



## Director's College!

Mike O'Neill

Barbershop directors, assistant directors, associate directors, WANNABE directors...Director's College is right around the corner and for some odd reason, you haven't signed up yet! I've heard many reasons for people not making it to St. Joseph over the beautiful summer months of late July / early August (maybe beautiful is stretching it a little bit!), I figured I would use this platform to stifle all of those excuses!



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#### **1. I can't afford it – true, it is an expense to attend Harmony University but please allow me to break it down for you!**

- Currently, the rate is \$565 for members, associates, and affiliates (the rate will increase \$50 on April 18<sup>th</sup>)
- For that SMALL amount, you receive 32 square meals, a room to sleep in for 7 nights, transportation to and from the Kansas City airport, tuition to THE GREATEST EDUCATIONAL EVENT THE BHS HAS TO OFFER, endless opportunities to sing, make many new friends, rub elbows with your barbershop heroes, materials from your classes you can take back to your home chapter, and the experience of your life!
- Many Districts sponsor a scholarship for directors...check with your DVP of CDD.
- Although the opportunity to apply has expired, the Harmony Foundation sponsors scholarships annually...consider applying next year, even if you pay to go this year!
- Many chapters see this as a wonderful opportunity (and rightfully so) to invest in their music teams to better their chapter and may be able to provide some financial assistance.

#### **2. I can't afford the time off work – this one is hard for me to debate, BUT**

- This should be a major priority in your Barbershop life...plan and budget your time off work so you can afford the time to go...it is THAT worth it!
- Explain to your boss that this continued education will only make you a better employee (maybe that is a stretch for some of your jobs/careers, but it's worth a shot)!!

#### **3. I won't learn anything I don't already know**

- I won't even address this one with a response!

#### **4. I don't want to spend a week away from my spouse**

- Umm...uhh...I love my wife dearly, but you know what they say, "absence makes the heart grow fonder!"

#### **5. I don't want to spend a week in dorm rooms**

- Actually...the amount of time spent in your dorm room should be more like ½ a day (assuming about 2 hours of sleep per night)
- All the other time should be spent singing, having fun, learning, making friends, singing, eating ice cream, singing, eating ice cream, etc.

- c. There won't be enough hours in the day for you to worry about how much time you spend in your dorm rooms

**6. I've been to Harmony University before and there isn't anything new for me to take**

- a. The curriculum is constantly evolving...there is ALWAYS something new to get involved with.
  - i. For example...this year we have introduced a new coaching class that helps bridge the gap between the basic "Elements of Coaching" and our CAP program...Directors are essentially coaches, so this may be a wonderful outlet to pursue.

Whatever your excuse, err, reason for not attending Harmony University / Director's College, please consider some of the above arguments and others I didn't have make due to space limitations, and reconsider. Again, the next rate increase occurs April 18<sup>th</sup>...you still have time to sign up.

Please click here to read more about Harmony University –

<http://barbershop.org/education/harmony-university.html>



## **Video Recording** - Give Yourself Feedback

Chad Hall

Chorus directors are always looking for ways to improve themselves. Chorus directors are very committed individuals. We are always looking for good quality feedback from professionals. Coaches can provide invaluable information regarding interpretation, mechanics, and energy levels of a performance. Coaches may influence our decisions, but ultimately the musical decisions come from the music director. Nobody knows what you want from your music and chorus better than you.

Wouldn't it be great to have a coach who would give you feedback every time you step up in front of the chorus? They could analyze your posture, evaluate the clarity of your gestures, your coordination, and make sure you are hearing all the possible mishaps that occur in your chorus. Most of you probably have this coach. It may be in your home or in your pocket on your smart phone. It is a video recorder!

Video recordings give you visual and aural feedback. For director's, it is often a challenge to hear or see everything happening while a group is performing. Do you know what you are showing your ensemble? In digital form, you have to opportunity to review a moment as many times as needed.

Here are a few things you can consider monitoring from a video recording:

### **Posture**

A sturdy and confident director establishes command. Does your posture represent how you would like your singers to be? Stand tall with one foot slightly in front of the other, shoulders relaxed, head level, and body is relaxed. Basically, stand like a singer with proud posture!

## Clarity of Gestures

Make sure your gestures make sense and are clear. Entrances and cut offs should be clear and concise. The goal is to get your overall message for the song displayed. Remember: What they see is what you get!

## Coordination

What the heck are these things doing anyway? Cueing and dynamics are often indicators from the left hand. Work on making the hands independent instead of mirroring. When using the pattern, make sure it is unmistakably clear.

