

Houston  
  
Tidelanders  
Barbershop Chorus

**NEW MEMBER  
ORIENTATION  
MANUAL**



## NEW MEMBER ORIENTATION MANUAL

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### INTRODUCTION

Congratulations and welcome to the Houston TIDELANDERS!

You have just successfully completed your audition, the first step toward becoming a full-fledged member of the performing chorus. We consider performing to be the ultimate reward for our collective effort and we're anxious to have you standing there on the risers with us, as quickly as possible. After all, isn't that why you first expressed interest in joining the TIDES?

It is in the best interests of both the TIDELANDERS and every new member to provide relevant background information about the chorus and to summarize our expectations of each TIDES member, regardless of tenure. Likewise, we'll outline the steps which must be completed by everyone in order to become a part of the performing chorus. We're certain that you'll find these steps to be very reasonable. You can be sure that we'll do everything we can to help you.

The TIDES hope that this *New Member Orientation Manual* will provide the necessary information you'll need to get started. Don't hesitate to ask questions if there is anything you don't understand about the process or if there is additional information about us you'd like to have.

Once again, congratulations. We look forward to getting to know one another better in the months ahead.

**The Houston TIDELANDERS**



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### 1.0 SCOPE

This document is given to every potential new member immediately after he has requested and passed his audition. The Manual includes background information about our fantastic hobby and, in particular, the TIDELANDERS. Finally, it outlines how each new member can become a part of the performing chorus.

### 2.0 WHAT IS EXPECTED OF ALL TIDELANDERS?

All members of the Houston TIDELANDERS must also be active members of the Houston Chapter. This means more than just singing well and becoming proficient in choreography. It means that each of us understands and accepts that a great deal of time, effort and personal commitment will be required.

This *New Member Orientation Manual* has been prepared so that each prospective member will know what is expected of him once he joins the TIDES. Please take a few minutes to read it. You'll have plenty of opportunities to ask questions about how and why we do things during your application process. However, before your completed application is presented to the Board of Directors, you will be asked to sign an acknowledgement that you have reviewed, understood and agreed to meet the expectations outlined in Section 2.0.

#### 2.1 Dedication to Excellence

The Houston TIDELANDERS are dedicated to achieving the highest level of singing and performance quality. Achieving our collective goal starts with our members; therefore, each member must be dedicated to achieving the excellence we seek.

#### 2.2 Administration of Chapter Life

The Houston TIDELANDERS have an "active member only" policy. This means that each member is expected to perform one of the following:

2.2.1 Chair or serve on at least one committee

2.2.2 Accept a position as an appointed official

2.2.3 Serve in a Chapter elective office

2.2.4 Be accountable for a position of major responsibility within the Chapter

#### 2.3 Participation at Rehearsals

The Houston TIDELANDERS expect each member to attend all rehearsals on time and to participate attentively in the entire rehearsal schedule.



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### 2.4 Memorization of Music and Performance Plans

The Houston TIDELANDERS require each member to be able to follow the Musical Director or his/her Assistants and/or Coaches. Members are required to memorize the chorus music and to memorize and perform the stage presence visual moods and motions. The TIDELANDERS do not expect this to be accomplished with the 3-hour format of the weekly chorus rehearsal. Therefore, it is expected that a member will spend time away from the rehearsal to accomplish these requirements.

### 2.5 Certification for Performances

Prior to a performance, or as new music is added to the chorus repertoire, and at the discretion of the Music Committee, a demonstration of proficiency in notes and lyrics may be required through the use of a tape recorder or other methods, as may be designated. In addition, special demonstrations of stage presence moods and motions may be required. Inability of a member to perform any music to an established standard will disqualify him from participating in a public appearance during which it will be performed.

### 2.6 Participation at Performances

Members are expected to participate in all TIDELANDER public performances. However, representing the Houston Chapter by singing in public appearances is a privilege which will not be allowed if a member's attendance at chapter rehearsals prior to the event does not meet the recommended, established, announced and published standards. Exceptions can be made on an individual basis and for good cause shown.

### 2.7 Positive Attitude

The Houston TIDELANDERS expect each member to maintain a positive attitude at all Chapter functions. This is not to say you cannot have an opinion or make a suggestion. However, problems or complaints should be brought to the attention of a Chapter Board member, in private, and preferably in writing.

### 2.8 Participation in Ticket Sales

The Houston TIDELANDERS produce several shows each year which depend upon public ticket sales for their financial success. Each member is required to sell tickets to these combined shows.

### 2.9 Payment of Dues

Membership in the Houston Chapter requires payment of Society, District and Chapter dues. The Chapter Secretary and Treasurer can assist you with information regarding transfers, dual membership, student discounts and seniors' discounts.



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### 2.10 Payment of Costume Deposit

Each man accepted for membership will be required to pay a damage deposit (normal wear and tear excepted) for his performance costume. While you are given custody of the costume and you are responsible for its proper maintenance, it remains the property of the Chapter and must be surrendered when you are no longer a qualified member of the Performing Chorus or when you leave the Chapter.

### 2.11 Ethical Behavior

Each member is expected to abide by the Code of Ethics established by S.P.E.B.S.Q.S.A, Inc.

### 2.12 Agreeing to Abide by Houston Chapter Policies and Regulations

Each member of the Houston TIDELANDERS is expected to read and abide by its Code of Regulations, as well as the policies and procedures which may be enacted from time to time by the Chapter Board of Directors.

## 3.0 THE ORIENTATION PROCESS

Following is a sequence of steps we follow to help you become a member of the Houston TIDELANDERS performing chorus.

