



**BIG CHIEF CHORUS**  
**SMOKE**  
**SIGNALS**



**Pontiac/Waterford Chapter**  
Meetings on Tuesdays: 7:30 to 10 PM

**Bulletin #45, January 4, 2005**

### Christmas Chorus

Our Christmas Season is over.

- Over a period of three weeks, we sang at fifteen locations
- By my count we sang to 980 folk, from the several hundred at Lake Orion's Candlelight Parade to the handful at Bordine Nursery
- Eight seasonal singers joined us
- We learned a couple new songs – "Secret of Christmas" and "Silver Bells"

Some highlights –

- Singing for Bill Pascher's friends at Sunrise Senior Living
- Bringing some outside stimulation to the lonely folk at the OC Medical Care Facility
- Searching for parking space at Lakeland Place or Inn at Cass Lake, or just trying to find the right building at Lourdes-Fox Manor
- Crowding into the tiny Super Chief Coney Island
- Alternating with our ensemble – Off the Reservation – and our quartets – Jackpot and Sunnyside.
- The acoustics at Canterbury on the Lake and their marvelous buffet meal

- The penetrating coldness at Lake Orion and at Holly
- A young father applauding and picking up our tab at the final afterglow (at CJ's)

Let's do it again next year!



Big Chief Chorus at Holly Festival, Dec. 18, Photo by Ray Wysocki

### AROUND THE PATCH

#### MEMBERSHIP (at 56)

**Renewals:** Bill Auquier (6), Ted Prueter (4), Walt DeNio (8), Donald Carrier (22), Bill Nevaux (30), Marv Wilson (49), Len Barnes (52), Bill Pascher (62)

**January Birthdays:** Len Barnes (3<sup>rd</sup>), Bob Marshall (10<sup>th</sup>), Dennis Robinson (25<sup>th</sup>)

Fred DeVries is still on the road of recovery from his October stroke. Walt DeNio's wife needed repeat surgery on Dec 8<sup>th</sup>.

Bob and Eileen Marshall have each been in the Oakland Press lately, Eileen for her channel TV work, Bob for playing ping-pong.

Walt DeNio's niece, Lauren DeNio, was featured in an Oakland Press story for her smiling response to a medically tough life. As Walt says, "You'd think all of us in the Chorus should find it easy to SMILE, eh ???"

John Cowlshaw begins a four-month “practice retirement” during which he will be on leave from Oakland University. He’ll spend one month in Destin, FL, during which time, Smoke Signals will be published by guest editor Chuck Murray. Thanks, Chuck!

### **Quartets and Ensemble:**

Jackpot sang at a lunch program for the Lake Orion Senior Center on December 16, arranged by Mel Parrish. They followed with a short program at nearby Heritage Place Apartments, where John’s mother-in-law lives.

Impresario sang at the December 1<sup>st</sup> Holiday party of the Master Gardener Society Of Oakland County. Greg Moss helped arrange it.

In response to a special request for barbershopping, Chuck Murray pulled together a pickup quartet on short notice for Clementine Pryor, a pediatrics RN at North Oakland Medical Center. She had just been diagnosed with inoperable cancer. The Sunshine Quartet sang for her on Dec 22 at Hero’s Restaurant, featuring Bruce Brede, Lead; Jeff Spires, Bari, Tom Blackstone, Tenor, and Chuck as bass.

From Bruce Brede: (Dec 11)

The Off-The Reservation Ensemble began rehearsing right after the fall Show with an initial presentation to the BCC on Nov 23<sup>rd</sup> of “I’ll Be home For Christmas.” Presently, the regulars are Leads (Mazzara, Jackson, Brede), Basses (Holmes, Cheyne, Moss, Carinci, Prueter), Baris (DeNio, Dabbs) and Tenor (Keith). Teuber is a substitute tenor/bass, and Downie and DeVries are on leave. Johnson and Troeger are honorary singer/directors. This provides a mid-size group for Gigs as well as presenting a training platform for prospective quartetters.

