



June 2019
Vol. 19, No. 2 (#218)
www.bigchiefchous.org



The Sing-Out That Wasn't

On Friday, May 10, 2019, the Big Chief Chorus was scheduled to sing at a Mother's Day weekend Luncheon in Auburn Hills. However, an exceedingly rare convergence of circumstances arose that prevented the chorus from signing up enough singers to perform and the BCC had to pull out of their commitment.

When the announcement was made to the chorus, OverTime Quartet quickly reached out to the staff at The American House Elmwood retirement community in an attempt to save the sing-out, but other entertainment had already been booked, so it was too late to secure the gig.

The Big Chief Chorus is widely known for its culture of giving back to our community by carrying out dozens of sing-outs each year. In this time of diminishing membership and neighboring choruses disbanding, our art form is in danger of losing some of its prominence in society.

Our Vice President of Membership, Fred Pioch is developing a program for recruitment. This month he will be encouraging the tribe to spread the word of barbershop to men in the earshot of our members. And on June 8, we will be putting on an ice cream social benefit concert in Waterford with the purpose of exposing our craft to others who may like to find a men's [or as some may suggest] a mixed chorus for their own musical outlet.

In the meantime, we must all refresh our focus on our calling to bless this world with barbershop harmony. New



ideas for improving recruitment are definitely needed, and certainly welcome. Please let Fred and Eric hear your thoughts about enlarging our tribe.

Happy June Birthday to this Harmonious Brave!

18th Fred Pioch

Membership Renewals

Downie, G.

MacDonald M.

Vowels Vowels Vowels

Director Tom's Feature Article

"Better Vowels in an Instant"

By Brody McDonald

Choir directors are all about vowels. Vowels are all about shape. The biggest problem I encounter with vowels is that they lack height. Another problem is that they lack structure. Here are some tips to help both problems. AW-ROO – your new best friend. AW-ROO came to me from Jean Barford, a champion Sweet Adeline barbershop singer/director. Just slowly say "AW-ROO." You should feel as if you are making the shape of a cheerleader's megaphone, only facing backwards. The larger end (AW) is in the back of your throat. The smaller end (ROO) is in the front with your lips. The theory behind AW-ROO is that all vowels are inside that megaphone/cone. Larger vowels (EH, AW, AH, OH) are in the AW space and smaller vowels (EE, IH, OO) are funneled through the ROO space. AW-ROO is tall and round – just what we want! Just saying AW-ROO can remind your choir to guard against "spreading" their vowels. Anything outside that cone is forbidden!

VOWEL BLOSSOM – This is my code for when singers take an especially long time to open their mouths from a closed consonant to a target vowel, thus creating a sound like an old record player getting up to speed. Say the word "swatch" in slow motion and you'll feel a vowel blossom. These often occur when singers are attempting a crescendo. They increase space and volume at the same time, rather than forming a firm, structured vowel and increasing the volume independently. The first step to eliminating vowel blossoms is to acknowledge their existence. The next step is...INSTABANG – another barbershop gem, and the cure for vowel blossoms. It refers to the process of getting quickly from the formation of a consonant back to a large, open, pure vowel formation. BANG! Snap that vowel open in an instant: INSTABANG, as in, "Come on, choir – instabang those vowels!" (Notes: this was coined before Instagram, but that can't hurt for tying this concept with young singers. If you are afraid of any giggles, you could also change the word to INSTAPOP.)

POLLUTED VOWELS – I have noticed that my choirs often sing less-than-pure vowels when the end of the syllable/word contains a singable consonant. R's, L's, and N's are especially troublesome. I call these polluted vowels. Vowels can also be polluted when anticipating the second half of a diphthong. Imagine you have a

bottle of drinking water. Now add just a bit of ink. It isn't like you dropped a dime into the bottle, where you can see it shouldn't be there but can drink the water anyway. The ink has polluted the water throughout, turning what was once clear into a murky grey. That's what singable consonants/diphthongs can do to a vowel – tainting the purity to our ears. My men's chorus is singing "Laudamus," a Welsh hymn, done in English. Many phrases end with the word "evermore." When they hold the last note, I can so clearly hear the R polluting the OH vowel.

