Learn To Sing

Program Guide for Chapters

Barbershop Harmony Society

Music & Performance Committee

Primary Contact for Comments or Questions:
Your District Vice President for Music & Performance
Introduction

Our Mission: To Enrich Lives Through Singing

You are part of one of the most exciting vocal music organizations in the world! Your Barbershop Harmony Society has challenged all of us, in our Vision Statement, "to be the premier membership organization for men who love to sing!" In order for this Vision to be fulfilled, we are reminded of several cornerstones on which to build this great organization. One of our primary Purposes is to "introduce and sustain music in the lives of people everywhere," one of our primary Values is "service to others through our music," and, finally, our Mission is "Together, making the music that's making a difference."

No doubt you have, no matter how long you have been a member or leader in your Chapter or District, experienced the benefits of these cornerstones which have led to your life being "enriched" through singing! And you have likely seen that same "enrichment" in the lives of the other men with whom you sing, from the joy you share at Chapter meetings, rehearsals, performances, conventions and other activities which form our barbershop "lives." And you've also likely seen that special "light" in patrons' eyes, folks of all ages, who are attracted to good quality a cappella singing in the barbershop style; it's a feeling that you can almost touch!

Membership Challenges

It's no secret that the challenges of sustaining and growing our Society's membership as we've entered the 21st century have been daunting. If you haven't experienced these challenges in your chapter (and you likely have!), you undoubtedly have seen other chapters in your local area or District struggle to sustain and grow membership. Whether through exhaustive research by social scientists or simply by our own awareness of the cultural changes which have occurred, we can see that there are many forces which have contributed to men's seeming unwillingness or inability to "join with us." Some assert that today's technology has shifted the public from being "participants" in groups of any kind to a more insular lifestyle of interacting with computers, smart phones or (still!) TV rather than with other men of like interests. Or, others suggest that today's ever-increasing demands of family, faith, work, tight finances and other responsibilities have placed such demands on men's time that there's simply no room for other "outside activities." Still others contend that members of Generations X and Y (and Z?) have simply found other outlets for their self-expression; or at least are much more selective in those activities in which they participate. There are even a number of "musts," conscious or otherwise, which organizations who wish to attract new members in our times "must" meet to satisfy the desires or needs of prospective members, including educational opportunity, leadership opportunity, community service and charitable work.

You can take heart that your Society is working hard in recent years with a series of efforts to understand and adapt our approaches to attracting men to both our artform and our Society. An example of this hard work is the titanic effort of countless men, empowered by the Society Board, to participate in various phases of activity within our Membership Growth Task Force. And, as of this writing, we are now beginning to see the reversal of many years of
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membership decline Society-wide. Perhaps you've even seen the trend begin to improve in your chapter, too. We sure hope so! This commitment to involve every level of our organization--Chapter, District, Staff and Society Board--in the successful propagation of what we love has prompted very focused, achievable "Aims," which Committees like Music & Performance and Membership are tasked to work toward, in the hope of providing you and your chapter with the tools necessary to "carry the message."

**The Opportunity...Men Love to Sing!**

But, through all the challenges to our achievement of our important Mission, particularly "to enrich lives through singing," there is one absolutely undeniable fact--an opportunity--upon which we must capitalize: many, many men, to one degree or another, love to sing! It's true! Whether in the shower, in the car, at Karaoke night at the local club, at parties with friends, virtually all men--in fact, all people...especially young people!--LOVE TO SING! Want to sing! Have always wanted to sing! Fact is, they've either never learned to sing properly to be able to enjoy singing in front of other people, without fear or embarrassment, or they've never known of ways to find where or with whom to learn to sing. We need to capitalize on this desire, this love of singing that is resident deeply in so many who have yet to find an outlet for their ambition.

