a great exercise for any *a cappella* ensemble. It can be used in any key. We tend to start in B flat Major and ascend in scales from there. In these phrases we determine which of our voices need to be tweaked towards brighter or darker vowel shades for certain words. This way, we can balance more towards the middle of the vowel chart (Refer to Fig. 1.2), thereby sounding more like one voice.

8

We sing late at times
You could go all night

Example 1.2. Harmony University 2017 Quartet Warm-Up.

This exercise gets the singer who is both a barbershopper and a soloist acquainted with blending his or her voice with a surrounding ensemble, —be they other singers or instrumentalists. As an individual, I prefer simple *vocalises*, like *allegro*, sixteenth-note scales going from tonic to dominant, repeated, and then from tonic to octave. I usually sing this on my

preferred open form of the vowel [ɔ] as in “God.”¹⁹ I also enjoy singing difficult parts of passages from my repertoire, and I create warm-ups out of those excerpts. An example of this is the last phrase of the Count’s aria from Mozart’s *Le nozze di Figaro* (Fig. 1.5)²⁰. I exercise my voice up and down the major scales (in several different keys) on that excerpt until the muscles become more accustomed to it. As athletes, we do the same when exercising various muscles in our bodies. We must remember to take breaks during these exercises. During an exciting practice session, this is quite easy for a singer to forget.

Example 1.3. Last phrase of the Count’s Aria from Mozart’s *Figaro*.

An individual barbershopper can also isolate sections of a quartet chart that he or she finds particularly difficult and practice those sections in different keys. When it comes to individual or group practice sessions, remember that singing with full voice (full potential) is

¹⁹ I have a Midwestern United States accent.

²⁰ Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus. *Le nozze di Figaro: Opera buffa in quattro atti, KV 492*. Libretto: Lorenzoda Ponte. (Kassel, Germany: Baerenreiter-Verlag Karl Voetterle GmbH & Co., Rev. Ed. 2005): 336.

more important than under-singing (not singing to full resonant potential). I am reminded of a particular Cardinal District (Indiana and Kentucky) convention in which my quartet competed. After our performance, we were surprised by our scores in certain categories. In the performance category, we received high marks from both judges (two per category). In the music and singing categories, the judges had given us scores lower than what we felt we deserved. At a coaching session after the contest, one judge suggested we play around with our dynamics. He wanted each of us to match in levels of loud (*forte*) and soft (*piano*). He encouraged us to sing at our most extreme levels of loud, or so we thought. We perceived our loud to be overly loud, but to his ears, it was the preferred dynamic level. It all comes back to the breath management. I discovered I did not have to alter my breathing technique much from classical to barbershop. Once my quartet sang with our full voices (and engaging our entire bodies-*appoggio*), we were then able to adjust our dynamics as they pertained to the emotion in the lyrics.

My voice teacher will keep me honest as well if I am not singing with my full voice. I have discovered a good rule of thumb is whether I feel exhausted in the abdominal region after a practice session. The diaphragmatic breathing we use in classical singing is uncommon to most untrained singers. As classical singers, we must use our entire bodies to sing. By utilizing or engaging our entire bodies, we are taking the pressure off our throats (larynx), and they need not work hard. Unnecessary tension in the throat and neck must be eliminated and converted into engagement throughout the body, especially the lower half. After all, we are our instruments.

Barbershop choruses and quartets often employ warm-ups tailored around the repertoire; this is useful to classical singers because it saves time and effort when vocal issues arise while rehearsing a piece of music. Music educator Cindy Hansen Ellis writes,

Plan warm-ups around what you'll be rehearsing. For example, if you're rehearsing a rhythm-driven song, the warm-ups should include similar rhythmic patterns. If the song features a particular vowel or word pattern, warm-ups should emphasize the lock and ring of those vowels. Do your warm-ups in the key of the song.²¹

²¹ Ellis, Cindy. "How top groups consistently improve," *Harmonizer*. (March/April 2019): 22.

I cannot emphasize enough how important Ellis’s last point is. If individuals and chorus directors practice her advice, much time and effort will be saved. I know this because I have wasted much time and effort in warm-ups that were not relevant to the repertoire for that rehearsal.