- 3.1 During your first visit, you'll be introduced to a TIDES "Buddy" from the Membership Team and to your Music Team Section Leader. You'll also be loaned a Guest Music book and assigned a rehearsal spot in the "Stack" so that you can sing with us while we're getting acquainted with one another. Don't hesitate to ask any questions you may have.
- 3.2 After you've attended several rehearsals, three is typical, and have decided that you're interested in joining the TIDES, ask the V. P. Membership to schedule an audition.
- 3.3 The Musical Director or his designee will conduct the vocal and visual audition.
- 3.4 As soon as you pass the audition, the V. P. Membership will give you a copy of this Manual, a notebook containing music for the active chorus repertoire and whatever written choreography outlines are applicable. You'll also be given "Learning" CD's for the active repertoire.
- 3.5 Please review the preceding Section 2.0 and decide if these membership expectations are acceptable to you. If they are, ask the V. P. Membership for a set of application documents. Complete the SPEBSQSA Application for Membership, a Houston Chapter Member Expectations acknowledgement and the TIDELANDER Member Directory Information sheet. Submit these, together with the required Chapter and Society dues, to the V. P. Membership.

- 3.5.1 The V. P. Membership will submit your membership application documents to the Chapter Board of Directors for approval at their next monthly meeting. Upon Board approval of your Application for Membership, the Secretary will:
  - 3.5.1.1 Submit your approved membership application to SPEBSQSA headquarters who will, in turn, add your name to the Society's roster and send you a package of information about the Society.
  - 3.5.1.2 Notify the TIDES' WebMaster that you should be added to the list of those who permitted to use the Chapter's intra-chapter e-mail communications system.
- 3.6 Now that you're a member of the Houston chapter, we'll work together so that you can become performance qualified for the TIDELANDERS. To help you become qualified in both the chorus repertoire and its associated choreography, be sure to take advantage of the following opportunities:
  - 3.6.1 Attend the Craft sessions conducted by our Music Team. You will be expected to attend all six (s) sessions although this is not a pre-requisite to becoming a member of the performing chorus.
  - 3.6.2 Attend the weekly, pre-rehearsal Choreography training sessions which start at 6:15 p.m. and last until the 7:00 chorus rehearsal begins.
- 3.7 In order to become performance-qualified, you must:
  - 3.7.1 Prepare a recording of yourself singing two repertoire songs selected by your Music Team Section Leader. This recording may be made individually or while you are singing with the chorus, whichever you prefer.
  - 3.7.2 Perform the choreography and visual enhancements for the two songs selected by the Section Leader. Your performance will be observed by a member of the Music Team Visual Group, either individually or while you are rehearsing with the chorus, whichever you prefer.
- 3.8 Once the Music Team has decided that you're performance-qualified, the V. P. Music and Performance will ask the V. P. Membership and the Wardrobe Chairman to issue you a set of uniforms. He will also ask the "Stackmaster" to assign you a spot on the risers for performances.
- 3.9 Pay your uniform deposit to the Wardrobe Chairman and pick up your uniform(s).
- 3.10 Assume your assigned place on the "Stack".

**4.0 DO THE TIDES EXPECT ANYTHING SPECIAL FROM NEW MEMBERS?**

- 4.1 We intend to continue our tradition of being among the best male choruses in the world. It goes without saying that in order to perform with the TIDES, you must learn all the music in our current chorus repertoire together with the choreography to those repertoire songs which have been choreographed. Take advantage of all the learning opportunities we offer. Ask for help if you need it.
- 4.2 At the discretion of the Music Committee, you may be encouraged to participate in limited portions of chorus performances if you have already demonstrated knowledge of the music and choreography which will be performed in that set.
- 4.3 While you are working to become performance-qualified, we hope that you will attend all performances or other chorus activities and to help with the behind-the-scenes activities which must be done.
- 4.4 Be sure to stand on the risers with the chorus whenever we rehearse on Monday evenings or other special rehearsals. This is an excellent opportunity to become more familiar with the repertoire while building confidence in your musical abilities.

**5.0 PERFORMING CHORUS STANDARDS****5.1 Vocal Standard**

All chorus members must demonstrate their ability to sing the song with no note or word mistakes and with consistently good intonation and vocal quality, accurate vowel targets, precise attacks and releases, proper synchronization and flow, and accurate pronunciation and enunciation of all word sounds. All aspects of each chorus member's vocal performance must contribute to and blend within the performance of his Section and the chorus as a whole.

**5.2 Visual Standard**

All chorus members must demonstrate the ability to perform the song with no mistakes in choreographed movements, gestures and focal points. All movement should be non-mechanical, natural and believable. The movement and timing of that movement must contribute to the unity of the chorus performance.

**5.3 Emotional Standard**

Through vocal quality, facial expression and limited body movement, all chorus members must visually and vocally convey appropriate emotions and moods of the lyrical message of the song. The performance must "come from the heart". It must be natural, believable and contribute to the unity of the chorus performance. There must be total individual involvement throughout the song.



## 6.0 COMMENTS PERTAINING TO THE PERFORMING CHORUS STANDARDS

6.1 It is impossible to judge any artistic performance in a totally objective way. Our outline of performing chorus standards contains both objective and subjective elements. One can judge objectively whether the each of us sings the word “love” instead of “life”, sings an F rather than a G or uses his left hand instead of this right hand. It is much more subjective to judge at what point a note is flat, or when a vowel target is acceptable or unacceptable, or whether a facial expression adequately expresses the emotion.

### 6.2 Objective Standards

Both the vocal and visual performing chorus standards begin with a statement of “no mistakes”. This is intended to cover whether or not each of us has learned and is able to perform all the notes and words and moves, NOT whether they are performed with all the desired accuracy, subtlety, musicality, believability and artistry. These elements are covered by the subjective portion of the standards.

A word and note can be “right” (i.e. not a “mistake”), even if we sing it flat, with a bad vowel target, without a proper turn of the diphthong and with poor vocal quality. In this case, the singer does not need to review the words or notes, he needs to work on intonation, vowel targets, breath support, etc. Similarly, the singer can perform the “right” choreography move even if it’s mechanical and his hand is six inches too high.

