

Autumn 2009

Illinois District Website  
<http://www.illinoisdistrict.org>

## We're Little but We're Proud

*What to do when more people are on stage than are in the audience*

by Craig Rigg

with additional commentary

by Tom Woodall

You know you've got a problem if Bob Squires gets a little angry. Jump to his "commentary" on the page 5, and you'll see why the district seems to be having a problem with conventions.

Obviously, there's no problem with the competitors, except that there aren't enough of them. The singing was as good as it's been in any contest, with several new faces in the quartet competition (and a few old leathery ones as well). While the chorus competition was over in less than an hour (heck, we were on our way home at 8:15 when the "Show of Champions" concluded!), no one could complain about the quality of the entertainment value displayed by the "big" choruses – Bloomington No. 1, Northbrook, and Chicago-Land West Suburban.

No, the problem wasn't on stage – it was with the rest of the district who apparently had other things to do the last weekend in September.

### Friday Night Semi-Finals

With the help of Jim Stahly as Master of Ceremonies, the contest to select our new district champion quartet started off with the retiring champs **Rush Street** as mic testers. Then came 20 quartets (79 guys because Chris Weber from Rockford Metro sang in two quartets), 15 regular, four senior, and one novice. With great dispatch, the panel of judges hustled Stahly and the quartets along, probably to ensure that the A&R sessions wouldn't stretch until after midnight.

Two sidelights to this round: After **Rush Street's** warm-up act, Stahly indicated



that in fairness to all the competitors, a certain problem would remain in effect (lighting? sound?) so that all quartets would be singing under the same conditions. However, to those of us in the audience, nothing seemed amiss, and the contest round zipped by with nary an issue.

Second, apparently, the virus of non-attendance affected some of the competing quartets who opted to forego their A&R sessions without informing the judges. In my 30 years of contests, I've never heard a Contest Administrator admonish quartets of this faux pas.

Afterwards, the herd rushed off to the President's Reception. Well, rushed is a little hyperbolic considering the size of the crowd at the quartet semi-finals. Probably a hundred or so made their way to the main ballroom in the Pere Marquette to hear a few quartets. In previous years, the room had been packed, but that's probably because there was free food (a mini-buffet) and beverages. But for the last two conventions, the hotel hasn't offered this service, and the lack of attendance shows. Makes you wonder if people were attending to hear the quartets or to scarf up some free munchies.

Check out the district's photo gallery for a plethora of photos taken by several "official" photographers, both of the contest rounds and some of the other affiliated events.

### Saturday Morning "Sing with a Chump, er Champ"

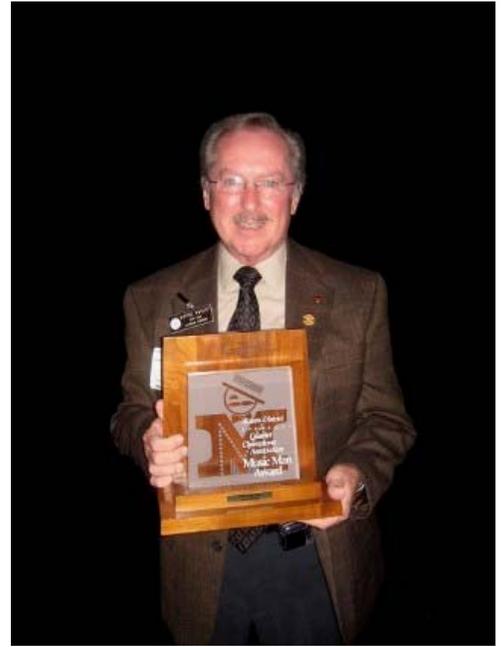
Previous years, the district has tried all kinds of ways to entice people to come to a convention rather than sit and listen to performers. In a premium offering that holds promise of being a highlight event, the district offered a variation on the international "Sing with the Champs" and without charging for the honor. Men (and I presume women) had the chance to sing in a quartet with a member of a past district champion quartet.

Thanks to the efforts of Tom Woodall and Jeff Bowyer, and their wives Marge and Marsha, several singers got the chance to hear their voices blend with a champion-caliber singer. The Coles County Chapter handled the registration and even provided copies of *Just Plain Barbershop* for those willing to try different parts. Had you attended, you might have noticed that a significant number of "champion" quartet men are woefully unfamiliar with the *JPB* songs and have to depend on paper!

Hey! They're just like us!

From all accounts, the morning event will probably return next spring. Check out the district photo gallery to see photos of those who participated.

**Paul McCracken (left) sings with champ Mike Woods, Dustin Wells, and Mike Bagby**



**Wayne Wright honored by the QCA as its 2010 Music Man of the year.**

"Unlike in years past when award recipients rarely had a clue they were even in the running for an honor, most awards are given to guys who kind of "expect" that possibility. However, when they announced the Music Man Award winner was Wayne Wright, he was absolutely surprised.

Running around backstage, tending to all the details that a District VP for Contest and Judging Chairman deals with at the end of a contest, that was the farthest thing from his mind. Then friends started congratulating him. He finally appeared on stage and said a few words, which he probably doesn't even remember.

Wayne attended his first barbershop meeting with the Coles County Chapter in the early 1970s. Soon he moved to Sterling, where he became their chorus director and entered the judging program. Now, as a senior judge (a couple of Internationals under his belt) he has held many district offices and is always striving to make good decisions for Illinois Barbershoppers."

