

**A MANUAL FOR BARBERSHOP CHORUSES BY
SOUND OF THE ROCKIES CHORUS
10-Time Rocky Mountain District Champion
5-Time International Bronze Medalist Chorus**



READY? SET, SING!

**FREE Voice Lessons &
Guest Night Tactics For the New Millenium**

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I. Introduction

Borrowing from a tried and true Sweet Adelines International (SAI) program called Ready, Set, Grow, the Sound of the Rockies chapter first put a modified version of the program in place in the fall of 2009. We decided to call our program Ready, Set, Sing! The program was run over a six week period and 46 individual guests joined us over that time period. The following year in 2010, over 80 guests spent time with us during the six week program. Publicity of the program's success via the *Harmonet* and in a feature article (including a front page cover photo) in the BHS society magazine *The Harmonizer* led to numerous requests from other chapters for information and, in particular, details of the program in a "How to" format. This manual is in response to those requests, as well as an attempt to develop a repository of information and best practices going forward.



The program is evergreen and changing, and is in a continual state of fine-tuning depending on the perceived success of its individual components. However, the main body of what was put in place by the Sound of the Rockies chorus is covered here. Chapters are welcome to continue to fine tune and modify the program to their individual needs, and share the results with us for subsequent versions of this manual as well as with the membership leaders within our BHS for dissemination to the entire organization.

II. How to Start

The hallmarks of a successful Ready, Set, Sing! program consist of...

- a. An ambitious committee – it takes committed individuals to execute the plan, no matter how good the program. There are a myriad of details to attend to before the program begins, and plenty of follow up communication once the program is underway. Choose a coordinator to budget and head up the effort, assisted by four or five individuals to attend to different aspects of the program. The key positions are for 1) Marketing and Advertising, 2) Music Team & Program, 3) Sign-In Table and Refreshments, 4) Chorus Buddy / Riser Buddy Coordinator, and 5) Guest Communications & Follow Up.
- b. A good teacher - since the essence of the program is Free Voice Lessons, you'll need a good voice teacher and a good communicator. This should be someone comfortable with vocal instruction on a one-on-one basis, or also in a group setting. This may be your chapter music director, assistant director, music team member or someone (male or female) brought in from outside the chapter. The teacher need not be a barbershopper since the core of the lessons are about good vocal technique while singing.
- c. A hook – how do you get guests in the door? By offering 1) a valuable service, 2) with no strings attached, 3) with no pressure to join the chapter, 4) absolutely FREE! The Sound of the Rockies approaches this program as a community service project, offering men the chance to improve their vocal skills with increased exposure of our hobby and the joy it provides to men of all ages in the community. And by adopting and dutifully implementing these trademarks, the success of the program and the willingness of the community to advertise and market the program on your behalf is greatly increased.
- d. Resources – The Sound of the Rockies budgets between \$2500 - \$3000 for the program.



Much of that is spent on advertising and marketing, however there is also photocopying of music and preparing guest music folders, purchasing name badges and lanyards, bottles of water, costs for the facilities (if applicable), and refreshments for the break period each week.

- e. Communication to the Chapter – Be sure to give the chapter members themselves plenty of notice of the upcoming program as it will have a significant impact on the usual rehearsal. At the Sound of the Rockies, all chapter members are asked to act as ambassadors for the chapter and the society by graciously welcoming and attending to all guests throughout the program. A friendly smile and firm handshake will go a long way towards breaking the ice and ensuring that the guests (who may be feeling a little overwhelmed) are able to relax and enjoy themselves.

III. Budget and Proposal

An estimated budget and program proposal should be prepared about 3 months in advance of the event. It should be circulated and reviewed by the music team prior to submission to the board of directors for approval. Ideally, the board of directors should review the proposed budget and program 2 months prior to the event. The submittal should contain details on the proposed length of the program, when it will be conducted, where the program will take place, a budget accurate to within 20%, a rough idea of the local marketing and advertising plan, a sample list of curriculum topics, an estimate of chorus resources required, and if known, who is likely to be involved and their particular roles. A sample proposed budget is shown in **Exhibit A**.