### 6.3 Subjective Standards

Many of the performing chorus standards, things like accuracy, subtlety, musicality, believability and artistry, are much less “black and white” with respect to what is right or wrong. They are subjective in nature, a spectrum ranging from poor to very good, recognizing that no one is perfect. The difficult task confronting the listener is determining what point on that spectrum we consider acceptable.

It is our intent to improve the chorus by nudging that “acceptable” point closer to “very good” each year. We are doing our best to ensure that all Section Leaders or Coaches are as consistent as possible in identifying what’s considered “acceptable”.

### 6.4 Benefit of the Doubt

For both the Vocal and Visual Performing Chorus Standards, we state that each member must “demonstrate the ability” to sing and perform the notes, words and moves with no mistakes. “Demonstrate the ability” is a phrase intended to give the Section Leaders and Coaches some latitude in interpreting what we consider “no mistakes”. If we submit a qualification tape with only one word mistake, but have sung the word correctly on previous tapes, the Section Leader may decide that the singer has demonstrated the ability to accurately perform all the notes and words even though no single tape was perfect. Similarly, if, during choreography

qualification, we miss a move that we have performed properly in the past or, if there has been a recent change to that move or another move immediately before or after it, the Visual Coach may determine we have “demonstrated the ability” to perform all the moves. It is not the Music Committee’s intent to disqualify anyone.

## **7.0 HOW DO WE COMMUNICATE WITH ONE ANOTHER?**

7.1 Most of the intra-chapter news and information distribution is accomplished electronically, either by the TIDES website, [www.houstontidelanders.org](http://www.houstontidelanders.org), or by e-mail.

7.1.1 The website contains sections which are accessible to the general public as well as sections which are only accessible to members of the TIDES.

7.1.2 The “Members” section of the website is password-protected. You can use the password “**tides2001**” to reach that information.

7.1.3 Instructions for setting up your e-mail account are included in the Appendices.

7.2 The “Public” sections of the TIDES’ website contain information such as:

- Performance Schedules
- Calendar of Upcoming Events
- Chapter History
- Chapter Mission and Vision
- Chapter Goals
- Chorus Philosophy
- Chapter By-Laws and Regulations
- Member Expectations
- Performance Standards

7.3 The “Members” section of the TIDES’ website contains information such as:

- Pictures of Every Member
- A Listing of Chapter Officers and Committee Chairmen
- Chapter Roster
- Music PDF Files
- Song-specific Choreography Outlines
- Costume Policy
- Show Ticket Selling Guidelines

7.4 The Society website address is: [www.spebsqsa.org](http://www.spebsqsa.org) which contains information about the Society in general, the various Districts, and other information of interest to every Barbershopper. Become familiar with this valuable source.



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- 7.4.1 You will be able to access the “Members” section of the Society’s website once your Membership Application is accepted. That will enable you to review personal information such as your address and telephone number(s) and to make changes whenever necessary.



### ORIENTATION MANUAL REVISION HISTORY

00	04-15-03	Original issue of the Manual.
Draft	01-30-04	Revised Performing Chorus acceptance criteria per Music Team recommendations. Completely re-arranged sequence of Sections 2 through 6. Added TIDELANDERS <i>Mission Statement and Vision</i> , <i>SPEBSQSA FACT SHEET</i> , <i>HISTORICAL ROOTS</i> and <i>WHAT ARE CONTESTS?</i> sections to APPENDICES.
01	02-02-04	Changed Para. 3.6.1 Craft session attendance requirements per V. P. Music and Performance recommendations.



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**APPENDICES**



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### TIDELANDERS INTRA-CHAPTER E-MAIL

Welcome to the TIDELANDERS. We're really glad to have your on board!

Most of the relevant information pertaining to our chapter's organization, goals and activities, as well as internal communication among our members, is done by e-mail. YahooGroups is the vehicle by which this is accomplished, at the moment. Following is an outline of the steps you must take to participate.

#### 1.0 REGISTER WITH YAHOO

- 1.1 Go to <http://www.yahogroups.com>
- 1.2 **CLICK HERE TO REGISTER** on the box entitled "**NEW USERS**" which appears on the upper left of the screen.
- 1.3 Complete the menu which will prompt you to establish a "**USER ID**" and a "**PASSWORD**" for your account. Following are some suggestions about this.
  - 1.3.1 Although you don't have to create a profile, the TIDELANDER WebMaster requests that you at least enter your actual name. He'll need that whenever he notifies Yahoo that you have been accepted as a Chapter member and are eligible to participate on TIDELANDER web site.
  - 1.3.2 By clicking on the "**REMEMBER MY ID**" box, you will avoid having to remember your ID and PASSWORD in the future.
  - 1.3.3 Add our site to your "Favorites".

#### 2.0 PLEASE BE PATIENT

- 2.1 It will take a few days for the Secretary to let the TIDELANDER Webmaster know that you are a new member so that he can complete his portion of the Yahoo acceptance process.

#### 3.0 CHECK OUR SITE (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/tidelanders>)

- 3.1 Confirm that you have been accepted. Do this by entering your ID and PASSWORD.

#### 4.0 BE COURTEOUS

- 4.1 Please remember that the YahooGroups e-mail distribution is only to be used for chorus business. It is not intended to provide a means of communicating jokes, personal opinions, business/financial opportunities, or other non-chorus mail.

#### 5.0 ENJOY





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### HOUSTON TIDELANDERS' MISSION STATEMENT, VISION AND CHORUS PHILOSOPHY

**Mission Statement:** The TIDELANDERS strive to achieve the maximum enjoyment of the barbershop musical and social experience by attaining the highest level of entertainment quality as determined by our members, our audiences and SPEBSQSA's judging system.

**Vision:** The Tidelander performing chorus will, in an atmosphere of fun and fraternity, continue growing to 100+ men who are constantly striving for excellence in all Houston Chapter endeavors, both singing and non-singing, with a goal to be recognized as among the very best male singing organizations in the world.