— Tom Woodall



## District Quartet Champion Finals

Ten quartets and one mic tester put on an afternoon show to determine our 2009 Illinois District Champion Quartet. Earning the title by a sizable margin was **Off the Record**, consisting of Tim Pashon at lead, Scott Diehl at bass, Don Deegan at baritone, and Craig Ahlgrim at tenor. All four singers had previously won district championships in other quartets. While someone, somewhere has probably sung the song in contest, their “One for My Baby, and One More for the Road” was expertly played and seems a natural for the barbershop style. Why hasn’t it been performed more often?

Some might call the second place quartet a surprise, but don’t tell them that. **AFTER HOURS**, last year’s district college quartet champion, blew into second place ahead of **Sound Design** featuring Doug Smith, along with Pete Hansen, Tim Carter, and Dave Farquhar. But **AFTER HOURS** couldn’t contain their youthful energy, which spilled over into some quality singing for a group so young. If the guys stay together through and beyond their college years, they’ll make a name for themselves. Rounding out the top five were **Ovation** (featuring previous gold-medalists John Muir and Andy Isbell) and **Tsunami**.

## Bloomington’s Back!

When registrants picked up their convention programs, they noticed that only five choruses planned to compete in the fall contest. This has usually been the biggie contest (and biggie money-maker for the district), but not so this year. The competition was still top-quality with high entertainment value and excellent singing, but only 223 men appeared on the stage.

How would this contest play out? Northbrook, the perennial winner of the top spot for nearly two decades has seen the departure of Jay Giallombardo as director. How might a Greg Caetano as new director and a new outlook shape this former international champion chorus? Then, there’s Chicagoland West Suburban’s West Towns Chorus with director Joe Kronos, back from a whirlwind tour of Russia with his quartet **Old School**. Old School was last year’s second place international quartet and are gearing up for a run for the gold. How might this pressure be affecting the chorus. Finally, there’s Bloomington, with Terry Ludwig getting the chance to mold an already solid chorus into something even better. Voice problems have curtailed his singing opportunities and certainly might affect his rehearsal procedures, but you’d never notice it from the stage. Put simply, Bloomington finally sang their way to a super performance and earned outright the honor of representing the district in Philadelphia next summer. Time will only tell if the other two choruses earned enough points to merit an at-large bid from international.

Northbrook certainly staged an entertaining set, with respects to the Gene Kelly, Frank Sinatra, and Jules Munshin movie *On the Town* (and don’t forget their dancing partners Ann Miller, Betty Garrett, and Vera-Ellen!). And West Towns did no less with their tribute to a Dickens/Disney chimney sweep world. But Bloomington’s singers on stage and more traditional song selections simply allowed them to outperform the other competitors.

Be sure to check out the chorus contest photos at the district gallery, and while you’re at it, make plans to attend all these choruses’ upcoming shows and Christmas concerts. Their respective web pages will give you all the pertinent information.

## A Brief Show of Champions (and other editorial comments)

After the chorus contest, the district wanted to feature the champions from



**Bob Squires**, long-time “Mister Everything in the Illinois District,” recently retired after 23 years in the Judging Program. He was presented with a well-deserved “Judge Emeritus” plaque. Bob continues to coach, sing in quartets, and consults on all district activities in addition to his role as Illinois District Historian.

—Tom Woodall

## Congratulations!

**Ed Wilson**  
Quartet Service Award  
**Grandfather’s Clock**

**MECA**  
(Most Entertaining  
Chorus Award)  
presented after the chorus  
contest and voted on by in-  
vited non-barbershoppers

**Springfield**  
(small chorus)

**West Towns**  
(large chorus)

the various contests. Performing first was seniors quartet champion **Take Note**, followed by 2009 District Champions to be **Off the Record**, and then capped by retiring quartet champion **Rush Street**. However, each of the quartets performed with hand-held mikes.

[WARNING: What follows is editorial content and does not reflect the opinion of the Illinois District]

Forgive the editorializing, but allowing each singer to hold a mic is not a good idea. First, the audience could easily hear a major difference in the quartet sound because of the mic placement relative to source (the mouth). Gotta weak bass? Boost or augment his sound with special effects like many gospel quartets do when they want to show off their bass's deep voice. Gotta a scratchy tenor? Back him off and soften his voice. Unfortunately, such mixing was not the case that evening. Tenors were too "hot" (as Craig Ahlgrim noted when he hit a screamer and had to hold the mic out at arm's length) and basses were too soft (one could barely hear one of the best basses the district ever produced, Duane Fenn). Unless the mixer has a chance to rehearse with the quartets and adjust balances, hand-held mikes simply are not a good idea for barbershop quartets.

Another problem with hand-held mics is that each voice part better be dead-on the notes because the slightest amount of sharpness or flatness glaringly comes through. Even breathing inconsistencies become much more noticeable when individual voices are amplified.

This leads me to an observation I recently discovered on a cheap compilation CD of Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young hits. In the liner notes, the group talks about the development of their singular harmony. I quote:

The trio headed to London, where they woodshedded their new songs for months. By the time they entered Wally Heider's studio in Hollywood in February 1969, they could sing their whole first record to you in your room. Engineer Bill Halverson was instrumental in capturing the radiance of the trio's harmonies using a technique he developed for The Beach Boys; he had them sing their parts around a single microphone, creating so-called "air mixes." [Steve Silberman. *CSN Greatest Hits*. Atlantic Recording Corporation, 2005.]

