

A Hopelessly Brief Introduction to the Incredibly Rich History and Ongoing Appeal of the Magnificent Hobby of Singing Barbershop Harmony

Since the presentation is short, I made the title long!

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Tenor, Gentlemen Songsters Chorus *and* Fireside Quartet



September 28, 2016



Why “Hopelessly”?

- Because like so many histories, a two-hour discussion just scratches the surface
- Contributors and Resources
 - David Krause > barbershop.org/history
 - David Wright > bit.ly/barbershophistory
 - Val Hicks > barbershop.org/about-us/history-of-barbershop/roots-of-barbershop-harmony
 - Terry Clarke



Wadderwee Gonna Talkabout?

1. What harmony is, and the chord and song structures that underlie barbershop style
2. How intervals work, differences between tuning standards, and why perfectly sung chords “ring”
3. The development of close harmony and the founding of our Society and the ladies' two
4. A barbershop smorgasbord demonstrating the wide variety of barbershop music today
5. The camaraderie we share in the BHS

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“Let’s get goin’, right away!”




What is Harmony?





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What is Harmony?



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What is Harmony?

- **Monophonic**
 - parts sung in unison
- **Homophonic**
 - parts move together, but on different notes
 - “chordal” music
- **Polyphonic**
 - each part has melodic interest on its own and a distinctive rhythm

<http://www.medieval.org/emfaq/misc/homophony.html>

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What is Harmony?

Intervals in the Key of A

A4 A5 A6 A.octaves

Tonic Fifth Tonic Fifth A.fifth

Tonic Third Tonic Third A.C# Fifth Seventh Fifth Seventh E.G#

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Go to EasyABC ...



What is Harmony?

Chords in the Key of A

Tonic Third Fifth Tonic Major.Chord

Tonic Flat.Third Fifth Tonic Minor.Chord

Tonic Third Fifth Seventh Major.7th.Chord

Tonic Third Fifth Flat.Seventh Dominant.7th.Chord

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Go to EasyABC ...



How Do Intervals Work?

- To sound a tone an octave higher than any other tone, you double its frequency
 - The A below middle C (A4) is 440 Hz
 - The A above middle C (A5) is ... ???



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- To sound a tone an octave higher than any other tone, you double its frequency
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 - The next A (A6) is ... ???



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 - The A below middle C (A4) is 440 Hz
 - The A above middle C (A5) is 880 Hz
 - The next A (A6) is 1760 Hz



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How Do Intervals Work?

- Thus, the tone differences are multiplicative
- Now, there are 12 semitones in a scale from "do" to "do," which is an "octave"

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$${}^{12}\sqrt{2}$$

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<http://www.phy.mtu.edu/~suits/scales.html>



How Do Intervals Work?

- Thus, each interval has the same frequency difference
- And that's the way a piano is tuned



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How Do Intervals Work?

- This tuning is called equal temperament
 - First proposed in 1636 by French theologian, philosopher, mathematician, and music theorist Marin Mersenne



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How Do Intervals Work?

- This tuning is called **equal temperament**
 - First proposed in 1636 by French theologian, philosopher, mathematician, and music theorist **Marin Mersenne**
 - Accepted in the late 17th century at the urging of **J.S. Bach** so that he could write music in any key and still be reasonably, *but not perfectly*, in tune



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How Do Intervals Work?

- In perfect tuning –
 - just intonation
 - intertonal differences are based on integer ratios to the tonic (fundamental) tone

$$3/2$$

$$4/3$$

$$5/3$$

$$8/5$$

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How Do Intervals Work?

- In perfect tuning – just intonation – intertonal differences are based on integer ratios to the tonic (fundamental) tone

Interval	Just Intonation Ratio	Equal Temp. Ratio
Unison	1	1.00000
Minor Second	25/24	1.04167
Major Second	9/8	1.12500
Minor Third	6/5	1.20000
Major Third	5/4	1.25000
Fourth	4/3	1.33333
Diminished Fifth	45/32	1.40625
“Perfect” Fifth	3/2	1.50000
Minor Sixth	8/5	1.60000
Major Sixth	5/3	1.66667
Minor Seventh	9/5	1.80000
Major Seventh	15/8	1.87500
Octave	2	2.00000

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What Makes It Barbershop?

1. Four-part a cappella harmony, harmonic variety, few passing tones

David Wright, Future History of Barbershop (characterizing)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KtGI62i_8XM

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2. **Melody in second tenor, first tenor above, bass usually solid chord tones, baritone fill**

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4. Freedom with the song
5. Chords tuned to lock and ring
 - just intonation

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Where'd It Come From?

- Work songs sung by Negro slaves in the fields
 - Also sung by prisoners, especially chain gangs
- Characterized by lead-ins, call-and-response
- A cappella, improvised harmonies



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- Work songs sung by Negro slaves in the fields
 - Also sung by prisoners, especially chain gangs
- Characterized by lead-ins, call-and-response
- A cappella, improvised harmonies
- Developed into gospel



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Where'd It Come From?







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Who's in this picture?