**Philosophy:** Our mission is clear – we are about becoming excellent singers and performers. That entails work. But as our Mission Statement acknowledges, what we do should also be fun. In today's vernacular, "We play hard". For those who enjoy good music, performing at a level that is both personally satisfying and pleasing to your audience is immensely rewarding.

We believe that, given a basic ability to match pitch and harmonize while singing, almost anybody can learn to be an excellent ensemble singer. There are many skills to perfect but they are learnable skills. The commitment to acquire and apply these skills is the responsibility of each chorus member. We do not accept the premise that strong singers carry weaker singers. A hundred-plus chorus does not provide a place for anyone to hide. Any member who is not contributing to the desired musical sound is detracting from it, unless of course they're not making any sound at all!

Musical excellence requires attention to detail. Rehearsal time is focused largely on refining performance details. Members are expected to spend time outside rehearsals learning music and practicing singing skills. Training once a week is not sufficient to build and maintain those skills. The chorus provides learning CD's/Tapes of new music to support this learning process. Some members even take private voice lessons to improve their skills.

While we expect members to learn music quickly, typically three weeks to be "off the paper", we encourage everyone to use his music on the risers, to take notes and to record performance details. In this way, most of the required instructions and the music will be in one place to facilitate study. We further encourage members to bring tape recorders to rehearsals so that changes to or interpretations of the music can be recorded for individual practicing.

We recognize that achieving and maintaining excellence requires mental focus and discipline, as well as physical skills. We subscribe to the principles of mental management described by Lannie Bassham in his book "*WITH WINNING IN MIND*". Those principles include:

- Excellence in performance is accomplished by your subconscious. You must practice the necessary skills until you can execute them subconsciously. If your conscious mind is focused on technical detail while you're performing, the performance will suffer.
- You must create a self-image consistent with the level of excellence to which you aspire. Given sufficient training, performance will always match self-image. Cultivate a champion's self-image, both for yourself and for you fellow chorus members. The self-image you cultivate is a conscious choice. The cynic who makes excuses for his own performance or always finds fault in others is cultivating a negative self-image and is preparing to fail.
- Developing physical skills and mental discipline takes focus. There is no single factor that affects the quality of our performance as a chorus more than focus. When we respond well to a

coach's input, it is because we are focused on his direction. When we experience moments of musical greatness, it is because we are "in the zone", focused on the music and on the Director.

Excellence is an ever-moving target. It is a process, not a destination. We never let down in our pursuit of excellence, never stop building the skills. Unlike some athletic sports, the concept of "peaking" does not apply to the pursuit of musical excellence. As we prepare for an event, we will not relax and coast to the finish line. Instead, we will work to the end and perform with confidence in our preparation.

We rehearse on the risers because stance, posture and breathing are inseparable from good singing. Anyone not rehearsing on the risers with good singing habits and posture, is practicing bad habits. Worst of all is sitting on the sidelines due to a lack of stamina or health problems. This is less than desirable and should be minimized wherever possible. Non-rehearsal exercise to improve stamina is very important where lack of stamina is a problem. If a serious disability exists, stools on the risers are preferable to chairs on the sidelines. Unless a singer with temporary vocal problems is contagious, it is preferable for him to be on the risers mouthing the words and "emoting" the visual plan like there's no tomorrow rather than sitting on a chair, watching. The singer will be better off at his next rehearsal when his voice recovers.

A word about riser decorum is in order. We are on the risers to learn, to pursue the excellence that is our goal. When we lose focus, we stop the learning process. Worse, we disrupt the learning process of those around us. In a large chorus, the behavior of each member is magnified a hundred-fold. We set high standards for riser decorum because behavior on the risers directly affects our focus and our accomplishment.

Expectations for riser decorum include:

- Watch the Director. His job is to direct our focus. He cannot do that if you're not focused on him.
- When the singing stops, focus more intently on the Director. He stopped us for a reason, one which he is about to explain. There's a natural tendency to relax when you stop singing. That interrupts focus and momentum, which takes time to re-establish. Resist the tendency.
- When the pitch pipe blows, stop talking and focus on the pitch. Listen to the pitch and embed the key center in your mind. **DON'T HUM THE PITCH.** The key to singing in tune is hearing the correct pitch in your mind. Practice that skill when the pitch pipe blows.
- Watch the Director.
- Resist the tendency to instruct others on the risers. While well intentioned, it takes away focus from what the Director is trying to do. Discuss consistent problems with your Section Leader later.
- And watch the Director.
- Resist the tendency to ask questions, either of the Director or of your neighbor. Taking group time for individual questions is an inefficient use of time. Focus instead on what the Director is working on. If your question is not answered during the rehearsal, ask your Section Leader later.
- Resist the urge to entertain your neighbors on the risers. They're trying to focus on the Director.
- By the way, watch the Director. It's always a good idea.

Finally, we are a large, results-oriented organization that depends on many behind-the-scenes efforts to run smoothly and to accomplish our goals. We all have skills beyond our singing ability that can be applied to the benefit of the chorus. We expect every member to contribute in some way to the ongoing operation of the Chapter. Once you're settled in your musical role, find a way to help out, off the risers.



## **SPEBSQSA Fact Sheet**

**All the facts: who we are, what we do, how to reach us.**

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### **Barbershop Harmony Society Fact Sheet**

#### **Preferred names**

- The Society is properly referred to as the Barbershop Harmony Society
- Legal name: The Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Barber Shop Quartet Singing in America, Inc. or SPEBSQSA, Inc. Note: no periods between letters of abbreviated form.
- Please do not try to pronounce SPEBSQSA as a word; use individual letters or "the Society" instead.