There you have it – "air mixing" and "woodshedding." Barbershop's special style comes from more than just a tenor singing above the lead (gospel quartets do that too), or from lots of minor sevenths, or from cheesy turn-of-the-century "circle of fifths" melody lines. Our style is also a **blend** of voices that comes about in a natural, unamplified setting. The best sound you've heard out of your quartet has probably been in someone's living room during a rehearsal, not in front of the spot lights and fifteen microphones. Advice to convention planners: nix the hand-held mikes. And perish the thought that the Society permits them for contests. Think of the possibilities of manipulation!

The editorializing being over, I solicit your comments, all three of you who read the electronic version of *Attacks & Releases*. Please contact me at [crigg@winco.net](mailto:crigg@winco.net) or by regular mail. Check the web page directory.

### **After the Ball**

Since the convention officially ended at about 8:15, the rest of the evening was spent in celebrating (**Sound of Illinois** and **Off the Record**) or commiserating (you know who you are and you surely did do your share of grumbling). Some of that commiserating was over another under-attended convention with the resultant loss of revenue. And things don't look promising for next spring, normally a "soft" convention because of the usual low-number choruses. That's why the winter months are going to be especially trying as your district board and convention planners work out details for getting our contests back on track. After all, it's not nice to make Bob Squires mad [see next page].

## A Reminder from Bob

Hi Craig,

Here is something you might want to use in the A&R. In fact you printed it way back in 1989, but I think that it is something timely in 2009. So that you don't have to look it up, I have re-written the "Response to Swenson Letter" in its entirety. I also took the liberty of editorializing at the end. I'm feeling more and more like Johnny Mulkin every day.

Bob Squires

Dear Craig,

A line or two in Harry Swenson's letter to the editor in the January-February 1989 issue of *Attacks & Releases* really got to me: "...contest has meant work hard so we won't have to compete twice a year..." WOW!

Guess I have been spoiled. I have spent the majority of my barbershop life in several small districts (Pioneer - 10 years, Seneca Land - three years, Sunshine - 12 years) plus bits and pieces in other districts including Johnny Appleseed, Illinois, Cardinal and Land-O-Lakes. In Pioneer, Seneca Land and Sunshine districts, every chapter enjoyed the opportunity of sending its chorus to contest twice a year, once for the International preliminaries in the fall, and once for the district championship in the spring.

Of course, a chapter could decide to compete at only one of those conventions (or neither), but a large number competed at both conventions just for the joy of it. Not that most of us ever had a hope of winning! To go, sing, entertain, be entertained, enjoy, communicate, fraternize, woodshed — that's why we went to competitions.

Sorry, but I don't understand the philosophy of "trying not to compete." I do not understand the attitude of "let's work hard so we won't have to compete twice a year." I would like to hear of some Illinois chapter (in the district top 10) that competes twice a year just for the fun of it. Or don't Illinois choruses compete for fun anymore?

Tempo-rarily,

(Signed) Burt Szabo

Society Music Specialist

(says Bob)

This letter was written 20 years ago but still stands true today. Back then, before we changed our contest format in the Spring of 2007, the goal of every chorus competing in the fall contest was to "make the top 10" so they wouldn't have to "compete again in the spring." And that, for all intents and purposes, meant not attending the spring convention at all.

Although it is true that some chapters "who made the cut" also chose to attend the spring convention and have fun like Burt suggests in his letter, a great majority of our chapters chose to take a complete bye. They chose to stay away from those conventions completely, which meant not lending their support to the Illinois district.

I wonder what Burt Szabo (Burt still resides in Florida today) would say when he reads that a great majority of our chapters have turned their backs on the Illinois district by refusing to support our district conventions with their lack of attendance and their refusal to participate in our district contests and associated activities. The lineup of Fall 2009 chorus contest participants will be missing eight choruses who qualified in the spring contest. It matters not that each of those choruses earned the right to represent their chapters on stage this fall. They're staying home. Too much work? Where's the fun? We're preparing for our show? Not enough tenors? The list is longer than why I don't have my homework done.

# Parts is Parts

by Tom Woodall

Many of the old timers recall hearing Dave Stevens (now deceased former SPEB-SQSA staffer) tell of his first barbershop experience. He entered the meeting hall – no risers, no director, just guys singing in all corners of a large room. The more experienced were holding up fingers to alert the others of pending chord changes or positions in the scale. It seemed like a disorganized fire drill, but Dave stayed and soon he was up to speed with what was happening.

It wasn't quite the same, but at 10 a.m. on Saturday, September 26, some Illinois District singers took part in a new event called "Singing with a Champ." Knowing that it was practical for all the members of a given championship quartet to take part (many are now deceased), former singers in district championship foursomes were invited to sing songs with any other three guys who walked in the door.

Ironically, the first five responses were from former Illinois winners who live out-of-state and who could not attend, but they sent their well wishes. They were Bobby Brock (1962 **Imposters**, Washington), Russ Foris (1986 **Lucky Day**, Arizona), Kevin Keller (2001 **Cheers**, Missouri), Tom Noble IV (1964 **Gold Coast Four**, New York), and Rudy Sikler (1966 **Barbersharps**, Arizona). Several former champs had chorus rehearsals and some were preparing for the afternoon quartet finals with new quartets. However, 10 champs actually showed up to this first of its kind event. There was no cost, no pictures, no audience, no coaching, no judging – just guys meeting old and new friends and sharing some musical moments together.