“Lock and ring” is a phrase used by barbershoppers that refers to expanded sound. This result comes from several factors dependent on the cooperation and precision of the quartet. This may be the most important feature of the barbershop style of harmony and a useful model for the classical singer to imitate. This is essentially the singer’s formant—again, different ways of explaining the same concept.

Expanded sound, sometimes called lock and ring, creates the impression that the composite ensemble sound contains more than the total sound the individual voices produce...the barbershop style provides greater opportunities for the reinforcement of consonant overtones and the production of combination overtones...The chord must be intune. The word sounds must be sung uniformly and with good quality. There must be good precision, which increases the proportion of time during which expansion can occur. The relative loudness of the tones must be adjusted to produce optimum harmonic reinforcement.²²

This quality of sound can only be attained by perseverance of the individuals. The recurring theme of improvisation and experimentation appears once again; each singer within the quartet improvises or experiments with different techniques until his or her individual sound matches with the whole sound. Improvisation is sometimes welcomed in performance. Max H.

Brandt reminds us:

Polyphony as we know it today began as an improvised art form. Even among nobility and ecclesiastic leaders of Western Europe, harmonic vocal music was worked out in performance—improvised and preserved by rote—for centuries before written arrangements took hold. In the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries it was common to improvise in parallel thirds above a “sighted” chant, something called Gomel. In countries such as England, Germany, and Italy, the ancestral home of many present-day barbershoppers, harmonic improvisation was important both in and outside the church. Even throughout the baroque period, well after musical notation had taken hold, improvisation continued to be important in the music of the upper social classes as well

²² Garnett, Liz. *The British Barbershopper*. (Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 2005): 30-31.

as the peasantry. Spontaneous embellishment and decoration was the norm in just about any kind of music during this period in Europe.²³

I include this only to show the reinforcement of the importance of improvisation in both barbershop and classical singing. We can see that improvisation has played an important role in music history and continues to be important today. Chapter One discussed how important improvisation is for the history of barbershop singing. Woodshedding in barbershop and improvisation in jazz and western styles of music is the way all world musics were performed from the beginning of recorded Music History. The fact that many barbershoppers today come to the hobby art form not being able to read music and therefore learn songs by rote is a testament to the very origins of music history; late nineteenth-century African American quartets (and ancient Greeks) did not learn music with written out notes, instead they harmonized and learned music through improvisation and by rote. We must never forget this and always preserve this improvisatory nature in our singing.

The solo classical singer perhaps cannot sing with the same power of harmonic reinforcement that a quartet can. However, knowing this, the solo singer can practice with the knowledge of expanded sound. Instead of three other voices singing with him or her, there are several other factors to consider. For instance, the soloist could be singing with string quartet, piano, full orchestra, or a full chorus. The soloist must consider the acoustics of the space in which he or she is singing. He or she must experiment and practice with these other factors to get the greatest possible “ring,” just like a barbershop quartet does. Classical singers usually do not have the advantage of using microphones; therefore, much of this work must be done before the performance.

²³ Kaplan, Max. *Barbershopping: Musical and Social Harmony*. (Rutherford [N.J.]: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1993): 40.

The solo classical singer should also incorporate emotions into his or her warm-ups. Indeed, this is especially useful to the barbershopper and reinforces the importance of expression and presentation in both techniques. This is important because it gets the singer in the habit of emoting while not sacrificing good technique. It is particularly important that the singer incorporates the habit of emoting while not sacrificing good technique in warm-ups. F. Lamperti writes:

The solfeggio should be sung in various sentiments—“love, prayer, irony”—to realize the dramatic situation embodying the feeling of poetry which the singer has read into the solfeggio.... singing must be subordinate to art because “untutored feeling chokes the voice; let him never abandon himself to his feelings, but instead, strive always to sing with a warm heart, yet a cool head.”²⁴

Another good *vocalise* or vocal exercise for the solo singer comes from W. Stephen Smith’s book *The Naked Voice*, see (Figure 2.3) This exercise demonstrates one classical approach to achieving *chiaroscuro*—what barbershoppers would refer to as a balanced voice:

The goal...is to train the voice to naturally and instinctively modulate between the extremes of *chiaro* and *oscuro*...In the lower part of the range, the ratio will lean toward speaking; in the upper range, it will lean much more toward airflow. The exercise is an eleven-tone scale sung on seventeen notes. We begin on a pitch in the lower part of the range and ascend on a major scale eleven notes. Then we descend on a dominant seventh chord, arriving finally on the original pitch we began.²⁵



Example 1.4. W. Stephen Smith. *The Naked Voice*. Page 98.