IV. Marketing and Advertising

This is where the rubber meets the road. It is one of the keys to a successful Ready, Set, Sing! program. All the preparation the chapter can do will seem ineffective without a good turnout of men enthusiastically ready to improve their vocal skills. With a little imagination, a program budget of any size can be stretched and utilized within the community such that the total impact can be much greater than initially thought. This is particularly true due to the advent of the web based virtual community and the multitude of neighborhood, advertising, special interest and sales websites out there. Many free or low cost methods are at your disposal to get the word out within your community. Use the list below to begin the brainstorming process:

- Facebook.com; MySpace.com; Craigslist.com; etc.
- Place Ready, Set, Sing! advertisement prominently on your chapter web page
- Submit an article about our hobby to local neighborhood newspapers, with a plug for RSS near the end
- Prepare full color posters to distribute to the chapter membership for displaying in public places
- Get email lists for local sweet adelines chapters, advertising RSS and asking the ladies to send husbands, friends, co-workers, et al to your event
- Advertise on local TV station and radio station websites under community events or community calendar sections
- Send press releases several times to area media outlets via email....newsprint, radio,



magazines, TV stations, and any neighborhood e-newsletters your members may know of.

- Contact TV/newspaper reporters and invite them to attend one evening of your RSS program and report on it
- Contact area churches and request that they display a RSS poster on a community bulletin board, or place information on RSS in their bulletins
- If the chapter has developed relationships with a local radio on-air personality, ask for some free plugs for RSS on the air
- Read through a copy of Sweet Adelines International Ready, Set, Grow manual as it is a good resource

When it comes time to spend funds for advertising, you may have better results targeting community or neighborhood newspapers rather than the large metro newspaper in the area. Advertising rates will often be better, and you may have a better response rate targeting the communities which surround your specific rehearsal location. A display ad (3"x3" or larger) with a picture of the chorus is eye catching and seems to generate good reaction. For a sample display ad, refer to **Exhibit B**.

One other successful method utilized by the Sound of the Rockies was to secure a web domain to use in all marketing and advertising, www.voicelessons4free.com. The idea is to direct all interested men to this website where they may find details on the program as well as the ability to register for the program on line. The registration feature captures the name, phone number and email address of the interested prospect. Once registered, an email is automatically generated with this information and distributed to a pre-selected list of chapter officers and RSS organizers using the distribution email address sing@soundoftherockies.com. The above website address remains active and you are encouraged to visit the site to view its content and see how it is organized.

v. Music Team & Program



Ready, Set, Sing! is certainly a team effort, and the chapter Music Team plays a large role in making this successful. It is vital to keep the members of the Music Team involved and engaged in the planning and execution of a Ready, Set, Sing! program. The event has the potential to turn your chapter's weekly rehearsal into chaos, but this can be avoided with plenty of planning and discussion amongst the key players beforehand.

Try to find a suitable space separate from the main chorus rehearsal, where the Ready, Set, Sing! program may be conducted without disrupting the chorus and vice versa. Ample seating should be available or provided for the guests, and risers are not required. Whether you bring in a director from outside the chapter or utilize a member of the Music Team, directing responsibilities must be designated for both the chorus rehearsal and the RSS program so that they may be conducted simultaneously to make the best use of available time. A good length of time for the RSS program is approximately one hour.



A typical evening program during Ready, Set, Sing! may be as follows. Feel free to tailor the program to your chapter's specific needs.

7:00 – 7:20 Vocal Warmup – RSS guests invited to warm up with the chorus

- 7:20 – 7:25 Chorus performs a repertoire song for the RSS guests
- 7:25 – 8:30 RSS guests move to their designated area for vocal lessons. Chorus rehearsal resumes as normal.
- 8:30 – 8:50 Groups recombine in the main rehearsal room. Introduction of the RSS guests (and any other guests) followed by a break for refreshments. Make sure plenty of refreshments are on hand.
- 8:50 – 10:00 Resume normal chorus rehearsal. RSS guests are invited (but not required) to remain and sing with the chorus for the rest of rehearsal. RSS guests who elect to depart may do so at this time.

The program for the actual vocal lessons will largely be determined by the director assigned to lead the RSS guests, how many guests are in attendance, what their overall vocal experience may be, etc. A rough outline of topics to be covered during the vocal lessons may include:

- Breath control and posture
- Resonance and use of the soft palate
- Vowels and diphthongs
- Dynamics and range expansion
- Voice part placement
- Fundamentals of the barbershop style of singing



In terms of how the leader approaches the vocal lessons class, Darin Drown with the Sound of the Rockies usually incorporates the following:

- Gives a brief overview of the topic
- Demonstrates concepts in the form of several vocal exercises
- Engages the singers with these exercises
- Has the group frequently stand up or sit down during the class
- Asks for volunteers in the class to demonstrate and be coached
- Uses a piano and dry erase board
- Compares/contrasts the barbershop style with other classical disciplines
- Allows time for questions and answers
- Recaps the previous week's fundamentals
- Each week, distributes a handout describing the chapter, the society, requirements for membership, costs, etc. to be placed in the guest folder
- Keeps the class positive, uplifting and fun



These may be modified as needed to fit your particular circumstances. One way to determine the experience level of the RSS group is to send out a vocal skills survey by email in advance to all registered participants. Ask them to bring their completed survey when they arrive for the program, or they may fill out a survey on site when they arrive. A sample of a vocal skills survey is shown in **Exhibit C**.

