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
  - David Wright
  - Val Hicks
  - Terry Clarke
  - barbershop.org/history
  - bit.ly/barbershophistory
  - barbershop.org/about-us/history-of-barbershop/roots-of-barbershop-harmony

September 28, 2016
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
   “Let’s get goin’, right away!”

What is Harmony?

September 28, 2016
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
What is Harmony?

Intervals in the Key of A

Go to EasyABC ...

What is Harmony?

Chords in the Key of A

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 880 Hz
  - The next A (A6) is ... ???
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
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  - The next A (A6) is 1760 Hz

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”
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.”
- If we set the ratio of the lower tone to 1 and the upper tone to 2, you would think that the ratio difference between each tone would be ... ???

\[
\frac{12}{\sqrt{2}}
\]
How Do Intervals Work?

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

How Do Intervals Work?

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

How Do Intervals Work?

• In perfect tuning – just intonation
  – Intertonal differences are based on integer ratios to the tonic (fundamental) tone
  
  \[
  \begin{align*}
  &3/2 \\
  &4/3 \\
  &5/3 \\
  &8/5
  \end{align*}
  \]
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interval</th>
<th>Just Intonation Ratio</th>
<th>Equal Temp. Ratio</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unison</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.00000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Second</td>
<td>25/24</td>
<td>1.04167</td>
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<tr>
<td>Major Second</td>
<td>9/8</td>
<td>1.12500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Third</td>
<td>6/5</td>
<td>1.20000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Major Third</td>
<td>5/4</td>
<td>1.25000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>4/3</td>
<td>1.33333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diminished Fifth</td>
<td>45/32</td>
<td>1.40625</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Perfect” Fifth</td>
<td>3/2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minor Sixth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Major Sixth</td>
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<td>Major Seventh</td>
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<td>1.87500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Octave</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.00000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

http://www.phy.mtu.edu/~suits/scalas.html

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=KtGl62I_8XM
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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
- Developed into gospel
Where’d It Come From?

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
History and Commentary

- **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
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  – 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

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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- 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
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.”

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

History and Commentary

- Formation of choruses and more
  - First official chorus contest in 1954
- Collegiate and Senior Quartet Contests
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TIME FOR A BREAK

We’ll be back soon...
Barbershop Smorgasbord

- **Buffalo Bills, 1950 Int’l Quartet Champions**
  - “Singing is just sustained talking.”
  - [https://youtu.be/nO0DFtQoJc#t=55](https://youtu.be/nO0DFtQoJc#t=55)
  - “Ice Cream” and “Sincere”

- **Classics as Sung in Contests**
  - Old School, 2011 Int’l Quartet Champions
    - [https://youtu.be/uRuJCFZteyY#t=20](https://youtu.be/uRuJCFZteyY#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/rfIM9NFhJAk#t=15](https://youtu.be/rfIM9NFhJAk#t=15)
    - “Come Fly With Me” and “Birth of the Blues” (at 3:00)

Barbershop Smorgasbord

- **Judging Criteria**
  - Singing, Performance, and Musicality

- **Pop Song Cover**
  - Signature
    - [https://youtu.be/BsYxOvO1Q](https://youtu.be/BsYxOvO1Q)
    - “A Change is Gonna Come” (Sam Cooke cover)

- **Comedy**
  - “Lida Rose” by the Buffalo Bills and Shirley Jones
    - [https://youtu.be/wtn7KER4YgA](https://youtu.be/wtn7KER4YgA) (Shirley @ 1:45)
  - Storm Front’s Version, 2010 Int’l Champions
    - [https://youtu.be/yvWCNjIaFw#t=30](https://youtu.be/yvWCNjIaFw#t=30)
Barbershop Smorgasbord

- **Chorus: “Seventy-Six Trombones”**
  - Music Man Film Finale
    - [https://youtu.be/hdd6qOqW4DM#t=220](https://youtu.be/hdd6qOqW4DM#t=220)
  - Ambassadors of Harmony
    - 2009 Int’l Chorus Champions
      - [https://youtu.be/QmDGnpZCJ3I](https://youtu.be/QmDGnpZCJ3I)

- **Chorus: “This is the Moment”**
  - Masters of Harmony
    - 1999 Int’l Chorus Champions
      - [https://youtu.be/GDib1vYVIGQ](https://youtu.be/GDib1vYVIGQ)

Barbershop Smorgasbord

- **Something You Wouldn’t Expect**
  - Acoustix, 1990 Int’l Quartet Champions
    - [https://youtu.be/kgIWh7B4uU](https://youtu.be/kgIWh7B4uU)
    - “Stars and Strips Forever”

- **Sheer Perfection (IMHO)**
  - Crossroads, 2009 Int’l Quartet Champions
    - [https://youtu.be/u7mGjSZpdpk#t=30](https://youtu.be/u7mGjSZpdpk#t=30)
    - “Lucky Old Sun”

- **The Holy Grail of Barbershop**
  - Boston Common, 1980 Int’l Quartet Champs
    - [https://youtu.be/Vg4cFVWzls#t=150](https://youtu.be/Vg4cFVWzls#t=150)
    - “That Old Quartet of Mine”