Here's our golden opportunity; an opportunity which leverages your chapter's enthusiasm, desire to grow and resources along with a terrific, proven program, to fulfill the desire of countless men to join with you in song...**Learn To Sing!**

**From Opportunity to Success!**

For a number of years, our sisters in Sweet Adelines International have capitalized on this innate human desire to learn to sing through a very successful program called "Ready, Set, Grow," the basis of which is the execution of program based on offering free voice lessons to women in their local communities. At the same time, a number of our own chapters Society-wide have experimented with their own hybrid programs to offer similar programs of voice instruction for men in their communities, with varying levels of "success," as measured by increasing chapters' membership. And, as you've likely read in a recent Harmonizer*, one of the Society's best-known International Medalist choruses, the Sound of the Rockies (Denver), offered a program of top-rate vocal instruction, which they coined "Ready, Set, Sing," to men in their community, resulting in a substantial growth in membership (as well as a high degree of satisfaction among participants).

Based on the accounts of these programs, a thoughtful study by a number of Society volunteers in conjunction with the activity of the Membership Growth Task Force, was undertaken to assess the execution and success of a number of other Society chapters' independent programs following the same general principle of "free voice lessons," generally lasting four to six weeks. It's subsequently been determined that as many as twenty other such chapter-run programs, developed with or without a blueprint specifically provided by

* Harmonizer, November-December, 2010 issue
other chapters, have been developed and executed, to one degree or another.

Meanwhile, the Society learned of the monstrous success achieved by one of our valued affiliates, BABS (British Association of Barbershop Singers), which, through its own organization-wide "Learn to Sing" program in 2009-2010, increased its membership dramatically!

Even though the precise methods used by all these programs varied, as did the chapter size and—ultimately—the results (some of which are still being measured), it became clear that the concept of "Learn to Sing" was a formidable one, capitalizing on that opportunity to both teach men to sing (enriching their lives!) and, with proper execution, enrich the membership of our own chapters with a well produced, carefully executed program.

**Learn To Sing Meets the Challenge, Fulfills the Mission**

After a number of valued contributors were consulted to suggest, consider and comment on key elements of a standardized program which the Society might offer to its chapters for their use, the CEO and the Director of Education asked your Music & Performance Committee, representing all 17 Districts through their DVPs (or Directors) of M&P, to shepherd the introduction and support of what is likely to become one of the Society's most successful programs, officially called Learn To Sing. Society Staff members participated in a carefully monitored pilot of Learn To Sing in a small (but largely healthy!) chapter in Athens, Alabama to insure that, along with the positive experience documented in Denver and elsewhere with medium-to-large sized chapters, success with LTS could be achieved with chapters of all sizes which commit the resources and energy to follow through with this new product.

The words of the introductory announcement distributed to media outlets by the Sound of the Rockies Chorus simply and clearly identify the mission of this initiative, "...to offer free vocal lessons for six weeks to men of all ages who enjoy singing and are interested in learning more about the craft of singing four-part harmony." Here it is, in black and white: a proven way to capitalize on the inherent desire in men to learn to sing while, at the same time, integrating them in a low pressure but systematic way into ensemble singing, with an eye toward bringing them into our fraternity; thus, enriching more lives through singing!

**The Learn To Sing Program**

**Program Objectives**

While the primary objective of Learn to Sing is membership growth, here's a look at other benefits your Chapter might expect to gain from participation:

- Provide solid music education to current and potential members, including proper singing techniques
- Improve participants' physical health and mental stamina
- Expose non-members to the hobby in a non-threatening environment
- Vary your chapter meeting
o Provide a therapeutic outlet for men of common interest in singing
o Community outreach
o Community awareness
o Increasing membership fulfillment, satisfaction

**Your Chapter’s Commitment and Planning for LTS**

Your District VP for Music & Performance is now your "go-to guy" to help you, with the support of Staff's and the Committee's suggestions and support, to achieve the results your chapter seeks. But, fair warning: LTS requires a **lot of commitment!** In this case, "commitment" means garnering the **will, manpower, time and ingenuity** to assure its success, including honest monitoring and "tweaking" along the way and thorough, no-fail follow up (both during and after the six week program!).