On December 11, Off the Reservation did its own van tour, visiting our Show Ad Sponsors as a way of saying thank you. “We visited Copperstones, Everybody’s Cafe, Ripples, Pete’s Coney, Village Place, Coopers, Tenutas Foodlane and the Big Apple. Our audiences averaged about forty at each of the eight tour stops and they seemed especially appreciative of our four regular songs (Joy to the World, Jingle Bells, Rudolph and We Wish You a Merry Christmas) as well as the occasional Little Toy Trains and Angels We Have Heard.”

### **MEET ROGER HOLM**

Roger was born on a 180-acre farm in rural Iowa in 1933, though his Scandinavian genes had arrived earlier aboard his four grandparents from Norway and Denmark. His mother died when he was one, and his father raised Roger and his older brothers (two) and sisters (three).

Roger was driving a tractor by the time he was ten, a car by fourteen. In fact, he liked machinery more than farming, so upon his graduation from Chester High School (senior class of four students), he left the farm for Iowa State College and a degree in mechanical engineering.



Roger’s dad sang in a church choir, and Roger had sung in church choir and a high school quartet, so at Iowa State he joined the Iowa State Singers, and was part of the tour group of seventy-five that toured the state.

When he graduated in 1955, he looked for a position in the auto industry and joined Pontiac Motor in Product Engineering. However, he was quickly drafted and spent two years with the Nike project at White Sands Proving Ground. Upon his return he held a series of positions - chassis drafting, test engineer, design engineer in power train, and finally as a power train development group leader.

In 1985 came the ill-fated reorganization under Roger Smith. Pontiac Motor Product Engineering ceased to exist. Roger (Holm, that is) had thought it a great place to work, like family, and was much less happy upon his transfer to the GM Tech Center, so at the first chance of a buyout, in 1988, he retired.

Roger had met Janet, a young widowed Milford schoolteacher, on a blind date, and they married in 1964. All three of their kids went to Hope College, and Jeff, the oldest, got his doctorate in psychology and now teaches at the University of North Dakota. Son Doug works in a real estate investment company in San Francisco, and their daughter Amy is married to Richard who works in IT at Ford. There are four grandkids.

It was Janet who saw Bill Pascher’s newspaper ad marketing the 1988 Christmas chorus. All that Roger knew of such vocal harmony was that he liked the Mills Brothers. Nevertheless he responded, and in 1989, he joined the chorus. As they say, the rest is history. Roger’s rich bass voice and responsible leadership skills have led to a central role in the Big Chief Chorus. Roger has served as secretary three years, President for two years, as librarian, and as Bass Section Leader. Under Zaven Melkonian’s arm-twisting, and with John Smith’s foresight, he took over the role of Music Committee chair. “I don’t have John’s or Chris’s musical background; all I know to do is hold meetings, and, as we used to say at Pontiac Motor, keep the balls in the air.”

When Harmonic Progression's bass, George Mekros, dropped out, Roger replaced him, joining Dick Johnson, Len Barnes and Mike Keith. Then when Meniere's disease incapacitated Mike for several years, John Smith stepped in at tenor, and the name changed to Sunnyside. During Len's yearlong struggle with lymphoma, John reconstituted B Natural, with Lyle Howard and Dick Johnson and Roger. Since Smitty's death, B Natural can still occasionally be heard with Fred McFadyen at tenor.

Roger loves the big band music of the World War II era (e.g. "Sentimental Journey"). His brother was an air force pilot. In later years he picked up Roger at Pontiac Airport for flights to visit Dad in Iowa. Roger flirted with the idea of taking flying lessons from him.

As a footnote, when Roger returned to Iowa State University last year to see his talented grand-niece perform with the present-day Iowa State Singers, the director called Roger to the stage for recognition and to join in singing the school song. Roger was simply thrilled with the chorus's talent, and very proud of his grandniece, and also a vocal grandnephew and flautist grandniece in the University's musical programs.