Those former champs who participated are as follows:

- Mark Betczynski – **Skyline**, 2005
- Bob Cernal – **Male Delivery**, 1978
- Steve Davis – **Chicago Swing**, 2000; **Rush Street**, 2008
- Duane Fenn – **Lakeside Edition**, 2004; **Rush Street**, 2008
- Pat Henders – **Rush Street**, 2008
- Ray Henders – **Soundtracks**, 1971; **Chicago News**, 1978
- Bill McKnight – **BarberQ-Four**, 1949
- Andy Isbell – **Fascinatin' Rhythm**, 1992
- Joe Sullivan – **Four Renegades**, 1957; **Avant Garde**, 1967; **Tin Pan Allies**, 1981
- Mike Woods – **Rush Street**, 2008

Approximately 20 men participated. To avoid too much downtime in song selection, 30 *Just Plain Barbershop* books were available as needed. Some of the singers were brand new to the hobby, less than six months.

It was wonderful. Walk into a room with six foursomes, all enjoying one another, making a few chords ring and better yet, establishing friendships with guys they hadn't even known before. Almost to a man, they walked out smiling and pleased at the event. Joe Sullivan, the new QCA president, has been around a long time. Here is an email concerning his impression: "Sing With A Champ in my opinion was a big success thanks to your great efforts. Thanks for the idea! By the way, that's the most singing I've done at a convention in 10 years, and I'm hoarse thanks to you. What a great feeling!"

Check out the district photo gallery of many of the singers at the "Sing with a Champ" at the district website.

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What would you tell Burt? What answer from that long list would you provide?

Ask

**A Reminder from Bob**, continued from previous page

the men from Kankakee and Carbondale (who missed qualifying by 6 points) why you're not in Peoria even though you qualified. I'll bet they'd love to take your place and support our district while you stay at home.

# House of Delegates Report

## Fall 2009 Convention

Thanks to new district secretary Mike Isley, we have the following major issues to discuss from the Fall House of Delegates meeting.

Bob Cearnal moved and Syl Wetle seconded to increase district regular dues from \$17 to \$25 effective 1 January 2010. Motion carried unanimously by voice vote. Below is a chart illustrating the district dues other districts assess. You'll notice that Illinois District has (had) the lowest rate.

District	Regular Dues
Central States	\$20
Dixie	\$25
Evergreen	\$32
Far Western	\$25
Illinois	\$17
Cardinal	\$35
Johnny Appleseed	\$25
Land o' Lakes	\$24
Pioneer	\$20
Mid-Atlantic	\$25
Northeastern	\$25
Ontario (based on Canadian dollar)	\$65
Rocky Mountain	\$33
Seneca Land	\$20
Southwestern	\$45
Sunshine	\$25

Various motions were made to seat or to reappoint personnel to the Illinois District Endowment Assurance fund.. Syl Wetle, Earl Meseth, and Joe Sullivan were all approved as new trustees.

Syl Wetle/Don Smit moved to adopt a return to the Frank Thorne District Award as proposed by the Awards Committee, effective Spring 2010. However, Jerry Bach/Tim Woodall moved to table the motion until remaining details can be worked out. Motion to table carried by show of hands.

Mike Bagby/Greg Caetano moved to adopt a new **Frank Thorne District Award** as proposed by the Awards Committee. Details of the award appear on the next page.

District Treasurer Bill Miller reported that (1) any Chapters which plan to host youth oriented activities must contact James Estes (note: NOT Jim) to ensure that appropriate insurance coverage is activated; (2) only 16 out of 35 chapters have submitted form 990 tax forms to Nashville; and (3) Spring convention 2009 was a money loser; Fall convention 2009 is on track to be another loss.

At the Illinois District board meeting August 8 in Peoria, Miller issued a report outline the financial state of the district. "Thru July 31, 2009, disbursements total \$45,716.50 and revenues \$39,587.63. We are running \$6,128.87 in the red for the YTD. Operating budget has dropped to \$12,700, the lowest in my term. This balance will drop to under \$10,000 when I pay for fall contest judges airfare."

In unfinished business, there was a lot of discussion and gnashing of teeth with respect to future convention venues. Attendance is going down, while the existing venue is getting more expensive. Spring 2010 will be the last to use the Civic Center.

Spring 2011 and Spring 2012 will still be in Peoria - somewhere. Fall 2011 is completely up in the air. A question was posed: "Can we have just one convention per year?" The answer: No. C&J rules require two conventions per year. Rockford is interested in hosting the convention.

In new business, the delegates and board discussed efforts toward a 2014 International convention bid. Sears Arena is being considered as the venue. Two major nearby hotels are hungry for the business. Hoffman Estates Convention Bureau is actively involved. Lake County, Northbrook, Chicagoland West Suburban, and Elgin chapters have all given their support to the bid. "The District Board and the Delegates present ALL enthusiastically support the efforts of the International Convention Committee." [taken verbatim from the minutes and read out to the room; everyone agreed.]

### **Proposed revival of former Frank Thorne District Award (tabled)**

#### History

As far back as 1960, there was a district award given in honor of Frank Thorne, an early President of the Society from Illinois (1946). At the time, it was based on a complex system of points that chapters earned for various activities (shows, performances, etc.)

#### New Objective

To encourage/increase attendance at the district conventions.

#### Methodology

All Illinois District chapters are eligible to compete for the award in the spring or fall contest. The chapter with the highest percentage of member registrations at convention in proportion to the chapter's Society rolls, based on March 31 for spring and June 30 for fall, shall be the winner. For example, if 45 members of a chapter of 46 official members register for a convention, the percentage would be 98 percent. The chapter does NOT have to compete in the contest to be eligible for the award. The winner is determined by convention registrations only.