The planning process for implementing Learn to Sing begins with a thoughtful and honest dialogue within your chapter concerning the "health" of your chapter **today.** Even if you were not to decide to pursue LTS right away, this exercise alone is **critical** to learning if the environment of your chapter meetings and the attitude, activities and leadership you possess can both attract and retain potential members...with or without the "hook" of free voice lessons! You may wish to enlist the assistance of your District to provide you with some guidance in this regard, perhaps referring others in Chapter Support and Leadership functions in your District (like a Chapter Counselor, if your District has them) to help guide you in the assessment of your "readiness" to embark on Learn To Sing. Your public performance quality alone is not necessarily the only--or even the **best**--indicator of your chapter's "health" and attraction, as it may be perceived by someone who's being introduced to an environment (let alone a skill!) with which he's totally unfamiliar.

**Important Planning Considerations**

**The Chapter as a Whole**

As you examine your Chapter carefully while considering implementing Learn To Sing, you may want to ask yourself these key questions regarding your Chapter itself:

- Do you have an attractive, compelling chapter meeting? Be sure your chapter is an attractive place to be!
- Do you have dynamic leadership?
- Does your chorus already practice what the Learn to Sing program will preach?
- Do your members constantly show up late and leave early?
  - Are they checking their watches every 5 minutes?
  - Do they enjoy themselves?
- Which description (and outcome!) fits YOU?
  - Unhealthy chapter / meeting experience = guests unlikely to join = waste of time and money on the program
Healthy chapter / meeting experience = guests more likely to join = money and time well spent!

- If you don’t know if your chapter is unhealthy or not, ask a respected barbershopper outsider to visit and do a chapter health assessment
- Clean up your website (do you even have a website?)…update it and make it relevant to attracting new folks
- **The purpose of this program is to get people in your door and experience something fun, attractive, and compelling that they have never seen!**

### Human and Financial Resources for Learn To Sing

- Are you a chapter with a dynamic voice instructor already? Will you have to go outside of the chapter to hire someone?
- Do you have someone who will spearhead the whole effort (a "Program Manager") and be able to work successfully with all of the volunteers needed to effectively pull off this program?
- Can your chapter afford this program? Guest books, promotion/advertising, supplies, materials, voice instructor (if applicable), etc. will all cost money.

### Program Timing

- What is the most effective time to perform this program?
- Are you a chorus that participates in contest? If so, how will that affect the timing? If not, how will that affect the timing? What about your annual show?

Of course, we want this program to work for you! But **our experience tells us that if any of these three considerations are neglected or not attended to seriously, Learn To Sing not work for you!** Please be sure your about your honest self-evaluation. If your Chapter environment is not healthy for an enjoyable, growth-oriented experience, concentrate on **fixing that first**, then consider Learn To Sing. If you don't have and are unwilling or unable to seek the outside help to get the human or financial resources--especially a qualified voice instructor--to run this program, don't embark on Learn To Sing until you are in a better position to do that. And if your show or contest commitments are just weighing you down right now...**wait** to consider and implement Learn To Sing until you can dedicate the time required to "do it right."

### Steps in Developing and Executing Learn To Sing

#### General Process

1. **Identify teacher of the Learn to Sing program**
   - Will this teacher come from within the chapter?
   - Will this teacher come from a within your district?
   - Will this teacher be a local music educator with whom the chapter has an established relationship?
   - Will this teacher be someone from International HQ?
Before you decide on WHO, make sure you know what skills they need to possess to effectively execute the program.