²⁴ Coffin, Berton. *Historical Vocal Pedagogy Classics*. (The Scarecrow Press, Inc. Metuchen, N.J., & London, 1989): 61.

²⁵ Smith, W. Stephen, & Chipman, M. *The Naked Voice: A Wholistic Approach to Singing*. (Oxford:Oxford University Press, 2007): 98.

I find this exercise to be helpful because it makes me aware of the stretching sensation in my vocal folds as I ascend the major scale. Also, I strive to feel the loosening of the stretched vocal folds as I descend. In barbershop charts, this exercise can be particularly helpful to leads or basses who often demonstrate considerably wide ranges in their voices.

Improvisation in barbershop is a useful analogy that reinforces how the classical singer can practice. The singer must experiment in his or her own time until he or she produces a sound satisfactory to the teacher. Even though voice pedagogy and science of singing research have provided us with knowledge about what happens when we sing, it does not help us with what to do; this is where the teacher/student relationship comes in. Experimentation is extremely important. The student should continue experimenting until muscle-memory takes over. The result of the performance should appear, and sound improvised or spontaneous. W. Stephen Smith wrote: "...scientific analysis can only tell us what happens when we sing. It cannot tell us what we must do to sing well."²⁶

Barbershoppers and classical singers use different methods to arrive at the same goals. I have provided exercises and methods here in the hope that reinforcement between the two techniques is evident. These exercises have proved to be meaningful for me as a singer and continue to help me improve my craft. I encourage all singers to study vocal exercises and song learning methods in crossover disciplines; they may be surprised just how much they learn.

²⁶ Smith, 18.

Chapter 8: THE CURTAIN RISES: BARBERSHOP AND CLASSICAL

COACHING AS PERFORMANCE ENHANCEMENT

A classical singer can learn performance-enhancing techniques from barbershop coaching and competitions, and vice versa. Although singers will have different experiences in a classical audition versus a contest for a barbershop quartet or chorus— both are performances. I believe that a barbershop quartet performance is explicitly a dramatic and expressive act just like a performance from a singer in an opera. The mechanisms of classical and barbershop coaching may be different in their approaches, but the goals and results are the same.

Coaching exists in both barbershop and classical singing. In barbershop, the coach or judge works with different quartets to improve their performance in contests or in a show. In classical singing, the coach helps individual singers improve their technique for performance in concert, in competition, in opera, or in an audition. The two worlds of singing also share subtext and detail work as important vehicles for a successful performance.

In barbershop conventions, the competitor pays a participation fee, and the coaching that happens after the performance is free to the performer. In a classical coaching session, the singer usually must pay the coach by the hour (some exceptions being school performances). Classical coaches make most of their money from gigs as freelancers. At barbershop competitions or conventions, for example, a coach is also a judge. This judge does not necessarily have a professional career in music but has had training and certification by the Society in barbershop singing to provide expertise. This person usually volunteers their time at competitions and sometimes has a full-time, non-music job. BHS coach, arranger, and music judge Kevin Keller refers to coaches as “voices” in his *Harmonizer* article “The ‘voices’ in your world: when should you listen...or not?” In this article, Keller encourages the performer to sort out the helpful

coaching that moves the performer forward versus the less-helpful information that does not make sense. He writes: “Your job is to filter all of the voices, figure out which voices resonate with you, which voices transform you as a singer and performer, and follow that path. To all other voices, say ‘Thank you,’ while you keep on the path!” (2020, Keller, 12)

The benefits of countless hours of barbershop coaching are most effectively displayed on the international contest stage. I believe that the international competition in the BHS will preserve excellent barbershop singing for generations to come. The international champions usually go on world tours after they win; many will record albums. The competition, in my opinion, is not just about finding out who is the “best” quartet or chorus in the world. International contests are the Society’s way of taking a snapshot of excellence in quartet and chorus singing, and those singers will be remembered forever. These champions are to be studied and admired for the sheer astonishment of their vocal prowess.