#### Awards

Originally, a traveling podium, built by Bill Just, a long-time district barbershopper, was used as the physical award. The podium has since been discarded. Therefore, a new, appropriate display plaque shall be engraved with the winner chapter's name, spring or fall, and year received. In addition, an appropriate certificate and a 50 percent discount on convention registrations for an equal number of chapter member registrations shall be given for the next convention. For example, if the winner chapter had 45 members present, it would receive 45 half-priced convention registrations for the next convention.

# American Harmony

More than a documentary about barbershopping

by Craig Rigg

Let's face it. Barbershop singing is a niche market, ignored by many, and misunderstood by most. In recent years, Peoria has hosted a convention of banjo players and a convention of ragtime piano players. Somewhere in the world, there's a convention for bagpipe players, and perhaps you've caught a glimpse of a Philadelphia mummies parade. As Jim Henry pointed out in his 2007 keynote address at Harmony University, most of the world doesn't even know or much less care about barbershop.

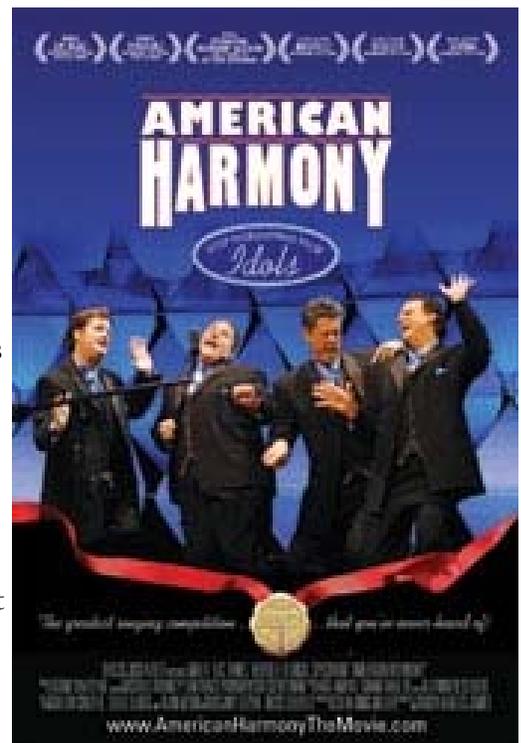
Enter an attempt by Aengus James and Collin Miller to produce a documentary chronicling the inner sanctum of barbershopping—the international quartet contest. From the opening images, one would assume the documentary would cover the history of barbershopping, what with all of the vintage footage of old-time quartets. But after a slick video dissolve to the Salt Lake City skyline, with appropriate contemporary soundtrack, we're venturing into new territory—for non-barbershoppers and most regular-Joe barbershoppers alike.

The premise behind the documentary must have evolved over the course of production. From the movie posters and website trailers, the documentary seems to focus on **Max Q's** rise to pre-eminence in barbershop. But somewhere along the way, as we all know, **Max Q's** gold medals weren't bestowed on them simply because of the quartet personnel's reputations. More than once, quartet coaches, particularly Mark Hale, said that the quartet having the greatest talent doesn't always lead to championship results. It's the **team** who wants it more.

Most barbershoppers are probably aware of how **Realtime** and **Vocal Spectrum** butted in front of Tony LaRosa, Jeff Oxley, Gary Lewis, and Greg Clancy's coronation. But what most barbershoppers don't know, and what the film depicts, are the nuances, the inner-circle camaraderie and egos, the perseverance that goes in to becoming an international quartet champion. Over a period of four years, the filmmakers followed the efforts of **Max Q**, **Vocal Spectrum**, and **O. C. Times** as they worked their way toward a championship. We watch the quartets getting schooled by their coaches, portions of on-stage performances, and glimpses of backstage joy and despair. We also invade the privacy of several quartet members, with countless unscripted moments of frankness, from Jeff Oxley's "I hate to lose" to Tony LaRosa's questioning of his abilities and whether the road to a championship is all worth it.

While the documentary may have started out as one quartet's journey to the top, clearly **O. C. Times** gets lots of air time and a blatant admission that, even in barbershop, sex sells. Featuring them also allowed the filmmakers to capitalize on an unexpected "ah s—t" moment in the competition at Indianapolis, thus revealing just how fine the line is between excellence and near-excellence. The film also features **Reveille**, a comedy quartet from New Jersey, who over the span of the movie faces a much more serious setback. **Reveille's** bittersweet segments tug on the emotions, reminding us that being part of a barbershop quartet, at any level, may be more about human relationships than about music.

On a couple of side issues, the movie implicitly separates barbershoppers into two camps. On one level are the international competitors, two hundred men who are at the top of the pyramid. In truth, the difference between the 50th best quartet and the international champion is probably greater than the difference between the 50th best



**Produced by  
Aengus James and  
Collin Miller**

**Written  
and Directed by  
Aengus James**

**Edited by  
Kate Amend**

quartet and a decent chapter quartet anywhere in the world.

The film also seems to reinforce the fact that we are a bunch of old white guys. Almost all of the conversations with ordinary barbershoppers are with people who are in their 70s and 80s. Whenever “ordinary” barbershoppers sing, it’s usually some old barber-shop standard and with not the best quality. On the other hand, at the championship level, youth and sex appeal define our top performers.

Also, the film is about big egos and does little to downplay how important such a mental stance is in becoming a champion. How many times do we hear “Awesome” Joe Connelly described as the world’s greatest lead or witness his hyper intensity (and New York Yankee gear) while describing the preparation and mindset to become a champion quartets. Even Jeff Oxley (whose wife acknowledged Jeff’s Elvis-like mystique) refers to his own ego in one of their championship quartet songs. But what performer at the highest level of his or her craft doesn’t have a big ego.