## Aural Training

Listen to the singers. Check for tuning horizontally, as well as vertically. Be sure the desired tone is being used and have the appropriate terminology to express what you want. Better yet, have the appropriate nonverbal communication to communicate what you want! Check for synchronization of entrances, exits, and overall words. If there is a problem with this, check your cues, entrances, and cut offs for clarity.

## Other Habits (Good or Bad)

### *Excitement – Good!*

Be exciting to watch! How are you at maintaining their attention? Chances are if you relax the energy level as a director, the singers follow suit.

### *Loud Body – Bad!*

Check to be sure your body is still while the arms, hands, fingers, and face do most of the work. Bouncing knees tend to give scooping chorus sounds. Quiet your body!

## Word sounds or words?

Are you using word sounds or mouthing the words to every song? Word sounds are a tool. Words are a habit. Refraining from mouthing words enables the singers to become more independent. It also usually helps with synch problems by requiring the chorus to watch your hands instead of your mouth. Occasional word sounds then become more effective at reminding the singers to correctly form or match vowel sounds.

As a director, you make the final decision about how good you will be. You have the skills to make good and bad decisions about how you musically communicate with your chorus, after all, our decisions are our own. Our profession can best be summed up by a quotation by Robert Beverly Hale as he was speaking of painting. "Your style will develop through the decisions you make... These decisions will be influenced by the qualities of your mind, by your selflessness or selfishness, by your curiosity or lethargy, by your dignity or vulgarity, by your honesty or insincerity.... Never forget that the good critics can look right through the canvas into the eyes of the artist beyond."

To look for additional guidelines, refer to the "Directing Techniques Level Placement Guide" found on the right hand side of the following link: [www.barbershop.org/directors-college](http://www.barbershop.org/directors-college)





## *Building our instrument*

Steve Tramack - Chair, BHS Chorus Director Development Committee

Sometimes, the answer to better singing is right in front of us, staring us in the face. It's so fundamental to the production of free, resonance singing that we overlook it, assuming that the issue must be more complex than it really is. It's the construction of our instrument – our bodies, properly aligned and free from undue tension, allowing our singers to more easily produce, sustain and reproduce (and resonate) tone.

If the bell of the trumpet were crumpled, the lead pipe bent and the valves inserted at an angle, would we still expect it to sound like a trumpet? Would we expect the trumpeter to be able to play with the same degree of effort as a perfectly constructed trumpet? The answer is a resounding “no”; how, then, can we expect the human voice to function freely, regardless of how our instrument is constructed?

We are musicians. Our bodies are our instrument. Our instrument is the only instrument in all of “music-dom” which is subject to thought and feeling. The construction and alignment of our instrument constantly changes. We have an opportunity to reset our instrument every time we create tone and prepare for an

optimal experience. Further, we have the opportunity, as directors, to reinforce and model the very best instrument for our singers. In the words of renowned choral conductor and teacher Rodney Eichenberger, “what they see is what you get.”

Here's a quick checklist for building a better instrument, from the ground up. Want to prove to your singers and yourself that a) alignment and tension release are important, and b) this is a skillset that everyone can improve in your chorus? Ask your section leaders, or your best chapter quartet, if they can assist with this demonstration at your next rehearsal. Let them know that you'd like to have them sing something for the chorus, and then would like to work with them to help improve their performance, but keep the specifics vague (as to not predispose them to the approach). With your chorus sitting on the risers or in chairs, have the quartet / section leaders come up front and sing a song of their choosing. Ask your chorus to keep that performance in mind as the baseline, and ask the quartet if you can assist them in building an even better instrument. Would they be interested in producing more sound, more consistently, with less effort?

Start at the feet. Ask the quartet to ensure their feet are shoulder-width apart (not the outside of the arms – the shoulders). Ask them to “find their skeleton” – that centered spot where their skeleton is supporting the majority of their weight. If they shift their weight forward and back, left and right, they'll find a spot where they're “centered”, with their skeletal structure supporting their weight more so than muscles. Have them sing 16 measures (intro, verse or first 2 A sections of the chorus of the song), and ask your chorus members to vote on whether there was any improvement by simply “finding their skeleton”. To vote, thumbs up = better, thumbs sideways = the same, and thumbs down = worse.

Pelvic girdle. Have them slightly tilt their hips / pelvic girdle forward, just so the knees unlock and the hip joint is now aligned, as you look at the singer from the side, with the middle of the foot. By playing with the degree of tilt, they'll find that the air falls more easily and lower into the body when the pelvic girdle is properly aligned. Have them (and your singers) play with this – if they go too far, the air seems to get “stuck” high in the chest. If they don't go far enough, the knees lock and the air also gets stuck. Have the quartet find the ideal tilt (where the air falls low into the body), and have them sing the same 16 bars. Have the chorus vote.