History and Commentary

- **The Beginnings (to 0:39)** 
 - The Edison Quartet, 1903 
- **Pre-Society Quartets (to 2:03)** 
 - Leading to the decline of quartets, some say due to improved recording methods
- **Formation of the Society (to 3:02)** 
 - First convention/contest: 1939

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History and Commentary

- **The Red Caps “Incident”**

- Starting in 1923, the New York City Park Dept. ran annual singing contests in Central Park

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- **The Red Caps “Incident”**

- Starting in 1923, the New York City Park Dept. ran annual singing contests in Central Park
- The 1941 winners were the Grand Central Red Caps, all railroad porters
- Mayor La Guardia wanted them to enter in that year’s Society contest



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History and Commentary

- **O.C. Cash, the society’s founder, refused**
 - Now, of course many organizations practiced discrimination in those days
- **Note the irony, given the music’s roots**
- **Result: Protests and Society resignations**
 - Al Smith, NY governor & presidential candidate
 - Robert Moses, the NYC Park Commissioner

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History and Commentary

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- *Result:* Protests and Society resignations
 - Al Smith, NY governor & presidential candidate
 - Robert Moses, the NYC Park Commissioner
- **The Society excluded blacks until 1963, when the convention was held in Toronto and the province of Ontario threatened to prohibit it if discrimination continued**

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History and Commentary

- **Formation of the Sweet Adelines (to 3:17)**
 - First convention/contest: 1945 



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History and Commentary

- Formation of the Sweet Adelines (to 3:18)
 - First convention/contest: 1945
- Formation of Harmony, Inc.



- “In July 1958, ... about 150 women [withdrew from Sweet Adelines to start] a new organization based on democratic principles and **open to all women, regardless of race, creed, or color.**”

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http://www.harmonymembers.org/docs/historybook/6_2.pdf



History and Commentary

- Affiliated international societies 
- The Buffalo Bills (to 4:02)



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History and Commentary

- Affiliated international societies
- **The Buffalo Bills (to 4:02)**
 - 1,510 performances on Broadway
 - 1 major motion picture
 - 728 concerts
 - 675 radio shows
 - 672 club & hotel appearances
 - 626 conventions
 - 216 television shows
 - 137 state fair performances
 - 15 record albums



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History and Commentary

- **Formation of choruses and more** 
 - First official chorus contest in 1954
- **Collegiate and Senior Quartet Contests**





Barbershop Smorgasbord

- **Buffalo Bills, 1950 Int'l Quartet Champions**

- "Singing is just sustained talking."
- <https://youtu.be/nOODFttQoJc#t=55>
- "Ice Cream" and "Sincere"

- **Classics as Sung in Contests**

- Old School, 2011 Int'l Quartet Champions
 - <https://youtu.be/uRu3CZfteyY#t=20>
 - "Little Town in the Old County Down" and "I Want a Girl" (at 4:10)
- Realtime, 2005 Int'l Quartet Champions
 - [https://youtu.be/rfIM9NFh\]Ak#t=15](https://youtu.be/rfIM9NFh]Ak#t=15)
 - "Come Fly With Me" and "Birth of the Blues" (at 3:00)

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Barbershop Smorgasbord

- **Judging Criteria**

- Singing, Performance, and Musicality

- **Pop Song Cover**

- Signature
 - <https://youtu.be/8RXXQsXvO1Q>
 - "A Change is Gonna Come" (Sam Cooke cover)

- **Comedy**

- "Lida Rose" by the Buffalo Bills and Shirley Jones
 - <https://youtu.be/wtn7KER4YgA> (Shirley @ 1:45)
- Storm Front's Version, 2010 Int'l Champions
 - <https://youtu.be/vWCNlIkbfw#t=30>

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Barbershop Smorgasbord

- **Chorus: “Seventy-Six Trombones”**
 - Music Man Film Finale
 - <https://youtu.be/hdd6qOpW4DM#t=220>
 - Ambassadors of Harmony
 - 2009 Int’l Chorus Champions
 - <https://youtu.be/QmDGntpZC3I>
- **Chorus: “This is the Moment”**
 - Masters of Harmony
 - 1999 Int’l Chorus Champions
 - <https://youtu.be/GDib1vYVIGQ>

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Barbershop Smorgasbord

- **Something You Wouldn’t Expect**
 - Acoustix, 1990 Int’l Quartet Champions
 - <https://youtu.be/kgIWh784uU>
 - “Stars and Strips Forever”
- **Sheer Perfection (IMHO)**
 - Crossroads, 2009 Int’l Quartet Champions
 - <https://youtu.be/u7mGiSZpdpk#t=30>
 - “Lucky Old Sun”
- **The Holy Grail of Barbershop**
 - Boston Common, 1980 Int’l Quartet Champs
 - <https://youtu.be/Vg4cFVWvzls#t=150>
 - “That Old Quartet of Mine”

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thank you

Concert at CCA
Saturday, October 1, 7:30 PM

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gentlemensongsters.org firesidequartet.net



September 28, 2016