Just say the word "more" in slow motion. You'll feel the point at which the OH has been compromised, but it comes before you are sustaining a pure R. Try the word "bound," and notice the collapsed point between the AW and OOH of the diphthong. These are polluted vowels, and choirs sing them all the time because they cling their speaking constructs of the language.

Fear not-I have a solution! It's called word switching. Let's try it on this MORE scenario. I had my men sing and hold the chord on MORE. It was polluted. I explained the concept of polluted vowels and asked them to only sing a pure MOH with no R. Didn't work. Then I asked them to sing the word MOTION, which does not have a singable consonant following the MOH. "Sing MO-TION but hold the MOH until I cue you to go on to TION." BOOM! A crystal clear OH vowel! It works for diphthongs, too. Having trouble with BOUND? Hold the first half of BOSTON. MAKE? Try MEXICO. LIGHT? Try LOBSTER. Get the pattern? By changing the English word, we are using our singers' tendencies against them. It's a simple trick that can be used in the short term until singing the correct pure vowel becomes a long-term habit. Listen in your next rehearsal and clean up those vowels. No one likes pollution.

THE WALL OF SOUND – A problem I face in rehearsal is that of muddy ensemble sound. This is most commonly noticed in homophonic passages, where the chords don't ring as clearly as I want. Poor synchronization of word sounds is often the culprit. I use this process (borrowed from barbershoppers) to clean up the vocal lines. It's called The Wall of Sound, because it creates a strong, uninterrupted sound from the choir. Vowels are bricks and consonants the mortar. In a strong wall there must be much more brick than mortar; the mortar must completely connect the bricks.

Step 1 – Model in unison: Sing the passage on one mid-range note that is accessible to the choir (in octaves for mixed choirs). Sing it as you wish to hear it. Have the choir then sing it back to you on that unison note. Listen

carefully for the treatments of consonants and vowels, including diphthong turns. Make sure the choir is following your timing in all ways, and that the pitch doesn't bend or scoop at all. Make them tunnel forward with a constant stream of sound. The goal is to become one voice. If needed, slow the tempo down to hear the timing of word sounds, then gradually speed up until you hit performance tempo.

Step 2 – Spread to a chord: After the word sounds are synchronized across the choir in unison, assign each section a note in a chord in the key of that section. Example: F major-basses/F, tenors/middle C, altos/F, sopranos/A. Sing the passage on this static chord, working synchronization as you did in the unison. The goal is to create a constant, ringing sound where vowels are matched, singable consonants ring with true pitch, and plosives click together. Again, vary the tempo as needed to make sure everyone is moving together cleanly. If this is too ambitious, start with the cleanest section, then add others one at a time for quality control.

Step 3 – Resume parts: Have sections sing their original notes but in the new style of the static chord. The goal is to now hear The Wall of Sound. Variation of tempo is valuable in this stage, to ensure everyone's word sounds are synchronized.

~ Choral Director Magazine April/ May 2019

"It's Great to Be a Barbershopper"!



Our beloved director, Tom Blue, master musician, aficionado of various styles of singing, decorated music educator, and lead of our chapter's own Tom Blue Quartet is our newest barbershopper of the month. Tom has faithfully lent his acutely sensitive ear to the

grand endeavor of helping our tribe to up its musical game, and rallying our harmonious troops for high quality performances since April 2007.

His devotion to the artform and our growth as musicians and singers is deeply appreciated, but that's not all. The highlights of Tom's professional career, along with a brief personal sketch were featured in a January 2015 article by the American Choral Directors Association. Tom's obvious joy in life is his family and the kids he teaches and colorfully touts to us on Tuesday nights, but we hardly ever hear anything about Tom's substantial

achievements and credentials, so let's file the following article under the heading "Good to Know." Thanks Tom. We greatly enjoy your harmonious leadership...