In my own quartet, Jordan River Crossing, we have been coached by world champions, and we have sung next to world champions in casual settings. I never had the feeling that they wanted adulation from us. Instead, they wanted to share with us all that they had learned about barbershop—a philosophy instilled in them through years of invaluable coaching. Barbershop is a humble art form—from its historical roots to the present day. To quote Scott Kitzmiller: “In what other hobby can you find direct competitors helping each other and being truly happy with the results?”¹

At conventions, education is of paramount importance. The insight for me at our Cardinal District conventions has always been the judges’ evaluations of our chorus and quartet performances. The judges share with us why they gave us their score and proceed to coach us in singing sessions, so we can actively improve our craft. As educator Steve Scott puts it,

Perhaps you’ve had a negative competition experience in the past or are worried that you’ll receive a low score. If you approach the contest as a vehicle for education, the

¹ Kitzmiller, Scott. “Resonating with Instant Classic,” *The Harmonizer*, (May/June 2016): 19.

score can serve as an effective guidepost on your music-making journey...In that way, we all win.²

A Student NATS (National Association of Teachers of Singing) competition, for example, is similar in purpose to a barbershop competition—the educators want to show the singers that their overall goal should be learning how to improve; however, the difference lies in the adjudication/scoring aspect. It is less hands-on than a barbershop evaluation/coaching after a performance. Barbershop evaluations/coaching sessions can serve as mini voice lessons to the competitors. After all, barbershop is a hobby art form. In a SNATS competition, usually the competitor already has a voice teacher, and the adjudicators may not want to overstep any boundaries.

A singer should not give up just because he or she sees and hears a competitor that he perceives to be better. There will always be someone better. Even the perceived better performer was once inexperienced and had to constantly improve his or her craft. The new singer should do the same. In BHS arranger Kevin Keller's *Harmonizer* article, the author writes: "[A]s you find voices [coaches] that resonate with your group [or you], have them periodically join you on your journey. They will reinforce the positive steps you are taking and steadily unlock more potential." (2020, Keller, 13) Recently, my quartet (JRC) has followed this advice by coaching on several occasions with both Scott Kitzmiller and Paul Ellinger. They certainly have had our best interests at heart and challenge us to discover our true potential. After all, good coaches or mentors are people who see more potential in us than we see in ourselves. For the performer to distinguish between a genuinely helpful coach and a less-helpful coach is to ask if the coach's advice serves the music. Keller writes:

² Scott, Steve. "Get great education at district conventions," *The Harmonizer*, (September/October 2018):7-8.

Does it [input] feel organic and natural? Or do you have to remember every detail, and each week stumble again over details that don't make sense? If it isn't natural and organic in serving the music, then just say "Thank you."³

Most barbershoppers improve their craft by integrating techniques from coaching. This is also true for classical singers in the music school or conservatory setting. The connection between these two worlds is that coaching is essential to the crafts and many ideas on performing are shared. For instance—I have learned from both worlds that to connect with an audience, the performer needs to be authentic. To be authentic, one must be genuine and true to the character in the piece of music. To be genuine, I believe the performer needs to be vulnerable. If there is anything in the performer's mind that is distracting him or her from the present moment on stage, I believe the performance will suffer; it could look contrived. A performer must achieve a Zen state of mind. Thoughts must be allowed to come and go in their own time, and the performer must live in the flow of the muscle memory-trained performance. There is a level of trust that the performer must experience. Much of the battle of singing well in a performance is won or lost in the singer's mind. The singer must practice the enjoyment of making mistakes and making them work in his or her benefit. Then, the singer can live in the gratitude of the moment in a performance. Ecumenical author Richard Rohr offers a practice in awareness and vulnerability which I find to be of value for singers before a performance:

When you are triggered or caught by something unpleasant, begin by simply *being present to your feeling*, experiencing it not just mentally, but also emotionally and physically. Don't try to rationalize or explain the feeling, but witness and give attention to this sensation. Welcome the feeling.⁴

Most classical singers and barbershoppers would agree that it is beneficial to convert nervous pre-performance energy into productive stage energy. Somatic voice teacher and HU

³ Keller, Kevin. "The 'voices' in your world: when should you listen...or not?" *The Harmonizer*. (July/August 2020): 13.