- The type of person it takes to run this program is not your average, or even above average, barbershopper.
  - This person has a solid understanding of the voice and the mechanism that accompanies all things related to singing
  - This person is a vocal pedagogue
  - This person can identify and correct, quickly and easily, vocal issues by listening and working with a singer
  - This person IS NOT just a good singer/performer in the barbershop style

2. Identify team leader of this project and committee of volunteers

- Keep in mind there are A LOT of logistics to worry about with this program
- The team leader needs to be someone who will take charge, be a self starter, organized, and a good communicator
- The members of the committee need to possess those same qualities as they will be doing the majority of the “grunt” work

3. Create a budget

- Carefully consider all the potential costs associated with this project, and determine where there may be free or low-cost alternatives as appropriate
  - Advertising
    - Print, radio, TV, direct mail, flyers posted in churches, etc.
  - Printing
  - Creating guest books
    - The guest books should be branded with your chorus logo
    - Should be professional in appearance
    - The guests should be able to take them with them when they leave
  - Supplies
    - Snacks/refreshments for break
    - Printouts / handouts / materials for the course
    - Name tags (and other chorus literature) branded with chorus logo
    - Videos of vocal pedagogy and / or barbershop performances and equipment to play/project those videos to a large group
    - Other supplies you may feel you need
  - PR
    - Facebook, Craigslist, Twitter, Public Service Announcements (PSAs), church flyers/bulletins, etc.
  - Voice Instructor (if brought in from the outside)

4. Identify target audience
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5. Get organized

- Location, location, location
- Demographic
  - Make all considerations BEFORE you commit to spending money on advertising
    - Are you reaching out to a specific age bracket?
    - Are you reaching out to a specific type of professional?
    - Are you reaching out to retired men?

5. Get organized

- Prepare your advertisements / informational flyers / PSA’s to send to the respective media outlets (include chorus logo/brand)
- Prepare form letters / emails for those who show interest (include chorus logo/brand)
- Prepare notebooks or guest books for attendees (include chorus logo/brand), labeled with names of the men who have shown preliminary interest
- Order music the chorus will learn with the guests of the LTS program
- Prepare Welcome Letter for insertion into guest book (include chorus logo/brand)
- Prepare name badges (include chorus logo/brand)...PRE-Printed badges with all men who have shown preliminary interest
- Prepare a spreadsheet of all attendees to confirm important information

A sample "log" of a Learn To Sing program is included later in this Guide

- Prepare your chapter membership on their role(s) in the event
  - Identify riser buddies, door greeters, and all others who will come in direct interaction with the guests…prepare them on what to do and how to do it!
  - Everyone needs to show up early, with a positive attitude, wearing their name badges
- Be sure each week of the Learn to Sing program is clearly laid out…BOTH the LTS program AND your normal chapter meeting night
  - You don’t want to invite the LTS folks to observe your meeting and have it be completely unorganized
- Communicate with those who have shown interest one week ahead of the start date
  - Remind them about the upcoming event…these should be personal emails, not blanket emails to everyone interested
  - Help them learn exactly where you meet
  - Send them a “Welcome Letter” to help them know exactly what to expect when they arrive

6. Execute the Program

- Develop a formula that works for your chapter regarding integration of the LTS guests into your chorus. Here is ONE SAMPLE of a Learn To Sing evening schedule...YOURS may vary, of course!
- 7:00 – Warm ups
- 7:20 – LTS program (either separate from chapter membership or together)
- 7:50 – Learn song incorporating new singing skills
- 8:10 – Learn second song incorporating new singing skills
- 8:30 – Break / Refreshments…AND lots of tag singing with the LTS guests!!
- After break, guests are welcome to leave or stay and observe remainder of evening
  - Follow a specific voice building program
    (This sample is based on the successful Sound of the Rockies effort, but is only meant as a guide. Review the planned voice building with your instructor in advance. More specific lesson guidelines are available from the M&P Committee Chair.)
    - Week 1 – Fundamentals of Breath Control and Posture
    - Week 2 – Fundamentals of Resonance and Use of Soft Palate – 1
    - Week 3 – Fundamentals of Resonance and Use of Soft Palate – 2
    - Week 4 – Fundamentals of Vowels and Diphthongs
    - Week 5 – Fundamentals of Dynamics and Range Expansion
    - Week 6 – Fundamentals of the Barbershop Style