About one week before the program, the RSS coordinator or vocal lessons director is encouraged to send out a welcome email to all who have signed up in advance. It should provide guidance on how to find the rehearsal facility, where to park, dress code (casual suggested), what a typical evening will entail (see program above), and that they are free to bring a friend along if they like. Most importantly, let the guest know that the evening will be relaxed and lots of fun and that you are looking forward to meeting and hosting him.

The Sound of the Rockies chapter has conducted RSS programs 6 weeks in length, but will experiment in the future with 4 week programs. It is believed that 4 weeks will provide sufficient time to cover the necessary topics, without the program growing stale for the participants or the teachers.

VI. Sign-In Table / Refreshments

Your chapter's first impression upon the Ready, Set, Sing! guest begins at the sign-in table. Make sure this table is staffed by folks quick with a handshake and an inviting smile. Some guests will arrive with no experience whatsoever in a singing organization, and they will understandably be a little nervous and apprehensive. And they'll be walking into a room full of people they don't know. So be sure to put the guest at ease by letting them know that you're glad they came by, and that a very enjoyable and relaxing evening waits.



Logistics at the sign in table are critical, especially if you have had a large response in advance of the first meeting. Give some thought to traffic flow, and use multiple sign in stations if warranted. It won't be unusual for the majority of your RSS guests to arrive from 5-10 minutes ahead of the start time, so multiple stations and plenty of volunteers can head off a log jam and delays.

Ideally, the goal is to have gathered all registration information (name, telephone, email) in advance and pre-printed this data on the sign-in sheet(s). In this manner, a guest's attendance may be noted by a quick check mark or "X" next to his name. Leave several blank lines at the bottom for walk-ups (there will be some), and update and distribute the new sign in sheet for each week's use. A sample of a sign-in and tracking sheet format is shown in **Exhibit D**.

At the time the guest is first signed in, provide him with a name badge to use throughout the program (with magnet, pin or lanyard), a bottle of water and a guest music folder. Suggested items to place in the guest music folder include the BHS "You Can Sing Too" brochure (available from Harmony Marketplace), a place to store handout summaries of information on the local chapter, audition requirements (if any), society membership fees, the vocal skills survey, and copies of repertoire sheet music to use when singing along with the chorus. It is likely that new first time guests will attend each week the RSS program continues, so be prepared to welcome first timers throughout. If possible, have some volunteers available to escort the guest from the sign-in table into the main rehearsal room, or over to the risers.



VII. Chorus Buddy / Riser Buddy



A frequent response common to the feedback provided to the Sound of the Rockies chapter by Ready, Set, Sing! guests was that they were inundated with kindness every step of the way. The guests were treated like family and warmly welcomed each week. Your chapter is encouraged to do the same! One of the ways to make this happen is with an organized program of chorus buddies and riser buddies. The two positions are related, but their responsibilities are different.

Riser buddies are comprised of the general chapter. Everyone is asked in advance to serve as a riser buddy to an RSS guest. These positions are not assigned in advance, but are determined on the fly as RSS guests join the chorus for warm-ups or for repertoire singing after the vocal lessons are complete for the evening. Riser buddies assist the RSS guests in finding a spot on the risers to sing, finding a member singing a particular voice part to stand beside, finding the sheet music to a particular song in their guest music folders, finding the restrooms, where to find refreshments at the break, answering general questions, etc. RSS guests are encouraged to try out different voice parts during the program until they are definitively voice placed by the vocal lessons director. So they may be standing in different places on the risers from week to week and a new riser buddy may need to take over duties.

A chorus buddy is individually assigned to each RSS guest during the week after the guest's first visit. In addition to welcoming the guest at rehearsal, the chorus buddy is asked to contact the guest each week outside of the rehearsal for a brief telephone or email chat to say hello again and address any questions or concerns. Make sure the guest knows how much his presence was appreciated and that you're hopeful to see him again.

VIII. Guest Communications & Follow Up

Following up with the RSS guests between rehearsals is considered as important as what takes place at rehearsal and during the vocal lessons program. In addition to the chorus buddy individual follow up, the RSS coordinator or vocal lessons director is encouraged to send a group email to all who attend each week. Let them know that a great time was had by all, and how much the chorus members appreciated the guests' attendance. Offer a preview as to what is planned for the following week and what songs the chorus will be working during the next meeting. Provide the guests with access to your chorus learning tracks and encourage them to have a listen. More than likely, several of the guests will respond positively with an email of their own.