I asked Roger about his other interests. He's long been active in a local Methodist church, he putters constantly with household and up-north-cottage projects, and he has been building a kit car that is modeled after a 1929 Mercedes SSK. He and Janet have toured Europe three times – the last two as part of a consolidated church choir singing in some of its great cathedrals.

### **Power Play on Jane Pauley**, by John Cowlshaw

Well, okay, so the Jane Pauley show was underwhelming. Power Play was on for five minutes according to my timing, maybe six with Jane's introduction. Just enough time for (a) the traditional explanation of barbershop, how it is built up part-by-part from lead ("melody"), tenor and bass ("who sing above and below"), and baritone ("who sings the junk notes"), all done to the first eight measures (not even time to sing thru to the tag) of "My Wild Irish Rose," (b) "Angels we have heard on high," and (c) one conversational sound-byte with Jane, which she used to express her surprise that there aren't more "family quartets," implying a kind of folksy understanding of barbershop. The rest of the show featured Yale's "Whiffenpoofs" and "Out of the Blue," the contemporary group "Rockapella," female group "Key of She," and the Jane Pauley Show singers directed by Jonathan Minkoff, president of CASA, the Contemporary A Cappella Society of America, who has a funny description of his involvement, at [http://www.casa.org/index.php?object=webcontent\\_bydate&section=standard&webpage=articles&area=main](http://www.casa.org/index.php?object=webcontent_bydate&section=standard&webpage=articles&area=main)

Was it my imagination, or was there very little "expanded sound" coming through from most of the groups?

On the other hand, a whole hour of a cappella singing on network TV is not to be sneezed at.

I posted the above on Harmonet, bringing some interesting responses, particularly about the show's sound people's poor handling of the bass, but also these intriguing comments on the difference between barbershop and other a cappella styles:

"As for expanded sound, it really occurs best on relatively few chords (from a physics standpoint at least). Barbershop happens to hone in frequently on those, particularly the dominant type "barbershop" sevenths and major triads. Modern a cappella uses a larger chord vocabulary than barbershop, which provides for more colorful sounds at times, and larger groups can often venture out to chords with greater than four parts. Exciting, different, and cool for sure, but for the most part those chords won't have the same lock, ring, and expansion simply because there is a lot less reinforcement of the overtone series. That to me is what gives barbershop its unique and exciting sound." (Steve Sammons)

...and this from Roger Payne:

"There is validity in all of this, but it's also worth noting that ours is the only style whose specific goal is to "ring" the chords. Most a cappella groups do seek to sing in tune, but with emphasis either on the forward motion or the intersection of notable voices (depending on the group, the song, or both), not on unitizing the ensemble for "ring". Think of two opera singers doing a duet; they're not out of tune, but it's sure different from how we'd approach it. That ring-see is one of the characteristics that defines our style and apparently served us well in this instance."

Neal Rubin's knowledgeable piece on Power Play is still available online at: <http://www.detnews.com/2004/metro/0412/17/A02-35703.htm>

### **VALENTINES**

Hopefully you all received (Dec 22) Ross Ensign's detailed, positive email on this year's Valentine's program. He has put a great deal of thought into this. And we need to respond by providing him with functional quartets – ready to hit the streets. Attached to his email were the flyer and order forms.

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

According to a story last month, *Wheaties* made advertising history as the first product to feature a singing commercial on network radio. Its first airing took place on Christmas Eve 1926. The soon-to-be famous "Have You Tried Wheaties" jingle was sung by four male singers known as "The Wheaties Quartet." At a company staff meeting, an advertising executive stated that since the sales were good in those regions where the *Wheaties* musical commercial was heard, why not air the commercial in as many regions of the country as possible. Those four guys came into the studio every day and sang the jingle live on the Jack Armstrong Show. They got \$6.50 apiece per day for their efforts. *Wheaties* would quickly become one of the most popular breakfast cereals.

## VOCAL TECHNIQUE - "It's only a paper tune?"

When I first joined the BCC I was upset at how far Chris Miller's direction deviated from the music on the page. Quarter notes became dotted, rests ignored, tempos toyed with. When I asked, I was told that that was "interpretation." So I came to think that there were two things, one was the way the music was intended, which we could know, because it was written down in the score, and the other was how some director wanted to change it.