Lengthen and broaden the back. Next, how much length can the singers create between the hips and the base of the skull (the A/O joint)? The back should feel like it lengthens and broadens, but the arms and shoulders must release down and hang naturally. You'll notice a higher rib cage naturally occurs as the back lengthens and broadens. Maintain the skeletal support – the shoulders should be aligned with the hips and the feet. Have them sing the 16 measures again, and ask the chorus to vote.

Back of the neck. Next, ask the quartet singers to lengthen the back of the neck, while finding that centered spot (not too far forward / back / left / right) for the head; feeling like it's floating on the top of the spine. It should feel like the head could easily release directly up, were it not attached, and can move freely. The chin is going to be level with the floor, or maybe even 2 degrees below the horizon. Have them sing the 16 measures again, and ask the chorus to vote.

Release any undue tension. The Four Musketeers of Vocal Tension are the neck, shoulders, jaw and tongue. Any tension here will have a direct impact on vocal freedom. Have the singers release tension through moving each of those areas (various exercises are available in warm-up materials from the Society), and sing those same 16 measures again.

Deconstruct and reconstruct. You've now built a better, aligned, optimal instrument together with the quartet. As the quartet if they were aware of things that they changed as part of the process. As a final step, ask for them relax, and then, in one motion, rebuild that instrument. That's what a singer should look like and, for them, feel like. Have them start the 16 measures again, in the "relaxed" position, and then, at the ninth measure, have them rebuild the instrument. You'll be amazed at the difference!

Now that the chorus has heard and seen the different, go through the full process with the full chorus.

This is most effective if you, as a director, can model this optimal, aligned instrument, and find opportunities to reset this alignment at key points throughout your rehearsal and your music. You should practice this in front of a mirror, so that you can quickly build / demonstrate the aligned instrument quickly and consistently for your singers. The more habitual this becomes for your singers, the better the singing will be, with less effort...which will increase their level of enjoyment. A win-win!

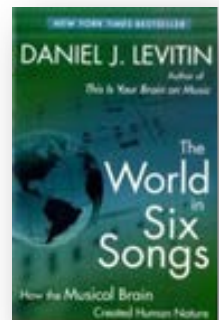
Sing 'em and ring 'em,



## Book Review – *The World In Six Song*

by Dr. Daniel J. Levitin

Denis Laflamme



A Few years ago, I watched a show on TV called, "[The Musical Brain](#)" (when you have a minute watch it here it's 40 minutes). I was reminded of how much I enjoyed the book "[This is your brain on Music](#)" and how science explained so much about the responses the brain has on music and all that comes with it. Such as, when people are singing together the brain releases a hormone called Oxytocin that engenders feelings of trust and bonding. I also found out that I had been missing out and that Levitin had another book out called "The World in Six Songs".

Daniel J. Levitin, is a path breaking McGill University (Montreal) neuroscientist and former world-class music producer. Music, he argued, was more than a fortunate evolutionary by-

product of language development. The book made a persuasive case that our minds and our bodies would have evolved very differently without it. Now in "***The World in Six Songs: How the Musical Brain Created Human Nature***", Levitin extends that argument beyond individual brains to human civilization and culture. For fans of "Brain on Music," this is a must-read.

In the opening chapter, you'll discover the author to be a lively conversationalist while posing scientific questions that send you exploring paths you didn't even know existed.

*"Through a process of co-evolution of brains and music, through the structures throughout our cortex and neocortex, from our brainstem to the prefrontal cortex, from the limbic system to the cerebellum, music uniquely insinuates itself into our heads. It does this in six distinctive ways, each of them with their own evolutionary basis..."*

Music has *"been with humans since we first became humans. It has shaped the world through six kinds of songs: friendship, joy, comfort, knowledge, religion, and love."* The book then devotes a chapter to each song type, blending neuroscience, evolutionary biology, social anthropology, musicology and conversations with contemporary musical greats such as Sting (also on the TV show) and Joni Mitchell, who seem as enthralled with the author's six-songs thesis as he is.