⁴ Rohr, Richard. *Just This*. (Center for Action and Contemplation Publishing, Albuquerque, NM, 2017):118.

faculty member Donya Metzger has coached ensembles and singers worldwide on how to convert performance anxiety into productive stage energy. In her *Harmonizer* article “How to transform nervous energy into electric performances: How to train your body’s responses to performance stimulus,” Metzger recommends this exercise before going on stage, “Inhale normally, exhale on a long, low ‘voo’ sound. This stimulates the vagus nerve in the gut, activating the parasympathetic [calming down] nervous system. Repeat a few times before singing and notice the calming effect.” (2020, Metzger, 23). In this same article, the author provides some insight into what goes on in the performer’s mind and body right before stepping on stage,

You’re backstage. You’re well-rehearsed. You know your music and your moves, you’ve dug into the story, and you’re ready to perform. What happens next depends on your autonomic nervous system (ANS). Your senses are continually gathering information and decides which response is most likely to keep you alive.⁵

Metzger is referring to the fight-or-flight pattern that we all experience. Performers either respond to the audience’s expectation of them with fear or excitement, or both. We know that we must respond with excitement, but this is easier said than done. The exercise above is one beneficial way to respond to performance anxiety. Another way for the performer to experience the positive effects of nervous energy is to be aware of thoughts and feelings. Playful curiosity is the key. If the performer views awareness of mind and body in a playful manner, he or she can act as a catalyst for creative communication with the audience. Metzger writes,

If it [ANS] responds this way, you’ll be able to stay in the present moment, take in the surroundings, respond creatively, and enjoy the excitement. You’ll be able to breathe and vocalize and move because you’ll be in the nervous system state known as ‘social engagement.’⁶

For a performance to look truly spontaneous, the performer must sacrifice the feeling of control and let the mind be free to do what it wants. If this can happen, then the rehearsed

⁵ Metzger, Donya. “How to transform nervous energy into electric performances: How to train your body’s responses to performance stimulus,” *The Harmonizer*. (March/April 2020): 22.

⁶ Ibid.

movements or actions of the performer can be experienced for the first time in front of an audience. The audience is not only paying for entertainment, but they are also experiencing a symbiosis of hearts and minds with the performer(s) on stage. I have always told people that my best performances did not feel like work, but like play. If performers are vulnerable on stage, the chances are higher that someone—or even many—in the audience will feel something significant because of it; after all, that is the reason people attend live performances.

I learned to trust and get rid of the clutter of my thoughts and over-analyzing in a performance at the “Top Gun” school. This is an informal weekend coaching session from expert music arrangers and judges in the Society to help selected quartets improve their stagecraft. I have had the privilege of participating in one of these weekends with my quartet JRC.

We also learned the practice of digging into the subtext of the story of our songs. One song, “Moonlight Becomes You,” stuck with us, and we have never performed it the same way since.⁷ In this song we were coaxed by coach Scott Kitzmiller to imagine being an American soldier during WWII saying goodbye to his sweetheart, not knowing if he would ever see her again. When we imagined the voice of Jimmy Stewart from the 1940s saying the words, we immediately connected with the song in a very personal way.

Stand there just a moment, darling. Let me catch my breath.
I've never seen a picture quite so lovely. How did you ever look so lovely?
Moonlight becomes you. It goes with your hair. You certainly know the right
things to wear, I swear...
If I say I love you, I'd want you to know it's not just because there's
moonlight. Although, moonlight becomes you so.⁸

This kind of subtext detail work applies to opera as well. I learned the practice of discovering a subtext in a song or aria from voice lessons, graduate opera workshops, and opera

⁷ “Moonlight becomes you”. Words by Johnny Burke. Music by James Van Heusen. Arrangement by Ed Waesche. International Copyright 1942 (Renewed 1970) by Famous Music Corp. This arrangement copyright 1999.