The other day, I was daydreaming about dance and music. Now in dance on the other hand, I thought, we don't really know what the creator intended, because it can't be written down precisely. There are various systems of notation to try to suggest – on paper – what the creator intended on the stage (Laba and Sutton notation, for example). But live energetic creative dance can't be reduced to a system of written symbols. Then the light bulb over the head. That should be true of singing also. The live energetic creative act of singing – it can't be really captured in written symbols. And to think so reduces singing to something like a series of notes played on a pitch pipe. How different that is from a Pavarotti aria. Or a ballad by Linda Ronstadt. Or Gotcha! Good singing is not accomplished by a faithful replication of the notes on a page; they are merely an arrow pointing in the direction of what is intended. They are a reduced version of what inspired the composer, and it is the singer's responsibility to remove that reduction, to broaden it back, to fill it with life, to get the blood and electricity back into the "music." Music is NOT just a paper tune.

## VOCAL TECHNIQUE - Bill Biffle on balancing the barbershop chord:

1. Melody is always predominate (easily audible)
2. Roots and fifths are louder than 3rds and 7ths
3. Lower notes are sung with a bit more relative volume than higher ones

## Swipes

"Barbershoppers used to memorize, teach, and sing **swipes** from the middle of songs the way we sing **tags** today. They are really fun to sing, since it's just pure chords...you just don't get that final resolution you get with tags!"

From Martin Grandahl, webmaster at [www.TheAfterglowLounge.org](http://www.TheAfterglowLounge.org)

And a few **jokes** from Martin's web page:

Q: How many leads does it take to screw in a light bulb?

A: One, and the whole world revolves around him.

Q: How many bass singers does it take to change a light bulb?

A: One, five, one, five, one, five ...

Q: What do you call a guy who hangs around with singers.

A: A baritone.

Q: Is there any difference in sound between a tenor's singing and that of a cat in heat?

A: Yes, if the cat's in good health.

## CHAPTER LEADERSHIP (2005)

Director: Jim Troeger

(248-853-4360)

Assoc. Directors: Dick Johnson, Bruce Collins

President: Pete Mazzara

(313-563-4026)

Past President: Gene Downie

VP: Chapter Dev: Wayne Chene

VP: Music and Performance: Roger Holm

VP: Marketing & PR: Jack Teuber

Secretary: Bill Holmes

Treasurer: Dick Johnson

Members at Large: Ron Clarke, Zaven Melkonian

Chorus Manager: Art Carinci

Music Team: Roger Holm, Johnson, Collins, Doig, Ensign, Melkonian, Prueter, Troeger

Bulletin Editor: John Cowlshaw

Music Librarian: Ted Prueter

Singing Valentines: Ross Ensign

Sunshine (Chaplain): Walt DeNio/Bill Dabbs

Uniforms Manager: Ron Clarke

Tape/CD Librarian: Ross Ensign

YMIH: Ron Clarke

## Calendar

Jan 4, T BCC Rehearsal, Crary

Jan. 8-9 COTS @ Okemos

Jan 11, T BCC Rehearsal, Crary

Jan 14, F Uncle Sam Night, @Windsor

Jan 16, 3pm Exec Bd Mtg, Jim Troeger's home

Jan 18, T BCC Rehearsal, Crary

Jan 20, Th R.D.Mathey coaching at Macomb

Jan 24-30 BHS Midwinter Convention, Jacksonville

Jan 25, T BCC Rehearsal, Crary

Feb 1, T BCC Rehearsal, Crary

Feb 9, W Exec Bd Mtg, Jack Teuber's

Feb 11-14,F-M Valentine Day Singouts

Apr 1-3 Singing Retreat, MacMullan Ctr

Apr 8, F 49<sup>th</sup> Annual Woodshed Contest

Apr 29-May 1 District Convention, @Kalamazoo

May 13-15 Harmony Roundup, @ MSU

July 3-10 BHS Convention, Salt Lake City