"Thomas Blue is in his twenty-eighth year of teaching



in the Rochester Community Schools. He is currently in his ninth year as the choral director at Rochester Adams High School in Rochester Hills, Michigan. He is also in his fourth year as choir director at Van Hoosen Middle School. He is no stranger to the

middle level, having taught at West Middle School in Rochester for nineteen years before coming to Rochester Adams. The choirs at schools where Mr. Blue has taught have consistently received excellent and superior ratings at both District and State Choral Festivals.

Mr. Blue has a B.S. in Music Education from Roberts Wesleyan College in Rochester, New York, a M.M. in Music Education with a choral cognate from Michigan State University and has completed coursework on a Ph.D. in Music Education with a cognate in choral conducting.

Mr. Blue is currently an adjudicator and clinician for Michigan School Vocal Music Association and is the Middle School/Junior High School Repertoire and Standards Representative for ACDA-Michigan. He has presented several times at various conferences including the ACDA-Michigan Fall Conference, Michigan Music (Midwestern) Conference, Michigan Association for Middle School Educators, Oakland Schools and the Summer Workshop for the Michigan School Vocal Music Association. He has also worked as a church music director, accompanist and handbell choir director. Mr. Blue is a recent assistant conductor for Measure for Measure: A Men's Choral Society. He conducted a community chorus, the Symphonia Chorale, for 10 years. He has also sung with the Gilbert Jackson Chorale, and is the current music director of the Pontiac-Waterford Barbershop Chorus. Mr. Blue has conducted the Session III JH/MS SATB Choir/ Chamber Choir at Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp for the past 7 summers and has been invited to conduct again in the summer of 2015.

He currently resides in Lake Orion with his wife, Jana (an ELL teacher) and four children, Anna and Grace, Emma and Noah."



Chapter Leadership

Director: Thomas Blue (248) 705 7952

Assistant Directors: Mike Frye; Jeff Doig

Section leaders: G. Moss, R. Sturdy, J. Doig, P. Hefner

President: Eric Domke (248) 674-2323

VP-Chapter Development: Fred Pioch (248) 330-2050

VP-Marketing & PR: Jack Teuber (248) 334-3686

VP-Music & Performance, Austin Suthers (248) 722-4464

Secretary: Art Carinci (248) 494-0884

Treasurer: Jim Owens (248) 682-4311

At large: J. Knapp, B. Maxfield, E. Reed, R. Sturdy,

Please email articles, photos, chorus news items etc. to

Bulletin Editor: Jon Knapp - jknappSLBC@att.net



Tuning Up for Summer Singing

On Sunday, June 23, our chapter's registered quartet, OverTime will be singing at the Clarkston Millpond for their annual Porchfest summer celebration. Pictured here with their new lead singer, Austin Suthers, OverTime enjoys the opportunity to sing each week with our other chapter quartets during Quartet Time. Sporting a new uniform, with logo created by Austin's Mom, Sacharissa Suthers, the quartet feels the love of many supporters both in our tribe and our extended community.

Upcoming Chorus Events

Rehearsals are 7:30 PM every Tuesday at Canterbury on the Lake, 5601 Hatchery Rd. Waterford, MI 48329. Sing outs are listed by performance times. Warm-ups are 30 mins. prior.

June 4 (Tue) Guest Night with the boys from Milford High

June 8 (Sat) Ice Cream & Harmony Benefit Concert, 4 p.m.

Central United Methodist Church

3882 Highland Rd. Waterford

June 14 (Fri) 2019 International Quartet Send-off, 6pm

6770 Tecumseh Rd E, Windsor, ON N8T 1E6, Canada

June 18 (Tu) Flint's Dead Creek Picnic, Frankenmuth, 6pm

Bus leaves from Scott Lake Baptist Church at 4:45

811 Scott Lake Road, Waterford

Aug. 20 (Tue) Big Chief Chorus Annual Picnic, 5:30pm

2456 Pontiac Dr. Sylvan Lake

Oct. 18-20 Pioneer District Fall Convention, Muskegon

Holiday Inn: OverTime will be competing.

Nov. 2 (Sat) BCC 75th Annual Show at Mott PAC

Nov. 5 (Tue) Christmas Chorus