⁸ Ibid.

rehearsals. A practice that has been particularly helpful to me is writing out the lyrics or text of a song or aria in my own words. If the song text is not in my own language, it must be translated word for word.

Another successful character development tool that I have used over the years is writing out the life story of the character I am portraying. It need not be an exhaustive history, just enough to get you in the right headspace. In her *Classical Singer* article entitled “Make Your Text Come Alive! Basic Tools of the Singer / Actor,” Diane M. Clark wrote, “[T]he purpose of singing is to portray to an audience the thoughts and feelings of a particular character in the musical drama known as the song.” (Clark, 2003, 32). In this instance I presume Clark is categorizing art songs as musical dramas. The performer must create characters and a story in these art songs. The performer must also ask themselves questions about the characters, and by answering those questions they make the songs come alive. Clark wrote,

In discussion of the text, I suggested that the singer ask these kinds of questions about the character to be portrayed:

Who am I?

What are my personal characteristics? (Age, sex, physical characteristics, personality traits, education, economic background, etc.)

What other characters are involved, if any? What are they like?

Where am I?

To whom am I speaking?

Is this person present with me now?

Why am I saying this? (What has happened that has brought me to this point?)

What are my thoughts (ideas) and feelings (emotions) throughout this song?
(Trace the progression from beginning to end.)

What other factors have a bearing on this situation? What will happen as a result of my having said this?⁹

The answers to all these questions will undoubtedly make the song or aria more gripping for both the performer and audience. I believe that these questions benefit both the classical and barbershop singer in an enormous way. As for subtext, this is also a powerful tool for performers

⁹ M. Clark, Diane. “Make Your Text Come Alive! Basic Tools of the Singer / Actor,” *Classical Singer*, November 2003, 32.

of both art forms. Clark also teaches her students subtext. In her same article she wrote, “If I hear a student sing a line that seems devoid of emotion or understanding, I stop him and say, ‘What is your subtext here?’ As soon as he is able to articulate the subtext, the delivery of the line takes on meaning and power.” (Clark, 2003, 33). Subtext makes the text jump off the page for the performer, and I believe it really makes the audience members feel like they are participating in an intimate conversation with the performer.

I have learned from watching interviews with some of the finest actors of our generation that body language goes a long way towards full embodiment of a character. As singer-actors, we must study the types of people we want to emulate in every small detail and then dress ourselves in these details like articles of clothing. If we are performing as part of a quartet or as a soloist on the stage, we must be in character reacting in the present. I am not proposing an exact copy of someone else’s performance. I am encouraging performers to imitate a character until it becomes unique to the person portraying it. No matter how hard we may try to imitate another character, pieces of our unique selves will always come through.

The Zen state of mind is important to remember. Being present gives the performer the freedom to feel the emotions of the song as if they are happening at that moment. In this way, every performance is different and fresh. I learned from educator Paul Ellinger at Harmony University 2017 that feeling the words or lyrics is the highest level of art a performer can achieve.¹⁰ The difference is *showing* someone what you are feeling versus just feeling it. I believe the attitudes and states of mind I have outlined thus far are of enormous benefit to both the barbershop and classical singer, or any singer, period.

Barbershop quartet performances and opera performances, for example—are both dramatic and expressive acts. I have outlined different methodologies from the two mechanisms

¹⁰ Ellinger, Paul. (2017, July) “Wave box singing/Music on Steroids” class taught at the annual meeting of Harmony University and the BHS at Belmont University, Nashville, TN.

of singing that essentially arrive at the same goals—presence, subtext, and detail work. The unifying factor between barbershop and classical singing is coaching—the perfect delivery system for these concepts.