#### **Size**

- More than 32,000 members in more than 825 chapters in the United States and Canada; world's largest all-male singing society.
- Approximately 2,000 quartets registered with The Barbershop Harmony Society headquarters; an estimated 1,000 more quartets are active but not officially registered.
- Affiliated organizations in: Australia, Germany, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, Sweden, The Netherlands, Great Britain. There are also barbershop singers in Denmark, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Uganda, China, Hungary, Spain, Brazil, Argentina, Iceland, and the Russian Federation.
- Governed by an elected board of directors; administered by a 50-person professional staff at Harmony Hall in Kenosha, Wisconsin.

#### **Motto**

- "Keep The Whole World Singing."

#### **Founding**

- First meeting: April 11, 1938 at the Roof Garden of the Tulsa Club in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

#### **Vision statement**

- "The Society is to be an ever-growing fraternity of barbershop-style singers, leading the cause of encouraging vocal music in our schools and communities."

#### **Activities of the organization**

- Education of members and the general public in music appreciation, particularly barbershop singing.
- Advocacy at all levels of society to keep recreational and social singing an important part of our culture.





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- Charitable projects on a local and national basis.
- Public performances enhance community cultural life, preserve the art form, and bring cheer to all.
- Quartets and choruses contribute more than 100,000 man-hours per year singing for more than half a million people at churches, schools, hospitals, senior centers, etc.
- Programs to help seniors realize their full potential through singing.
- Music publishing and distribution of cassettes, compact discs, DVDs and videotapes for entertainment and education.
- Contests in quartet and chorus singing at local, regional, and international levels.
- International champions named in chorus, quartet, and college-quartet divisions at international convention each July; international seniors champions named at midwinter convention each January

### Education programs

- Harmony College, a week-long school held each summer in St. Joseph, Missouri, brings together nearly 700 Barbershoppers with a world-class faculty of vocal coaches, arrangers, choreographers, and educators to explore all facets of the barbershop hobby.
- Directors College provides instruction in conducting barbershop choruses.
- Regional Chapter Operations Training Seminars held each fall teach members how to run their local chapters, recruit members, develop musically and better serve their communities.
- Visits by staff music specialists enhance performance and education programs in local chapters.
- The Society publishes numerous manuals on vocal techniques, singing skills and chapter administration

### Youth Outreach programs

- The Young Men in Harmony program is designed to preserve the art form by introducing it to a new generation of singers.
- Harmony Explosion camps give high school students and teachers the opportunity to explore harmony with their peers.
- MBNA America Collegiate Barbershop Quartet Contest selects a national champion from colleges across the continent.
- Educator outreach introduces barbershop to music teachers at all levels.
- Many Barbershoppers are active in their communities, in parent-teacher associations, in arts advocacy groups and in education coalitions, working to preserve arts education in school curricula.

### Charitable and community activities

- Harmony Foundation is the Society's charity. It actively guides all fund raising for the benefit of the Society. Its annual fund campaign supports special Society projects, including Directors College

scholarships, Harmony Explosion Camps and the Heritage Hall Museum of Barbershop Harmony. The Foundation also guides the growth of an endowment program and oversees grant education and services for Society districts and chapters.

- Barbershoppers donate sizeable amounts of money and time, and numerous performances to local charitable activities in their communities, particularly those which support the charitable mission.

**What is barbershop harmony?**

- Four-part, unaccompanied, close-harmony singing, with melody in the second voice, called the "lead."
- Tenor (counter-tenor voice) harmonizes above the lead singer; bass sings the lowest harmonizing notes, and the baritone provides in-between notes, to form consonant, pleasing chords.
- Music is in the style of "the old songs" from the heyday of Tin Pan Alley, circa 1890-1920.
- Melodies in the vocal and skill range of the average singer, with lyrical emphasis on simple, heartfelt emotions: love, friendship, mother, moon & June & the girl next door.

Source: [www.spebsqsa.org](http://www.spebsqsa.org)



## The Historical Roots of Barbershop Harmony

The oldest reference to barbershop harmony dates to 1900 -- and it refers to African-American singers.

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**By Dr. Jim Henry**, bass, *The Gas House Gang*, 1993 International Quartet Champion

If you're a Barbershopper, the odds are good that a certain Norman Rockwell print is hanging on some wall in your house. You know the one I mean. First appearing on a 1936 Saturday Evening Post cover, the scene depicts four men, one with lather on his face, warbling a sentimental ballad: the quintessential barbershop quartet.

Barbershop quartets often are characterized as four dandies, perhaps bedecked with straw hats, striped vests and handlebar mustaches. These caricatures of the barbershop tradition are not only a quaint symbol of small-town Americana, but have some historical foundation. Barbershop music was indeed borne out of informal gatherings of amateur singers in such unpretentious settings as the local barber shop.

But modern scholarship is demonstrating with greater and greater authority that while the stereotype seems to have successfully retained the trappings of the early barbershop harmony tradition, it breaks down on one key point. If you visualized the characters described above as you were reading, you probably pictured them -- like Rockwell did over sixty years ago -- as white men. And therein lies barbershop music's greatest enigma: it is associated with and practiced today mostly by whites, yet it is primarily a product of the African-American culture.

### Historical evidence

The African-American origins theory is not new. Several of our early Society members and recent historians have made the assertion, or at least suggested an African-American influence upon barbershop harmony. But it was a non-Barbershopper, Lynn Abbott, who in the Fall 1992 issue of *American Music* published, "Play That Barber Shop Chord": A Case for the African-American Origin of Barbershop Harmony," presented the most thoroughly documented exploration into the roots of barbershop to appear up to that time. In that writing, Abbott draws from rare turn-of-the-twentieth-century articles, passages from books long out of print, and reminiscences of early quartet singing by African-American musicians, including Jelly Roll Morton and Louis Armstrong, to argue that barbershop music is indeed a product of the African-American musical tradition.

