



PHOTOS: JIM ERNSBERGER



How your chapter can start building a youth program

In February of this year, the Masters of Harmony held its fifth annual "Young Men's Barbershop Harmony Festival." More than 200 young men from senior and junior high schools throughout the greater Los Angeles area attended the festival. This unique musical event consisted of a morning and afternoon clinic and rehearsal, followed by an evening public performance with the Masters of Harmony and several guest quartets, including **Men-so Forte** from Cal Poly University in San Luis Obispo; **OC Times**; and **Hi-Fidelity**.

The event was enthusiastically cosponsored and supported by the Southern California Vocal Association, a professional organization of choral music teachers. For the second year, the SCVA leadership decided to abandon its traditional "Young Men's Clinic" which had been poorly attended, and embraced

our festival as the **official young men's choral event** in its place. This represents a major acceptance by the choral music education community of the barbershop style as a viable musical art form.

All of the festival participants were given sheet music and part-predominant learning tapes for six songs about four weeks prior to the event. The young men eagerly learned the music on their own, and they were all very prepared with notes and words. In the weeks leading up to the festival, many of the choral music teachers were impressed with how quickly and easily their singers were learning the music. Not surprisingly, we found that the young men actually enjoyed singing barbershop music, and that the fellowship and camaraderie that comes from singing barbershop had a positive effect on the young men.

This year's event had the largest number of singers ever, and the overall quality and musicianship of the singers were significantly better. This is primarily due

to the increased awareness from choral music educators that this event is targeted at those singers who really want to work hard at producing a high-quality musical product. About 16 music educators accompanied their singers to the all-day event. Several more choral directors were unable to participate all day, but joined us for the evening performance.

At the end of the show, the entire audience rose to their feet and demonstrated their approval and appreciation for the gift of music that we shared with those young men. We heard music educators say this was the finest musical experience their singers ever had. Parents and teachers reported that the boys continued singing all the way home that night, and that several new quartets have been formed at many of the schools.

Our festival has become recognized as one of the top Youth In Harmony programs throughout the Barbershop Harmony Society. As a result of our

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successful efforts and contributions, a similar set of Young Women In Harmony festivals sponsored by local chapters of Sweet Adelines International (Regions 11 and 21) are already being planned for early 2006, including a Los Angeles area festival with the Harborlites Chorus, the 2004-2005 International Chorus Champion. The Masters of Harmony and the Harborlites are proud to be leaders in the cause of encouraging choral music education in our schools and our communities.

Our Formula For Success

It has taken many years of planning and experience to refine our festival format, but we learned some very important lessons about how to organize and conduct a massive choral festival. First, recognize that we didn't just decide one day to do this and it all magically happened. It's also important to realize that the needs of choral music educators in your area may be different from those in Southern California, so be sure to discuss and evaluate your plans with the music teachers before you embark on anything as ambitious as our festival format. In our case, a one-day format was preferred to an entire weekend.

1. **Identify a date that does not conflict** with other school activities, such as semester breaks, final exams, choral music educator conventions and festivals, major holidays, college entrance testing dates, proms, etc.
2. **Select a venue that is centrally located** and that has a stage that is large enough to accommodate the number of singers. The venue should have separate rooms available for section rehearsals and meals.
3. Arrange for several **guest directors and clinicians**, rather than relying on only one person to run the entire musical program. You never know when a last-minute cancellation may occur, so it's better to be over-prepared.
4. Arrange for one or two **high-quality quartets** to serve as section leaders, coaches and role models throughout the day, as well as perform on the evening show. If possible, these quartets should be comprised of younger adults, so they can more readily relate to the young men. However, quality is more important than youth.
5. **Allow plenty of time** in advance of

the event to select, order and distribute sheet music. Check with the choral music teachers to see if part-dominant learning tapes or CDs would be helpful.