One telling moment came after the Indy convention when the camera caught Tony LaRosa in a candid moment with Jim Henry after the Saturday evening competition. **Max Q** had just “lost” to upstart **Vocal Spectrum**. In the depths of his disappoint’, Tony utters what more than a few of us have said about the judging process, implying “they” aren’t going to let it happen—meaning whatever you want to read into it. Spoken in frustration and confusion, Tony was probably expressing what the other quartet members were feeling. Lesser singers might have hung up the pitchpipe, but the filmmakers keep committed to the project for another year. They follow **Max Q** as the quartet retools, with the results being the championship in Denver in 2007, thus bringing the film to resolution.

Technically, the movie is well-edited and scored, each private segment catching genuine and honest moments. Clearly, the videographers know how to blend image and sound, giving viewers a “fly on the wall” insight. One wonders how the on-screen personalities were able to conduct their lives with cameras recording their every moment.

For us barbershoppers, the 90-minute film offers a fascinating inside look at what our top competitors endure in the process of becoming champion. For those of you who attended any of the conventions covered in the film, you might gain a deeper insight into what went on behind the scenes, the stories behind the performances. Whether such a movie will resonate with the general public remains to be seen. Most of them will probably tune out after the first few contest performances (kitschy costumes, high/loud singing, bunch of old people), but they’ll miss the palpable drama and poignancy that comes in the last half hour.

According to websites that reviewed the movie, the DVD is scheduled to be made available in November. Considering all the movies you probably buy or rent, *American Harmony* has to become part of your collection, even loaned out as often as possible. The film makes a valuable statement about who we are and what we aspire to be.

## QCA just itchin’ to help

If you are interested in finding a coach for your quartet, the Quartet Champions Association is available to help. All you need to do is locate the following link on the district website and contact one of the Board of Directors:

<http://www.illinoisdistrict.org/index.cfm?pid=32>

Choose a qualified champ near you and make arrangements for your coaching session. You’ll be glad you did.

# Bloomington hosts showing of *American Harmony*

by Craig Rigg

We caught up with the showing of the new documentary in Bloomington on Tuesday, Aug. 10. The production company had been soliciting help from local chapters in arranging for shows in local communities. The Bloomington Chapter went about it in a big way, inviting local dignitaries as well as promoting the show through an intense media blitz.

While people lined up in front of the theater to plunk down their \$6, Bloomington's **Sound Opportunity** (Rich Hansen, lead; Matt Trusner, bass; Marty Abbott, baritone; and Dennis Grube, tenor) entertained the slowly growing crowd who awaited the



**Sound Opportunity:** (left to right) Dennis Grube, Rich Hansen, Matt Trusner, Marty Abbott

opening of the doors.

As the doors opened, a team from the McLean County Chamber of Commerce, led by Charlie Moore, held an opening ceremony, with Bloomington Chapter President Jim Waldorf cutting a ceremonial ribbon.

Inside, the old style theater had gone through refurbishing. The manager introduced him-



self and indicated that the theater (located near the Illinois State University campus) was attempting to remain viable by offering art films, independent films, and documentaries on a once-a-week basis. No shopping mall cine-plex, the management offered concessions inside the theater, with a cup of soda and a big bag of popcorn going for a buck each!

Before the showing of *American Harmony*, Bloomington director Terry Ludwig took the Sound of Illinois Chorus through a 20-minute opening act. Interspersed through the chorus numbers were songs by two other chapter quartets: **Catch-22** (Doug Ferrier, lead; Brett Mulford, bass; Larry Gilmore, baritone; and John Leitzen, tenor) and **Ovation** (John Davis, lead; Andy Isbell, bass; John Muir, baritone; Hugo Fuegens, tenor).

Once the live performances were over, the lights dimmed, the popcorn munching began, the curtains opened, and the movie began ...

Director Terry Ludwig preparing Sound of Illinois for performance



# Parts is Parts

By Tom Woodall

August 22, a group of barbershoppers and their significant others gathered in Charleston, Ill., at the First Baptist Church for a “Parts Party.” Three complete quartets showed up for coaching (they each had about four and a half hours worth) and 21 other singers took part. They came from nine different Illinois Chapters: Bloomington, Carbondale, Champaign, Coles County, Decatur, Lake County, Macomb, Northbrook, and Springfield. Some 26 wives took part in at least some of the activities, and we had out-of-state coaches from Missouri and a dinner guest/wife from Ohio.

Immediately following coffee and rolls, the ladies assembled and left for touring while the men headed for some paper work: completing a personal experience survey, followed by a brief written music knowledge test (naming notes, key signatures, accidentals, time values, etc.). Men scored their own tests, and it appeared that most did well when the answers were revealed on an overhead projector. There were several ties for a perfect paper, but Don Smit lucked out and won.



Part of the parts



Following the administration of the test, a four-page handout was given to all in attendance. It was a simplified method for recognizing key signatures, note names, time values, and the role of accidentals in music. An attempt was made throughout the day to refresh the understanding of these basics, especially for men who are inexperienced and frustrated by their lack of understanding [of music technicalities].



Then it was on to performing a warm-up with Paul Mayo using his CD. With voices warmed up, all singers practiced the “American Overlay” song composed by Joe Liles and a classic two-line hymn (“The Doxology ... Old 100<sup>th</sup>”). Both would be sung at the evening dinner.

For more photos, go to the Illinois District website and click on the photo gallery.