Among Abbott's recreational quartets, W.C. Handy, for example, offers a memory that is quite telling of the racial origins of barbershop music. Before he became famous as a composer and band leader, Handy sang tenor in a pickup quartet who, he recalls, "often serenaded their sweethearts with love songs; the young white bloods overheard, and took to hiring them to serenade the white girls." The Mills Brothers learned to harmonize in their father's barber shop in Piqua, Ohio, and several well known black gospel quartets were founded in neighborhood barber shops, among them the New Orleans Humming Four, the Southern Stars and the Golden Gate Jubilee Quartette.

**Early musicians associated barbershop music with blacks ...**

Among Abbott's findings are specific early musical references that suggest that barbershop was once acknowledged as African-American music. Here's just a sampling of the findings:

The illustration on the cover of Irving Berlin's 1912 composition, "When Johnson's Quartet Harmonize," features an African-American quartet.<sup>2</sup>

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,"<sup>3</sup> which we still sing today as the theme song of SPEBSQSA. The first refrain of O'Hara's version proceeds on to "Massa's in de Cold, Cold Ground," complete with its reference to "the cornfield" and vocal imitations of farm animals and a banjo, all conventions of early black vocal music.

The earliest white quartet recordings are rife with minstrel show conventions which included negro dialect and other parodies of the African-American culture, suggesting an African-American association with the music.

**... and the earliest known reference to barbershop music is associated with black quartets.**



Finally, the earliest known references to the term "barbershop," as it refers to a particular chord or brand of harmony, link it with African-American society. As early as 1900, an African-American commentator with the self-imposed moniker "Tom the Tattler" accuses barbershop quartet singers of "stunting the growth of

'legitimate,' musically literate black quartets in vaudeville." The 1910 song "Play That Barber Shop Chord," which before Abbott's discovery of the Tattler's commentary was considered the earliest reference to the term "barbershop," also associates the genre with African-American society.

The song tells of a black piano player, "Mr. Jefferson Lord," who was given the plea by "a kinky-haired lady they called Chocolate Sadie." The fact that the barbershop chord in this case is not articulated by a quartet, but rather by a single pianist shows that by 1910 the flavor of barbershop harmony had already taken on a life of its own beyond the boundaries of its usual host.

It is unknown exactly when or why barbershop music became associated with whites. Abbott cites African-American author James Weldon Johnson who, in the introduction to his *Book of American Negro Spirituals*, published in 1925, offers a hint at how the association might have shifted:

*It may sound like an extravagant claim, but it is, nevertheless a fact that the "barber-shop chord" is the foundation of the close harmony method adopted by American musicians in making arrangements for male voices. ... "Barber-shop harmonies" gave a tremendous vogue to male quartet singing, first on the minstrel stage, then in vaudeville; and soon white young men, where four or more gathered together, tried themselves at "harmonizing."*

There is additional support for the effluence of barbershop music from black neighborhoods into the white mainstream, as suggested by Johnson, in its parallel with other forms of African-American music. Ragtime, for example, was wrought by African-American musicians, whose syncopated rhythms and quirky harmonies (which, by the way, are the same as those found in barbershop music) became the backbone of the white-dominated Tin Pan Alley. More recently, musical genres such as rock-and-roll and country-and-western, though clearly rooted in the African-American musical tradition, are now commonly associated with whites.

### **Musical support for the "African-American origin" theory**

Lynn Abbott's scholarship regarding barbershop music's roots is unparalleled and his arguments are utterly convincing. He limits his scope, however, to historical data and primary-source recollections, and chooses not to delve into the inherent musical qualities that demonstrate the ways in which barbershop music reflects the African-American musical tradition.

In my recent doctoral dissertation, "The Origins of Barbershop Harmony," I address this important link. Using more than 250 transcriptions and recorded examples of early African-American and white quartets, I illustrate how the most fundamental elements of barbershop music are linked to established traditions of black music in general and African-American music in particular. The scope of this article allows me only to summarize my findings, focusing on the following musical characteristics:

- call-and-response patterns,
- rhythmic character and
- harmony.

### **Call-and-response**

The call and response pattern is one of the most fundamental characteristics of black music. Though it has many variations, call-and-response can most simply be defined as a type of responsorial song practice in which a leader sings a musical phrase which is either repeated or extended by a chorus of other voices. It is heard in spirituals, gospel, the blues, Cab Calloway's "Hi-De-Ho" songs and rap, to name a few genres.



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The barbershop musical lexicon abounds with examples of African-American-based call-and-response technique. Indeed, some of the most recognized barbershop tunes such as "You're The Flower Of My Heart, Sweet Adeline," "Bill Grogan's Goat," and "Bright Was The Night" are made up almost entirely of call-and-response patterns where each musical phrase is sung first by the lead and repeated by the other three parts.

The very first song to be sung at that fateful 1938 meeting in Tulsa that christened the SPEBSQSA was "Down Mobile," whose ending -- at least as transcribed by Sigmund Spaeth in his 1940 book *Barbershop Ballads and How to Sing Them* is a classic example of call-and-response. The following year, in 1939, the Bartlesville Barflies would win our first "international" competition with a medley that included a call-and-response rendition of "By the Light of the Silvery Moon."

### Rhythmic character

Upon listening to nearly any form of African-American music, sacred or secular, one is immediately drawn to its unrelenting regularity of the pulse. Above this basic pulse might be found any variety of uneven rhythmic patterns. Tilford Brooks explains that the element of rhythm in most black forms of music can be contrasted with that of music in the European concert tradition in that "the former makes use of uneven rhythm with a regular tempo while the latter employs even rhythm with accelerandos, ritards, and different tempi." This metric sense is so ingrained in the music of the African Diaspora that it is stressed "even in the absence of actual instruments."

The African-American a cappella quartets devised a method whereby the feeling of percussion and meter is created through vocal means. The technique employs a class of devices -- called "rhythmic propellants" by recent barbershop theorists -- which are designed to maintain the metric pulse through held melodic notes and rests. Like call-and-response patterns (which themselves can be considered types of rhythmic propellants) the rhythmic propellant is fundamental to the barbershop style, and most Barbershoppers will recognize the prevalence of these devices in the songs they have sung or listened to.