7. Follow up
  - This is an incredibly important key to success of the membership component of this program!
    - Emails alone, while critical, are not good enough…CALL the LTS participants and ask specific questions for specific feedback
    - That said, also follow up with an email or a letter thanking them for their participation
    - Invite the singers to be guests performers with you in a few songs on your next show
    - Let the guests know there is a place for them on the risers on a regular basis…they should want to participate in your compelling chapter meeting!

Additional Program Considerations

Program Length: 6 week programs are most likely the most ideal time frame for most chapters
  - Much longer than that, you begin to repeat yourself
  - Shorter than that, they have a hard time experiencing the culture
Curriculum plans  While all instructors will vary their curriculum slightly, there ARE fundamental elements to be included (see Sound of Rockies sample above for a guideline). Qualified instructors very familiar with our art form will understand this. However, you may still need to get additional help. Specific lesson plans are often considered property of the developer, too. So contact your DVP-M&P for suggestions or the Committee Chair. Over time, as the program matures, LTS curriculum guidelines will be published as part of this Guide.

"Lesson" length  Each weekly LTS session should last no longer than 1.5 hours

- Chapters may continue with their chapter meeting / rehearsal following LTS program, but it should be clearly known to the LTS guests they are free to go or free to stay and observe
- Another option is to do the LTS program on a DIFFERENT night than your normal meeting night

Learning a song!  Learning one song (minimum) or two songs (maximum) would be the way to go along with the LTS / voice building program

- The song(s) must be new to the chorus members as well

Performance opportunity!

- Many groups put an informal "concert" together at the end
- This could be a good way to show their loved ones what they have been doing and in many cases, could get the home support for being gone on a more permanent basis
- In the case of one chapter who has run a successful LTS hybrid already, consider a National Anthem performance for a local sports event to create "buzz" and incentive for both members and guests and to celebrate the LTS experience. The DC Chapter had 6 LTS guests join with them to perform the National Anthem at a Washington Nationals baseball game in 2010! Major or minor league...it's attractive to guys who want to sing. And their families win, too, by seeing Dad or Son or Brother sing in public!

Program timing  The timeframe of when to schedule a LTS program depends on the chapter

- If it is a competitive chapter, those variables will come into play regarding the best time
- If not, then there may be more flexibility in the scheduling

Free or Fee?  There are different schools of thought on levying a charge for the lessons. Ideally, the lessons are FREE to attendees; that's a pretty successful part of the "hook." YOU may determine over time that a very modest fee (for participation in the whole program, not night-by-night) may be desirable. So, consider:

- Free – no money obligation...only time commitment...VERY attractive
- Fee – charging something adds value to the song from an outsider’s perspective
**Bottom line investment** Most of the costs will come from production, advertising/PR, refreshments (if provided) and music…other costs might include hiring an outside educator to lead the sessions, if the chapter cannot provide that resource internally. **Costs of the program can vary widely**, and aren't quoted here (and shouldn't be); suffice it to say you may be able to invest as little as $500 or as much as $5000 to run Learn To Sing. It all depends on your goals and resources. It will also be very helpful to examine creative ways to garner free advertising, design services, printing and other support services either free or at low cost through your chapter members, families and contacts. In addition, you may be eligible for **grant funding** from governments or organizations which are interested in funding cultural community outreach programs!

**Postscript: SHARE your experience!**

Your Music & Performance Committee, your DVP and Nashville Staff really do want to know how your Learn To Sing program goes! Your input following an initial event can not only help you to establish "lessons learned" for next time you might try it, but can also benefit countless other chapters who might be considering launching LTS. This Guide will be upgraded to become a more "interactive" web-based document in the near future, complete with the ability for YOU to input your comments for us to review and construct helpful hints for inclusion in the Guide in the future.