Quartets headed for coaching sessions with Dave Cowin, Bob Squires, Tim Woodall, and Kevin Keller. The **Touch of Old** quartet from Carbondale arrived an hour before the event started and they drove 170 to attend. Members of the quartet are Chub Crawley, Andy Belobraydic, Dave Sanders, and Lee Sanders.

Because barbershoppers soon develop an ear for what is “good” and what is “not so good,” the non-quartet section listened to two performances by two quartets (on CD) and were asked to give each a score that ranged from 1 to 100. [The CD was a product of the

Contest and Judging system. It featured a wide range of quartet abilities, from absolutely unmusical to championship quality. Judges apparently hone their skills in assess such quartet performances.) The two quartet performances used as samples has been previously scored by a BHS panel of Certified Singing Judges who recorded scores of 18 (absolutely unmusical) to 94 (nearly perfect). Participants obviously noted the better performance, but their numbers weren't exactly in line with the certified panel's.

Then, using an overhead projector, participants proceeded to sight read notes, or interval numbers, that appeared on the screen. Most read very well. The **Exit 190** quartet popped in and sang a song for the group. Later in the day, they would change their standing order at the suggestion of one of the coaches.

Just before lunch, everyone enjoyed watching a comedy DVD performance by **FRED**. We all were ready for lunch after that. The wives returned from their morning tour and joined their husbands for a light noontime meal.

After lunch, the ladies left for Arthur, Ill.,—Amish country—while the men went back to work, if you can call it that. The non-quartet men divided into four groups with each group spending 15 minutes at one of four “stations.” Bob Squires worked “one-on-one” with men to teach them how to sell song messages visually (face, body language, etc.). Tim Woodall worked with vocal production. In an attempt to help men learn how to “plunk out their part” on a piano, Tom Woodall had individuals working at a keyboard with a little “cheat sheet.” The fourth group in the rotation was taught by Dave Cowin, who is a very experienced tenor singer. He worked with his group to learn how to produce a pleasing, accurate head and/or falsetto tone.

To finish his session, Cowin had the men take part in a “post” contest. All the singers in the group started at the same time. They each were allowed to sing any pitch and to use any vowel sound. The one who could sustain the pitch the longest—in good quality—was considered the winner. Using a stop watch, Dave determined that the winner in each group finished somewhere between 29 and 31 seconds. The overall winner was Cregg Miyat, who overcome the pressure of a public performance and held on the longest.

Then it was tag team time, and we had great teachers. Groups were divided so that we had from four to six singers in each. Tim Woodall, Hugo Fuegen, and Mike Bagby taught tags in a traditional fashion while Tom Woodall used the Tag Teaching CD produced by **Alchemy** (Illinois District Champions) to teach some tags. After 15 minutes, all four groups returned and sang for one another. It should be noted that anytime there was a slack moment, either Bagby or Fuegen was upfront, teaching a tag to the entire group.

[As a change of pace, the session turned back to video performances by other quartets.] Some men saw the **Aliens Quartet** [a top comedy group of several years ago] for the first time. They presented their “spoof” performance at a district international preliminary contest. With several clever and interesting electronic effects, they sang two songs [on the contest stage, but actually], they never sang a note! Instead, a recording was played of the **Boston Common** singing two very well-known songs with the **Aliens** lip-synching and acting out the parts. The audiences (both on the video and in the church could barely hear the singing for the laughter. It was the all-time “trick play” in barbershop quartet competition.

Ann Keller, wife of Kevin and outstanding Sweet Adeline singer and choreographer, spent 40 minutes with the non-quartet section, talking about and demonstrating how one could passionately present believable stories in song. One minute, she had a group of guys in a huddle, like a football coach. The next minute, she melted four Coles County guys right in their seats when she came over to them and lovingly sang “Let Me Call You Sweetheart.” She received a “Standing O” for that performance. She is a great teacher.

**Sound Opportunity** then performed as our afternoon was drawing to a close. Bass Matt Trusner had an “Oxley-like” post which excited most everyone.

The final event of the afternoon featured a video performance by international

medalist **Storm Front**. Masters of timing, great comedy, and good singing, we all left with for a good meal at Yoder's Restaurant in Arthur and for an outstanding show.

Once at Yoder's, Jeff Bowyer took over. Some 108 people attended, several from the community. Instead of the usual invocation, the men sang the "Doxology, followed by a great dinner. Before calling on the special guests, all the men sang the "America Overlay," and it sounded wonderful.

Then the **City Nights** mixed quartet took over. Talk about a "tight sound." Lynda Kever, wife of barbershopper Mark, and Ann Keller, wife of Kevin, are so accurate and sing with such good quality and with talent. Combined with the years of experience of Mark and Kevin, you'll not hear much better anywhere. Because they are accustomed to using four microphones for their shows, we owe a special thanks to Gary Nohren and Tim Woodall [who arranged for the necessary equipment].

"It ain't over 'til the fat lady sings" is an old expression. Well, a barbershop event usually ain't over until we all sing "Keep America/the Whole World Singing." Such was the case as Tim Woodall directed the participants and the audience in our closer. The evening finished at 7:30 p.m., and all were on the road home after a great day.

But wait, we found another quartet wandering around Arthur. They couldn't make it for the events of the day, but this foursome called **The Choir Boys** enjoyed performing for anyone who would listen.



### Summary Information:

The event didn't cost the Illinois District one penny!

Twenty-six women took part during the day (this includes the two female staff members). Not all of the women attended every function, but most seemed to enjoy the fellowship, the meals with their husbands, and the tour events planned. As barbershop wives, they were beautiful examples of the understanding and support men need to have so as to fully enjoy the party. We actually had two wives attend who are widows of great Illinois District barbershoppers: Sally Clark (Jim Clark) and Dorothy Graham (Jim Graham).