Some chapters will "resonate" more with you than others...and that's OK. I personally enjoyed **Comfort**, which begins with a moment of high drama. *"Eddie — the dishwasher at the pancake restaurant where I worked — lunged at my boss Victor with a kitchen knife. Victor fled, through the restaurant, just two steps ahead of him, knocking over a stack of high chairs and a few skinny teenage waitresses as he tried to get away. Victor made it to the parking lot and drove off. I went back to cooking pancakes and Eddie limped out the side door, and we never saw him again. All this over a song...And not just any song but Tony Orlando and Dawn's 'Tie a Yellow Ribbon Round the Old Oak Tree.'"*

After learning the back-story of this incident, which is interwoven with the story of how the young Levitin came to be working in that eatery, you will never view comfort music — including the blues — in the same way. This is one of those books that will stay with you for a long time and, as a director or anyone involved in your chorus' musical team, you will likely borrow anecdotes and facts when speaking with your singers that could give them a better perspective on the music they are making that night.

If you do enjoy the book (shoot me a note). It's always fun to hear about other people's opinions of books you like.

Happy reading!



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### ***Have Any Kind of Chorus You Want, As Long as the Guys Are Having Fun?***

Jim Bagby - Director Emeritus, Kansas City, Mo.

When it comes to BHS chapters, surely we can agree that by and large they have the right to decide what kind they want to be. Some stand on the risers and work their tails off for three hours every week. Some spend most of the evening gang singing, with a long break in the middle and maybe an early adjournment. A few are quartet-oriented, and may get in few numbers as a chorus during the evening. There are many formats. I know of one chapter that meets in a veterans' hall, with the bar open throughout the proceedings and a beer within reach. Yep, that's okay, too, as long as they aren't trying to recruit the young'uns.

All of that said I feel strongly that there should be, in addition to the all-important lynchpins of harmony and fellowship, a common denominator for all these chapters -- and especially their chorus rehearsals: Fun! If that key element is missing, will the meeting be a success? Will the guys come back next week? Will the guests show up, and will they return?

This is not new ground, by any means. But if we're honest with ourselves, fellow chorus directors, how often in our zeal and intensity in getting ready for "the next event," do we overlook the admonition of Joe Liles Lifetime Achievement Award winner Dr. Greg Lyne (I only quote from the best): "Every rehearsal needs some Aaah, some Aha! and some Ha-ha."

A frog calls the psychic hotline. He's told "You'll meet a young lady who's VERY interested in you." "All right! Will I meet her at a party?" "No, in biology class..."

Moreover, I offer this reminder from my first mentor, another Joe Liles honoree, Jim Massey (I only steal from the best): "In the past every time I've discovered I wasn't having any fun, I would realize that was something I could control. I would 'rededicate' and choose to make the learning, teaching, administering and performing fun for the guys and – therefore – fun for me."

In black and white that looks so simple, but let's just say it out loud: if we ain't havin' fun, how can the troops?

One more, from immediate past Society Prez **Bill Biffle** (okay, I lied about who I'd steal from – but when it comes to enthusiasm, no one beats Billy B.). In his days as a district championship chorus director, he said he had three rules:

1. We'll work hard to make good music together.
2. We'll have fun while we do it (emphasis mine).
3. I won't teach notes.

You could find three worse arm-waving rules to live by.

## Why do we sing about "After Dark" when it's really after light?

So why do we sometimes lose sight of the fun factor? Probably the simplest answer we touched on above: just the process we always seem to be in. There's a show or performance, or for many chapters, a contest coming up. We focus on that and overlook the joyous factors that attracted us in the first place – particularly if the music team and/or administration are not good at planning. Or as Bill says, we lose our compass. And there's no one out there to applaud each week, since we live in the rehearsal process, so the guys don't get much sense of appreciation for the effort they put in, whatever the level of the chorus.

But, perhaps you say, I am a serious musician, dedicated to my craft, working diligently to improve barbershopping in my chapter. I am not here to have fun (surely you wouldn't say exactly that). But you may be taking your job very seriously. In which case, consider seriously if the fun factor is suffering, and who can help you restore/improve it – if that is not your strong suit. Here again, as I probably said in my last article, a good program vice president or chapter development officer is worth his weight in pitch pipes. Or an assistant director/music team member who can give you honest feedback that this is an area to consider.

Without the fun, the harmony and fellowship so vital to sustaining and growing our membership can only carry us so far.

*As I sing all my vowels with care, This is my most fervent prayer:*

*Please let me blend, And then right at the end,*

*Don't let me run out of air!*





## *Interpretation Tips*

Karl Chapple

I have gathered tips on this topic from many different people over a number of years, so none of this stuff is original material. It is all stolen (with permission) from others but hey, isn't that how we all learn and grow! My only hope is that I've picked up something that you will find helpful for your chorus.