**Document Examples and Resources**

**Enriching your chapter environment**

Consider organizing or participating in a Compellingly Attractive Chapter Meetings program (CACM). More information is available in the Jan-Feb 2011 Harmonizer.

**Learn To Sing Welcome Letter and Announcements (samples)**

*From the Lansdale, PA Chapter:*
Free Singing Lessons Offered
by
The North Pennsmen Barbershop Chorus.
Space is Limited    Register Now

- Free singing lessons on six consecutive Tuesday nights
- Starts March 9 and ends April 13
- Lessons begin at 6:45 and run through until 8:30 PM
- Central Schwenkfelder Church, Worcester PA (Rt. 363, 1/2 mile east of Rt. 73)

Each lesson will provide 45 minutes of instruction on the basics of singing. After that, you will have more fun on the risers learning some songs with the North Pennsmen. All the necessary materials will be provided free of charge. You do not have to read music to enjoy this course. If you can sing in the shower or along with a radio or can carry a tune, this is for you.

These singing lessons will be presented by Anne Bureau, Director of the North Pennsmen who is an International Gold Medalist with Harmony Inc. and a certified Music Judge and by Ig Jakovac, President of the North Pennsmen and an International Qualified Certified Singing Judge with the Barbershop Harmony Society.

The Art of A Cappella Singing and the Barbershop Style

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<th>Schedule</th>
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<td>Week 1 March 9</td>
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<td>Week 6 April 13</td>
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The singing lessons will be presented in a warm friendly atmosphere appropriate both to beginners and to experienced singers who want to review the fundamentals of vocal production. Two barbershop harmony songs will be taught to participants as part of the course instruction.

Refreshments will be served and free gifts will be offered. Best of all, with successful completion of the course you will be invited to sing the songs you learned on stage with the award winning North Pennsmen Barbershop Chorus in their Spring Show presented on Saturday April 24 at the Branch Creek Community Church in Harleysville.

Registration for the course is limited and will be offered on a first come, first served basis. To register for the course, fill out our online registration (Ready Set Sing) at www.NorthPennsmen.org or call David Baraff 610 213-3372 right away to save your place in the class.

P.O. Box 1401, Lansdale PA 19446-0755
From the Sound of the Rockies, Denver Mile High Chapter:

Mr. Prospective Guest
123 Main Street
Denver, CO 80102

Dear Guest,

The Sound of the Rockies chorus is looking forward to welcoming you to Ready, Set, Sing! This will be an instructive and enjoyable 6-week program in vocal singing techniques that will be sure to help singers of all experience levels. It will be led by our musical director Darin Drown along with assistant director and baritone section leader Matt Swann. The format for our program may be found on our website at www.soundoftherockies.com/sing.

The class will be held at the chorus rehearsal location which is Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church, 7691 South University Boulevard, Centennial, CO. The church is approximately one block south of Dry Creek on the west side of University. Classes begin at 7:00 PM on Thursday, October 15th, 2009. Please plan to arrive by approximately 6:45 PM so that we may sign you in and provide you with a name tag. If you find yourself running a few minutes late for some reason, don’t worry! Someone will be available to greet you even after things get started.

The dress for the evening is casual, although some men will come to the meeting directly from work so you are likely to see all manner of attire. Feel free to wear comfortable clothing and comfortable shoes since we stand most of the time we are singing. We will have some complimentary bottles of water available for you to keep hydrated during the evening, or feel free to bring a bottle of water with you.

The Sound of the Rockies chorus prides itself in being a friendly and engaging group of men. We are looking forward to meeting you and trust that you will have a superb evening of singing and enjoyment. If you have any last minute questions or would like for us to try to arrange a ride for you to the meeting please do not hesitate to contact us at 303-993-3501 or via email at sing@soundoftherockies.com

In harmony,
Keith Kauffman

Sample Guest Roster and Tracking Info
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