CONCLUSION

By investigating the historical roots and current practices of both classical and barbershop singing, a singer can gain enlightening concepts for the improvement of his or her performance craft. The origins and traditions of classical singing inspired by predominantly White European culture has informed barbershop *a cappella* singing. Barbershop evolved into gospel, blues, ragtime, and jazz, which were all inspired by African American culture. These two musical styles have had a profoundly beneficial influence on me. I believe they can have the same positive influence on any new or experienced singer, teacher or student. These genres work in tandem for stylistic choices in performance. Deke Sharon, a prominent vocal producer and honorary member of the BHS has praised the practice and teaching of barbershop for all singers.

[B]arbershop has created a series of aesthetics and techniques that are so informative to any singer. It bridges the classic and the pop [CCM] world really beautifully. Anyone who is singing any kind of choral music, any kind of pop, is so much better if they learn barbershop.¹

I would add that barbershop not only bridges the classical and pop worlds of singing, but also provides a pleasant respite for the normal challenges of a classical singer; while classical and operatic singing remains an Olympian challenge to the casual barbershopper that would only reap benefits, including more vocal stamina, better understanding of breath control, and easier navigation between the registers of the voice. The benefits of barbershop include better understanding of complementary vowel sounds, the skill of tuning resonance with other members in an ensemble, and a skillful inclination towards improvisation.

A solid foundation of *bel canto* singing technique should already be in place for the teaching of healthy barbershop singing, but sometimes it is not. A well-trained singer may be more inclined to focus on technique of singing, whereas a barbershopper may be more inclined to

¹ M. Clark, Diane and Billy J. Biffle. *So You Want to Sing Barbershop*. (MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017):131.

focus on blending voices and finding the fifth voice in a chord; I believe it is the duty of barbershoppers and classical singers alike to share these philosophies of resonance and technique. In this respect, the two forms of singing are not mutually exclusive.

Barbershop singing is best enjoyed by the participants. Although listening to barbershop is very pleasant, it is more enjoyable to sing it with other people. The same can be said for live collaborations between pianist and singer or orchestra and singer in an opera; however, one could prefer the casual environment that barbershop has always provided.

All singing, no matter what genre or style, has a local purpose. Whatever one is trying to accomplish with his or her singing, it should always be to serve the community. Society president Dick Powell has said about local barbershop chapters in a conversation with BHS CEO Marty Monson,

Every chapter's culture is different. It reflects what the people of that chapter want to have happen...When we go out and start singing, we help build stronger communities -webuild connections and understanding and tolerance.²

The humble origins of barbershop singing inform the classical singer in a powerful way. It reminds us why we as performers do what we do. Barbershop is not about the adulation, the recognition, or the compensation; it is about the experience of the music-making in the present moment. The act of singing is about re-interpreting the inherited traditional music for contemporary audiences, making them feel emotions they never knew they could feel for *a cappella* and for vocal music, in general. Live music is where the magic of communication between performer and audience member happens.

I have made it abundantly clear throughout this research that improvisation and practice are the foundations for the art forms of both classical and barbershop singing. A lesson here for the curious singer could be to practice and perform in an improvisatory way. I have heard

² Powell, Dick and Marty Monson. "All barbershop harmony is local," *The Harmonizer*, (March/April2019): 5.

audience members say many times to a singer at the end of a performance “You made it look and sound so easy!” The performer must practice so much that healthy sensations are ingrained in his or her muscle memory. Once that occurs, the performance looks and sounds like it was improvised and spontaneous. This is good performance preparation and will get a classical singer hired. The same is true in barbershop—quartets will get hired and win contests.

Change in the music world is inevitable. Impermanence is reality. My colleagues and I can only hope for changing our art form for the better. We acknowledge that improvements to our craft can always be made. Technology can be a hindrance, but it can also be a helpful tool for singers to expand their borders from local music-making to global music-making. For example, if singers cannot travel overseas, they can still connect virtually with other singers in the place they wish to go to. We now have the capabilities for reaching literally anyone in the world.