There will be no-shows, or guests who had last minute conflicts keep them away. Send a separate note to this group, letting them know that they were missed and that it is not too late to begin attendance the following week. As was mentioned previously, it is likely that new first time guests will be present during each week of the program.

IX. Miscellaneous

Ready, Set, Sing! was not undertaken as a membership recruiting program, but as a community service project to broaden the exposure of this hobby and offer a useful set of vocal skills to men of all ages in the community. It was the hope, of course, that some of the "graduates" of this program would stay on board and continue as regular members of the chapter. To this extent, two additional items are worth mentioning.

The first is that all participants in Ready, Set, Sing! are offered the opportunity to join the Sound of the Rockies chorus on stage during the annual Christmas show. The timing of RSS was selected to be during the fall season so that upon completion, the guests could participate in a live performance with the chorus with no audition or membership requirements. This gives them the

opportunity to experience the thrill of performing in front of an audience. Further, the emcee of the show takes a moment to describe the RSS program to the crowd and recognize the guests who are participating on the risers while they accept a special round of applause. For the RSS guests who want to pursue formal membership, auditions and paperwork begin after the New Year.



Second, the Sound of the Rockies prepares a special “graduation” ceremony for all participants who are present on the final night of the program (even if they have not attended all the classes). A moment for individual recognition and applause in front of the chapter, a presentation of their “diploma”, and a group picture of the guests by themselves on the risers round out the final evening. A sample of this “diploma” is shown in **Exhibit E**.

X. Questions?

Please feel free to contact us with any questions or concerns you may have. Send an email to sing@soundoftherockies.com and we will respond as soon as practical. We would also love to hear about your program and how things turned out. Good luck!

Exhibit A – Sample Budget

Date	Description	Quantity	Amount
8/13/2010	50 pack You Can Sing Too BHS brochure	2	\$35.98
8/13/2010	purchase VoiceLessons4Free.com web domain	1	\$10.16
8/15/2010	200 envelopes, tape, adhesive labels	1	\$23.81
8/17/2010	280 return address labels - SOR Chorus address	1	\$9.41
9/4/2010	80 first class postage stamps	1	\$35.20
9/13/2010	Porchlink Media - 10 regions neighborhood newsletters	1	\$431.37
9/21/2010	18 CCN regional newspapers - 3x3 ad for two weeks	2	\$1,782.00
9/25/2010	Photocopying for guest folders	30	\$250.00
9/29/2010	YourHub Denver Post insert - 7 print zones, one week	1	<u>\$710.50</u>
			\$3,288.43

Exhibit B – Sample Advertisements

Flyer for members

3x3 Print Ad

Business Card Ad

Exhibit C – Sample Vocal Skills Survey

Ready, Set, Sing! 2010 Singing Experience Survey

Name Bervie Duran III Age 49 Email bduran@hotmail.com

Telephone Yes How did you hear about us? (circle any that apply)

Church Bulletin, Radio, YourHub.com, Regional Newspaper, Flyer/Poster, Facebook,
Craigslist, Chapter website, Another Sound of the Rockies member... Other: Facebook

1. Please briefly describe your singing experience (high school, college, church choir, etc.)

What voice part(s) have you sung?
BB Shop Lead since '02'

2. Have you had any formal vocal training? If so, please describe.

Nope

3. Are you currently singing with a group? If so, please describe including the voice part you sing with the group.

Sugar Valley Singers - Lead/Tenor

4. How long has it been since you participated in organized singing?

Since Tuesday

5. Do you have any experience singing "a cappella" (unaccompanied) style music, or have you sung in a chapter of the Barbershop Harmony Society? If so, please describe.

Yep, see #3

6. Can you "sight-read" from sheet music?

Some

7. Do you play any musical instruments? Please list.

PERCUSSION, Things You Wack-n-Shack

8. Is there anything else you would like for us to know about your musical background?

I have a great venue for singing.



Exhibit D – Sample Sign-In & Tracking Spreadsheet

Ready, Set, Sing! 2010 Roster													
Name	e-mail	Phone	1	2	3	4	5	6	Sing In Christmas Show?	BECOME S.O.R. MEMBER?	S.O.R. Team / Mentor	How did you hear about RSS?	Survey?
Doe, John	john@doe.com	(303) 555-1212	X	X	X	X	X				Richard Roe	Grace Baptist Church - flyer	Yes

Exhibit E – Sample “Diploma”