Perhaps the most common rhythmic propellant in barbershop music is the "echo." The echo is closely related to call-and-response pattern and usually occurs at the end of a musical phrase while the melody is holding a note. To keep the pulse going under the held note, one or more of the harmony parts will repeat the last word or words of that phrase.

One need only look at the phrase endings in the song, "Keep the Whole World Singing," to find clear examples of echo technique. Other rhythmic propellants clearly of black origin and commonly found in barbershop music include instances where one or more parts sing strict downbeats under syncopated rhythms; counter-melody or "patter" (take, for example, the lead patter that accompanies "Down Our Way"); "fills" (basses are especially popular choices to fill this role; every time you've heard "bum bum bum," "my honey," or "oh, lordy" you've experienced fills); "swipes" (where the chord changes or moves to a different voicing under a held melody note -- recall, for instance, the phrase endings in "My Wild Irish Rose"); and the ever-popular "tiddlies" (baritones are particularly adept at performing these little flourishes to color a held chord, and become quite agitated when you try to rush them through it).



***This 1910 score had long been the earliest known musical use of the term "barber shop." (Note black minstrel performer Bert Williams on the cover.) Now the oldest reference dates to 1900--a black music critic's lamentations about black Barbershoppers.***

### **Harmony & the tell-tale blue note**

Perhaps the most characteristic element of black music, the one that pervades every one of its incarnations, is the so-called "blue note." Relative to the Western major scale, two blue notes are commonly identified: the lowered third and the lowered seventh notes of the scale.

The blue note is a testament to a culture's ability to retain musical traits over great spans of time and distance. It is an anomaly by Western standards. No form of Euro-centric music gave rise to it. It is this blue note and the scale that derives from it that offers the strongest argument in favor of the "African-American origin" theory of barbershop music.

In order to support this claim, a little technical background is required. I apologize in advance to the academic musicians who will no doubt cringe at the generalizations I am about to make for the sake of simplicity and space considerations.

### **The barbershop seventh**

The single most telling hallmark of the barbershop style is that curious sonority we call the "barbershop seventh" chord. The barbershop seventh chord is described as a "major-minor seventh" chord because it results from taking a simple, three-note major chord and adding to it a minor seventh above the root, i.e., the lowest note of the chord. If we were to build seventh chords on every note of the major scale, the only one that would yield this sound would be the fifth note of the scale, sometimes called the dominant. For this reason, many musicians call this chord a "dominant seventh," and give it the Roman numeral shorthand V7.

In Western classical music, this dominant seventh chord anticipates a harmonic return back to the tonic chord (called Roman numeral I because it is built on the first note of the scale, the key note). We call this motion a "falling fifth" because the progression from the dominant to the tonic is down a perfect fifth. So in the key of C, the major-minor seventh chord built on the fifth note of the scale (G) will tend to lead back to C. (Go backward down the musical alphabet counting each letter: G-F-E-D-C -- five total letters.) The major-minor seventh chord as heard in classical music is almost always used to suggest this dominant function.

In African-American music, however, we may hear the major-minor sound built on, and functioning as, any number of chords other than the dominant. A major-minor seventh chord built on the subdominant (i.e., the fourth note of the scale, Roman numeral IV), for example, is a common occurrence. The natural seventh of this particular major chord is a major seventh. Yet in African-American music one will often hear it sounded with a minor seventh, thus giving it a major-minor or "dominant" sound. The major-minor seventh chord in this instance, however, is clearly not conceived as a dominant seventh chord because it does not progress in the falling fifth manner discussed above. Rather, it moves as it would if it were a simple version of IV.

### **Three distinctly African-American traditions merge to seal the deal**

So how did above anomaly come about? It is the result of three African-American musical traditions all coming together: (1) an approach to music that is primarily horizontal rather than vertical, (2) a particular penchant for improvisation and (3) the blues scale. Let's use the chorus of "Shine On Me"; (in the key of C for the sake of simplicity) to illustrate how it works:

1. The implied chord on the word "shine" in the second phrase (after the lead sings "in the mornin'") is a IV (sub-dominant) chord. It would classically be written as a simple major chord (F-A-C) without a seventh, and proceed to the V (or V7) chord (G-B-D-[F]). In the case of this song we do find the IV chord moving to the V chord two words later on the word "me."

2. If a quartet were singing this with a somewhat classical flavor, the tenor and bass probably would sing in octaves on the root of the chord (which, you'll recall, is built on the fourth scale degree, F). A singer in the African-American quartet tradition, however, would be thinking of his part not only in terms of how it stacks up against the other parts, but as a line unto itself. The improviser in him would add little flourishes ("tiddlies," if you prefer) that would no doubt incorporate blue notes. In this instance, he would likely pass down from the fourth-scale-degree root (F) through the blue (flatted) third (E-flat) of the scale.

3. The resultant F-A-C-Eb quality will sound exactly like a major-minor seventh chord. Since it was not conceived as a dominant chord, however, but simply an improvisation upon a IV chord, it will proceed onto the V as originally intended, not down a fifth as common practice would dictate. Thus in terms of function, this particular F major-minor seventh is not really a major-minor seventh at all. It is a simple IV chord with the lowered scale degree "three" from the African-American blues scale added to it. The influence of the African-American musical tradition to this basic barbershop idiom is unmistakable and argues forcefully in favor of the "African-American Origin" theory.

### **What's next?**

While barbershop has been an ever-changing musical art form, certain hallmarks of the style seem to have remained implacable for well over a century. Call-and-response patterns, rhythmic propellants and "barbershop seventh" chords are among the many distinctive features of the barbershop tradition that, when considered alongside the entirety of found historical evidence, root the genre in the African-American musical tradition. The road that leads back to barbershop, however, is still fraught with holes that need to be filled. Thus, while the performer in me looks excitedly to what our 21st century singers will add to barbershop's future, the historian in me prays for more scholars who will dedicate themselves to its rich and enigmatic past.