Singers are constantly challenged to adapt the act of singing for public consumption based on the needs and desires of the public. We remain inspired and encouraged. The CEO of the Society Marty Monson, gave a virtual “State of the Society address” in which he said:

The changes we’ve experienced over the last three years pale in comparison to what we’ve experienced over the last four months as an organization. As a member of the Barbershop Harmony Society, you have experienced a lot of change in the last several years...Looking at the heartache that our communities are experiencing today, I can say...I am so glad that our Society chose to become more inclusive years ago. We may not have rolled out the vision perfectly, but being more inclusive is always the right thing to do.³

Singing is a wonderful therapeutic activity which helps us face the challenges of regular, every-day-life. The clinical psychologist Oliver Sacks reminds us in his book *Musicophilia*, that singing is healing for the brain. Sacks wrote about a patient with amnesia,

[T]he act of singing is important in itself. Finding, remembering anew that he can sing is profoundly reassuring...as the exercise of any skill or competence must be—and it can stimulate his feelings, his imagination, his sense of humor and creativity, and his sense of identity as nothing else can. It can enliven him, focus and engage him. It can

³ Powell, Dick and Marty Monson. “Survival assumed—aim for serving the world during a crisis,” *The Harmonizer*, (September/October 2020): 5

give him back himself, and not least, it can charm others, arouse their amazement and admiration—reactions more and more necessary to someone who, in his lucid moments, is painfully aware of his tragic disease and sometimes says that he feels “broken inside”
...They can recognize music and respond to it emotionally even when little else can get through. Hence the great importance of access to music, whether through concerts, recorded music, or formal music therapy.⁴

In his substantial book *Four Parts, No Waiting: A Social History of American Barbershop Harmony*, Gage Averill discusses nostalgia as it concerns barbershop. Many of us have perhaps seen at least once the famous Saturday Evening Post cover of the “Barbershop Quartet” painting by American painter Norman Rockwell (1894-1978). Rockwell’s success as a painter had much to do with his nostalgic style. This edition of the Post was published two years before the Society was formed (September 26, 1936). Averill also notes that when the Society was formed in 1938, our nation was going through a revival of a bygone era:

I find it a very handy term [revival]...as long as my readers share with me in the understanding that there is no authentic historical experience that is made to be relived in this way. The term “revival,” in the sense in which I am using it, refers to the intent on the part of the participants to recreate some vision of the past in the present...how the past is filtered, imagined, and redeployed in the present to address contemporary desires, fears, and needs, and especially on how nostalgia for an idealized past shapes actions in the present.⁵

Averill’s comments can be true for many cultural comparisons spanning across generations. Consider Hollywood’s consistent attempts and desires to reinterpret and update successful films from previous eras. In the present time, imitation seems to supersede creative or original thought; however, we should not forget that all artists have been and continue to be influenced by their predecessors. It is true that we stand on the shoulders of giants. Averill commented on Rockwell’s iconic barbershop quartet painting,

I suggest that Rockwell was not “recalling an era” as much as participating in the construction of a national myth of this time and place in American history, remembered as a utopian “Main Street, U.S.A.” saturated in four part harmony. To call this image of

⁴ Sacks, Oliver. *Musicophilia*. (Vintage books, Random House Inc., New York, 2007): 378-380.

⁵ Averill, Gage. *Four Parts, No Waiting: A Social History of American Barbershop Harmony*. (Oxford:Oxford University Press, 2003): 13.

America's past a myth is not to say that it is patently or completely untrue, only to stress that it represents a selective snapshot from a much more complex cultural and social panorama, processed through a nostalgic filter, and developed in such a way as to develop its warm, romantic glow. I surmise that Rockwell was aware of the campy nostalgia of the New York barbershop contests and captured this tone for national consumption. I also expect that, in another of those odd American reinterpretations of rural and small town life through the eyes of the urban metropolis, Rockwell's iconic representation of barbershop singing helped to shape the character of the midwestern revival a few years later and secure for it an eager national membership base.⁶

The revival of the American art form known as barbershop harmony in 1938 was a result of many contributing factors. Like Averill, I simply see barbershop for what it is—a rich cultural heritage for the current generation to enjoy.

Once again, we see just how complementary all musical art forms really are: plainchant, opera, jazz, blues, gospel, choral, etc. If one investigates long enough, one usually becomes enlightened in some substantial way. I hope that many future generations will continue to research the creations of these art forms and let that knowledge inform and improve their performance craft of singing. As the Society theme song goes, “Keep the whole world singing!”

⁶ Ibid, 8.

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