6. Arrange for a sufficient number of **adult chaperones to help with logistics** and chaperoning. A ratio of one adult for every 10 students is a good starting number, but confirm that number with the choral music teachers. (We invite our entire chorus to serve; about a third of them actually do.)
7. **Send all materials and communications to the choral music teacher**—not directly to the students. This helps to keep the music teacher informed and involved, and reduces the number of separate packages of materials that you need to send.
8. Provide an opportunity to **meet separately with the choral music teachers**, to help educate them about the style and allow them to share some of their experiences with their colleagues. Also provide them with an opportunity to get involved with some aspect of the festival, rather than just having them passively observing all day. We teach two simple songs in four-part harmony (such as "Sweet Rosie O'Grady" and "In the Good Old



Success playbook

Where	Orange County, California
Players	Masters of Harmony, Men-so Forte, OC Times, Hi-Fidelity
Clinicians	Mark Freedkin, Rick Spencer
Singers	240 high school singers
Fans	Hundreds of audience members
Big moment	Combined chorus of 240 kids plus 120 Masters of Harmony plus quartets. A show stopper!





- Summer Time”) to the adult choral directors and have them perform for the students (often to much hilarity).
9. It is important to **keep the men focused on the business of the day**, and confine them to the rehearsal and performance area. Be sure to provide on-site lunch and dinner, rather than allowing the young men to find their own meals. In our case, we arranged for 650 roast beef sandwiches from a local Arby’s restaurant, chips and soft drinks for lunch, and 75 large pepperoni pizzas and soft drinks for dinner.
 10. If possible, **arrange for some kind of uniform** for the evening public performance. We asked the students to bring a long-sleeved white shirt (tuxedo shirt if possible), black trousers, black socks and black shoes. We provided them with red or blue bow ties and cummerbunds, which had to be returned at the end of the evening show. In preparation for distributing those items, we bagged bow ties and cummerbunds based on the number of singers from each school and had one representative from each school (such as a teacher or parent) be responsible for distributing and collecting those items before and after the performance. We also made it clear that the school would be billed for any missing items.
 11. For the evening performance, **have the young men perform first**, so they can watch the rest of the show from the seats in the auditorium. Then have each adult quartet perform a 20-30 minute set. Encourage the guest quartets to interact

with the audience (especially the young men), rather than just performing for them. In our case, the Masters of Harmony also performed a set, and then all performers returned to the stage for a finale. We sang Joe Liles’ arrangement of “Fun In Just One Lifetime,” with the young men singing the first chorus and the MOH singing the second verse. We also included “I Have A Song To Sing” sung by the guest quartets, and then all performers (more than 300 singers) sang together at the same time.

12. While the young men are returning to the stage, be sure to **acknowledge the choral music teachers** for all their hard work and sharing the gift of music with our sons and daughters. In addition, be sure to thank the parents for encouraging their sons to participate in choral music.

But what if my chapter is just getting started?

Obviously, a festival like ours is not something that you can just jump into without first laying a solid foundation. It can take several years to develop and nurture the relationships with choral music teachers. In addition, many chapters may not have the resources and range of musical talent needed to support such a large endeavor.

In all cases, it’s vitally important to identify the needs of the choral music teacher, and match those needs with what your chapter has to offer. It is not about getting their students to sing barbershop (at least, not immediately).

Here are some simple steps that you and your chapter can do to begin build-

ing a youth program with your local schools:

1. **Find out which schools** in your area have a choral music program by calling the school office. Then find out when they will have their next concert, and attend it. At the end of the concert, find the choral music teacher, introduce yourself as a member of the local Barbershop Harmony Chapter, and tell him or her how much you enjoyed the concert. A few days later, send a check for whatever your chapter can afford to the choral music teacher with a cover letter (on Society stationery) indicating that you attended their recent concert, that you appreciate all the good work he or she does to promote choral music education, and that they are to use the enclosed donation for anything they need. They should be encouraged to call if there is anything else they might need in the future. Be sure to include your name and phone number.
 2. **Invite a local school ensemble** to perform on your chapter’s annual show, and allow them to sell as many tickets as they can, with them keeping **all** of the proceeds. This helps them with their fund-raising, and brings the fathers, uncles and grandfathers of the students to see your show—what a great vehicle for recruiting new members! As a side benefit, it also helps you to fill the auditorium for your show.
 3. Send one or more men from your chapter to COTS and **attend the Youth Activities class**.
 4. **Sponsor one or more young men** who wish to attend a Harmony Explosion Camp, and offer to help them with transportation or anything else they might need.
 5. **Sponsor a choral music teacher** to attend Harmony University or any of the regional weekend schools.
- Whatever you do, be patient. It can take a long time to build credibility and a relationship with the choral music teachers. Keep in mind that your efforts must appear be anything but altruistic (“*it’s all about the students*”), and that there are no strings attached to your willingness to support their music program. ■