Forty male barbershoppers took part in the event. Twelve got quartet coaching, 21 received music teaching, and six were "staff." One man from Ohio was able to attend only the evening dinner. The 40 men averaged 27 years of barbershop experience. Only five had less than five years and several had more than 45 years of experience.

# IDAHA 2010

March 12-13

Bloomington

featured quartet and clinicians

## Masterpiece

Coaching for quartets and choruses; classes for individuals

Look for class and registration information on the Illinois District web site:

[www.illinoisdistrict.org](http://www.illinoisdistrict.org)

## Miscellaneous, yet important notes

### Director Wanted!

The Aurora Chapter is still looking for a director. This proud chapter wants to return to the days when it was a major force in Illinois District barbershopping. They are seeking a talented and committed individual to help a solid core re-establish the chorus's proud heritage. If you are interested or know of someone who might be, go to the chapter's webpage and contact any of the officers listed: [www.harmonize.ws/lamplighters](http://www.harmonize.ws/lamplighters)

### Upcoming Events — YIH Festivals

The front page of the district's web site lists the upcoming events in the district, including the Youth In Harmony programs. Check out what's going on at the youth level. Better yet, take a trip to any of the sites and see what your Illinois District barbershoppers are doing with a couple of hundred teenagers to introduce them to barbershop and to harmony. And thanks to those chapters who take on the responsibility of hosting one of these events.

### Small Chorus Co-op

At the fall convention, a flyer circulated the area announcing plans to form a "Small Chorus Co-op" in north central Illinois District. The premise is that several chorus would get together and commit to learning a number of songs that could be sung on each chapter's show or for other events, such as a "Joe Barbershop II" chorus for conventions.

The originators of the plan have seen the decline in chapter membership in many of the north-central chapters and how declining numbers have affected performance quality. By joining forces in this limited way, opportunities may appear for members to get the "big chorus" feel as well as for recruitment.

Currently, the co-op leaders are assembling a repertoire and will be creating learning tracks for interested members. The hope is to have something ready to fly by the spring of 2010.

To quote from the flyer about procedures: "We plan to select six repertoire songs with high quality learning tracks. We will utilize Groupanizer.com to track the activities of the co-op chorus. Each member will be responsible for learning music, for the cost of music, for uniforms and travel expenses. In the initial stages of the co-op, we may need to have a few rehearsals, but, for now, the plan would be to find a time at the spring and fall conventions. We may also participate in IDAH as a chorus. Each individual would be responsible for learning his song, and we plan to utilize the "honor" code for participation. If you don't know the words, notes, and/or interpretation, you shouldn't participate in an event."

For more information, contact Glenn Wells at [redsteelers@yahoo.com](mailto:redsteelers@yahoo.com) or call Glenn at 309-838-2011.

### Passing along a message from Bob Cearnal

Bob emailed us and asked that when space permits we offer an article from another district, calling for support of Harmony Foundation. Following is that article:

### Do You Think They Care?

by Rudy Zarling

VP—Financial Development

Land o' Lakes District

January 2009 *Pitchpiper*

It seems that from the day I accepted the responsibility as Land o' Lakes District Vice President for Financial Development, not a convention, COTS, or Mini-Hep has

passed without my having heard one or more of the following statements:

I would support Harmony Foundation if it were not for

- A. the logo
- B. the judging system
- C. the move to Nashville
- D. the arrangements now sung in contests
- E. They sing too loud.
- F. They all sound alike.
- G. not enough seventh chords
- H. add one of your own

Permit me, if you will, to ask: When the people attend your show, do you think they care what our logo is or about the move the Nashville or about any of the above? Do you think our young men who attend Harmony Explosion camps or Youth in Harmony programs care about our judging system? Do you think that when you sing for a Valentines event, they care how many seventh chords there are? Do you think that when you sing at a retirement community, they care if you all sound the same?

My friends, the important item is that we entertain and give that experience of entertaining to the young people. They will be our future. ... None of the youth programs would happen if it were not for Harmony Foundation. Open your hearts and wallets. Five dollars per month will not financially harm most of you. Just us today, now!

### **Chorus Director Workshop “Intensive”**

The date is Nov. 14, a Saturday, at St. Peter’s Church, 2700 Willow Road, Northbrook, IL 60026. Registration is \$150 and lodging is available at Baymont Inn in Glenview for \$60. The workshop is open to five front-line directors; if spots are available, they will be opened to assistants. CDWI Certified Trainers Byron Myers, from St. Joseph, Mo., and Paul Tamblyn, from Toronto, Ont. Northbrook Chorus members will serve as chorus members with whom the directors will work. For more information, contact:

Jay Giallombardo, Illinois District VP for Chorus Director Development  
847-850-1312  
gsbmedal@comcast.net

### **Multi-COTS!**

The Illinois District and the Central States District are combining forces for Chapter Operations Training Seminars. The two dates and locations are as follows:

Nov. 19, 2009 — Charleston, Ill. (First Baptist Church, 2800 South University Drive)

Jan. 9, 2010 — Rock Island, Ill. Holiday Inn (226 17th Street, Rock Island)

Classes for chapter presidents, secretaries, treasurers, and membership/development VPs will be available at both locations with possible course offerings for music/performance VPs, marketing and PR VPs, YIH VPs, chapter events planners, and Joe Barbershoppers.

For more information, check out the district web site or contact

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