### **Notes**

- Lynn Abbott, "Play That Barber Shop Chord: A Case for the African-American Origin of Barbershop Harmony," (American Music, 10 [Fall 1992], pp. 289-326). Wilbur Sparks review of the Abbott's article is found in the January/February 1994 edition of *The Harmonizer*.
- Irving Berlin, "When Johnson's Quartet Harmonize" (New York: Waterson, Berlin & Snyder Co., 1912).
- Geoffrey O'Hara, "A Little Close Harmony" (Boston: Boston Music Co., 1921).

On page 308 of his article, Abbott includes the following quotation from "Tom the Tattler," Indianapolis Freeman, December 8, 1900. It is valuable not only as the first known reference to the term, but also in the insights it offers regarding the musical constituents of early barbershop harmony:

A noticeable advancement along the lines of the profession is the passing of the barber shop quartette with its barber shop harmony. It doesn't take much of an effort of memory to recall the time when all quartettes sang their own self-made harmonies, with their oft-recurring minors, diminished sevenths and other embellishments. This barber shop harmony, although pleasing to the average ear, and not altogether displeasing to the cultivated ear, is nothing more or less than a musical slang. It violates -- at times ruthlessly -- the exacting rules and properties of music. All forms, phrases and progressions of music go down before it. What does [sic] the barber shop exponents of harmony care for such delicacies as the forbidden progressions of perfect fifths and octaves? What do they care about chord progression in its correct form? Their chief aim is to so twist and distort a melody that it can be expressed in so-called "minors"; and diminished chords. The melody is literally made to fit their small stock of slang-chords, instead of the chords being built around the melody.



**notes**

Lewis F. Muir and William Tracey, "Play That Barber Shop Chord" (New York: J. Fred Helf Company, 1910). Abbott discusses the song on page 312 of his article.

This quotation, found on page 299 of Abbott's article, is from James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamond Johnson, *The Book of American Negro Spirituals* (New York: Viking Press, 1925), 36.

Completed at Washington University in St. Louis in May 2000; the complete title is The Origins of Barbershop Harmony: A Study of Barbershop's Musical Link to Other African-American Musics as Evidenced Through Recordings and Arrangements of Early Black and White Quaternets

Sigmund Spaeth, *Barber Shop Ballads and How to Sing Them* (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1940).

Tilford Brooks, *America's Black Musical Heritage* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984).

Richard A. Waterman, "African Influence on the Music of the Americas." In Sol Tax (Ed.), *Acculturation in the Americas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 216.

It is important to keep in mind that the degree to which these pitches are bent is not absolute, but may fall anywhere within a half step.

If you play every other white key on the piano starting on G and ending on the F above it (to the right of it) you will hear a major-minor seventh chord.

Source: [www.spebsqsa.org](http://www.spebsqsa.org)





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### WHAT ARE CONTESTS?

The Society is divided geographically into sixteen Districts which include the continental United States and Canada. Each of these districts is subdivided into two or more Divisions along geographic and demographic lines. Every chapter belongs to a specific Division within a District. The Houston TIDELANDERS belong to the Southeastern Division of the Southwestern District.

Chorus, Quartet and College-quartet International champions are named at the Society's International Convention each July. Senior Quartet champions are named at a separate Mid-winter Convention each January. Division and District level contests are held throughout the Society at other times during the year.

#### Chorus Contests

Our contest cycle begins at the Division level. Once each year, every chorus within a Division meets and sings two songs, usually a ballad and an up-tune. A panel of highly-trained Society judges evaluates the chorus performance from standpoints of sound, music and presentation. Naturally, winning the Division contest is the primary goal of every chorus. A secondary goal is to at least earn the specific threshold score needed to advance to the next level of competition, the District contest.

At the District contest, each chorus again sings two songs and is judged by the same criteria as those used at the Division contest. The winner of the District contest is then qualified to advance to the International competition the following July. District winners are also exempt from competing in the following year's Division contest.

The International contest is the highest level of competition a chorus can attain. Only winners from each of the sixteen District contests are automatically invited to sing at International. There are four "At-large" invitations extended to the four highest scoring second-place choruses from the District contests. Winners of the Society's overseas affiliates' contests are also invited to compete.

The winner of the International contest is designated as the Society's International Champion for that year. Each International Champion is exempt from all levels of competition for the next two years. However, the Champion is expected to return to the International Convention the following year for a "swan song" performance and to "pass the torch" to the new International Champion chorus.

#### Quartet Contests

Quartets follow the same contest procedures as choruses with a few exceptions. At the Division level, Quartet and Chorus rules are the same. There is no limit to the number of quartets who qualify for District competition as long as they either win the Division contest or score the minimum threshold of points.

At the District level, quartets again compete under the same rules and procedures as the choruses. The District Quartet Champion automatically advances to the International quartet contest only in the year they win the District competition. In subsequent years, they must compete in another

Contest held specifically for International contest qualification. That contest is called the International Prelims. The District Champion Quartet is exempt from competing in any future Division or District competition, however.

The International Prelim contest is open to all quartets who have not already won an International championship. It is not necessary to compete in any lower-level contests in order to qualify for participation in the International Prelims. The format of this contest is basically the same as that of other contests. The winner automatically receives an invitation to the International Quartet Contest. Other quartets who score the minimum threshold of points are also invited to sing at International.

At the International level, once a quartet wins the International Quartet Championship, they are exempt from competing in any contest for the life of the quartet. They are automatically admitted to the Association of International Champions, AIC, and they perform with other past International Champions at future AIC shows.

Source: Bill Lyle, *NEW MEMBER ORIENTATION AND TRAINING* Program