A song is a vehicle for conveying, or sharing, a message, a sentiment, or a feeling. To perform a song by singing the correct notes and words in tune with synchronicity and rhythmic integrity, but without the artistry, energy, dynamics, inflection and body involvement necessary to move the audience is a disservice to the music. So how can we, as an ensemble, interpret the music in a way that will move an audience?

The first thing we need to do is to decide what message we want to convey with the song. Typically we get that from the lyrics of the song. There can often be a choice of messages on which we could settle. For instance, many of us have been through the exercise of interpreting "Heart of My Heart" from several different perspectives; the young man, the old man, the soldier many miles away, etc. All are perfectly acceptable.

The important thing is that one is chosen, and your interpretation plan is built around it using appropriate techniques to deliver that message. The next thing is to get the chorus on the same page. Remember that everyone has their own perspective. For instance, if you ask everyone to imagine a yellow ball, how many of the guys will have the same image in their head? Very likely no two will be the same, because they were not given enough information to create the same image. What size was the ball, what was the texture, what was it made of, how heavy was it, was it moving, did it have

any markings, where was it, and so on and so on? A good way to get everyone in the same ball park is to create a back story that supports your interpretation plan. The more detailed you can be with the story, the more solidified your chorus will be in delivering the message both musically and visually.

Another thing to keep in mind is the commonality of experiences that your men can share. A teenager, for example, may have little experience from which to understand a story that might involve the aches and pains that come with age. In that case, you may be able to find other references, like the morning after the first football or wrestling practice of the season. Also be aware of cultural differences when we ask our guys to internalize the images you created for your masterful interpretation. Again, find ways to evoke similar feelings and responses across the various perspectives from which your singers come. Don't hesitate to ask for help from people with different backgrounds like age, nationality, religion, or any other scenarios where you may find yourself in unfamiliar territory. They will likely be honored that you asked for their input, and you will end up with a better product for your audience.

In the next issue, we will explore ways to help the chorus actually sell the plan.

Break a leg...



## *The Care and Feeding of the Small Chorus Music Team*

Lynn Trapp

Having been the Front Line Director and/or Assistant Director of 6 different choruses in 4 different districts around the society has given me an interesting perspective on the problems that directors face as they try to improve the musical quality of their choruses. Obviously, every chorus is different, but

one thing that should be a common denominator in all of them is a strong Music Team. Choruses that have been the most successful in our society have such a music team. Choruses that don't have a strong music team tend to be less successful.

Several choruses – Research Triangle Park (late 80's / early 90's), Toronto, and Westminster – have demonstrated very effectively that it is possible for a small chorus to compete with the very best large choruses. There is no reason to think, any more, that the only way to be a winner is to become the largest chorus in your district. Further, there is certainly one thing that these successful small choruses have in common, and that is an effective music team. No music director can be expected to do everything needed to make a chorus successful. So how can small choruses meet the challenge of having an effective music team?

## A Music Team of the Whole

One of the problems that small choruses face in developing a good music team is, obviously, sheer numbers. If a chorus has 16 members (including the director) and 4 of them become section leaders and, and 4 become assistant section leaders 4 become "row captains," and one serves as the choreographer, then you end up with only 6 singers who are not in a leadership position. This situation is almost like having a "music team of the whole." Well, we have to remember, as directors, that we don't necessarily have to fill all possible positions on a music team in order to have an effective one.

I work from the premise that the bare minimum on a music team should be the director and a section leader for each section. In addition to that, there is no reason that the director can't do "double duty" and serve as one of the section leaders. A chorus of 16 can work pretty effectively with just 4 members taking on musical leadership roles. As a chorus improves their skill and brings in more singers, they can always add to the number of leaders on the music team.

## Where is the Talent?

Often choruses don't have an effective music team because they don't believe they have enough talented people to fill the positions. Part of the problem there is that music directors don't always trust their singers enough to ask them to serve as section leaders – or in other positions. As a director, you may have to be willing to take the risk of allowing someone with less than optimal skill serve as a section leader or assistant director, and give that person time and space to grow into the position.

So, how does a director find the people to serve as leaders? First, ask them. People don't mind being asked and the worst thing they can say is "No." It won't hurt you, as a director, if they do. Second, recruit them. Tell them that you think they could be of great service to the chorus in a particular capacity. You may be amazed at the response you get.

## Outstanding in Front

The Barbershop Harmony Society offers a WONDERFUL program to train and develop a music team within your chapter. Check it out at <http://barbershop.org/outstanding-in-front.html>



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