

The background of the cover is an abstract, high-contrast image. It features a complex, organic pattern of bright blue and white lines and shapes against a dark blue background. The pattern resembles a microscopic view of cells or a network of glowing fibers. The overall effect is dynamic and artistic.

# Guidebook for Performing Quartets

Walt Lammert, Editor

# Contents

FOREWORD .....	4
OVERVIEW .....	5
THE QUARTET .....	6
FINDING AND QUALIFYING MEMBERS .....	6
ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS .....	7
LEGAL ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES .....	9
QUARTET AGREEMENT .....	10
RECOMMENDATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED .....	13
MUSIC .....	14
PLANNING THE REPERTOIRE .....	14
Resources .....	15
SELECTING THE MUSIC .....	15
Resources .....	17
RECOMMENDATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED .....	18
REHEARSING .....	19
SCHEDULING AND STRUCTURING REHEARSALS .....	19
INTERNAL COACHING .....	22
EXTERNAL COACHING .....	23
PERSONAL PRACTICE AND LEARNING .....	24
Resources .....	25
RECOMMENDATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED .....	25
MARKETING .....	27
BUILDING A PRESS KIT .....	27
Resources .....	28
GETTING GIGS .....	28
Resources .....	30
WEBSITES AND SOCIAL MEDIA .....	30
Resources .....	32
RECORDING A CD OR DEMO VIDEO .....	32
Resources .....	34
RECOMMENDATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED .....	34
PERFORMING .....	36

BOOKING GIGS .....	36
BUILDING A SET LIST .....	41
Resources .....	42
PERFORMANCE GUIDELINES .....	43
THE VISUAL IMAGE .....	44
Resources .....	45
LIVE SOUND.....	46
Resources .....	47
RECOMMENDATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED .....	47
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	51

Revised 4 29 22

## FOREWORD

A success story that exemplifies the theme of this guidebook is that of the **Rip-Chords** quartet of the Central States District. They were the oldest registered, functioning performing quartet in the entire Barbershop Harmony Society when they hung up their pitch pipe in 2016. After 54 years of chartered airplane rides, rehearsals, two recorded albums and many, many performances they decided that they just couldn't continue entertaining any longer.



**Rip-Chords Quartet**

The quartet entertained thousands at clubs, businesses, churches, and other engagements in Kansas, Colorado, Missouri, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Nebraska, Iowa, and Chicago. The Rip-Chords would play the Knife and Fork Club circuit, a dinner/lecture series held in different towns in the area. The quartet was also featured at the Branson Music Festival in Missouri, and appeared on ABC Television's Good Morning America. The Rip-Chords performed at many nursing homes and serenaded many 100-year-olds at their birthday parties. Individuals would call-in on KTWU (PBS) Television and bid on the Rip-Chords to perform at social gatherings, weddings, or anniversaries.

Basically any time someone needed entertainment, they would perform a 20-30 minute show. They kept busy, performing 30-40 shows per year. Their repertoire included Broadway, pop, patriotic, and religious songs. The quartet's last performance was at a fundraiser to help citizens of Topeka Kansas.

*"There's a certain amount of emptiness in our lives because of seeing each other at least once a week and performing for both young and old and in between. There is sorrow and grief, and also joy and pleasure. What wonderful friends we've become over the years."*

The quartet's four members when they disbanded were Tom Knoebber, bass; Herschel Stroud, lead; Doug Exline, tenor; and Bill Hamm, baritone. During its lifetime the quartet had different members coming and going, but always survived because of the core belief in entertaining audiences. The first members were Greg Lyne (who later became Director of Music Education for the Barbershop Harmony Society), Jerry Goacher, Knoebber, and Stroud. During their 54 years of singing, other members have included Bob Fox and Don Newman.

# OVERVIEW

Becoming a member of a quartet can be one of the most satisfying experiences a Barbershopper can have. It is an opportunity to share the purest form of singing barbershop harmony with three other friends. You can develop your independence as a part singer, feel the joy of ringing a chord and touching the hearts of your audience, and experience the personal satisfaction of an audience rising to its feet in appreciation of your quartet's efforts. There are only a few types of performing that let you experience the combined thrill of quartet singing – individual singing skill, ensemble singing skill, stage performance, emotional commitment, camaraderie, and audience rapport.

The purpose of this guidebook is to provide resources that will encourage and assist in the formation and continued growth of quartets in the Barbershop Harmony Society. Additional quartets performing for the public will result in increased and higher quality exposure to our art form and sharing of the joy of barbershop a cappella singing with more audiences. In addition, experience as a quartet member singing in public directly leads to better singing and performance in a chorus.

Although barbershop choruses also perform for the public, quartets provide a unique environment for Barbershoppers to grow in their singing and performing ability. In a quartet, you learn to listen, blend, and match the other members of the group. You tend to learn songs better because you have no others to lean on. You not only have to carry your part, but you must sell the song – you cannot rely on others. Confidence is gained as experiences grow. Individual coaching, primarily with the other quartet members, is given and received. Your voice improves with practice and frequent singing which helps to improve the overall quartet experience.

With that in mind, this guidebook is here to help you produce performances for audiences that move them emotionally. Before we get there, we need to form the quartet, select music, rehearse, market ourselves, book performances, and plan our performance. That's what this guidebook is for – to provide the guidance, tools, and lessons learned from other successful Barbershop Harmony Society quartets who are performing. This guidebook is here to make sure you have the knowledge you need to start and grow a successful performing quartet.

This guidebook is the result of a Barbershop Harmony Society-sponsored project to encourage and assist in the formation and continued growth of quartets. Society registered and non-registered quartets were polled for preliminary information on their performances, repertoire and time in existence. Quartets with pertinent experience were then contacted to provide detailed information on their processes, procedures, guidelines, recommendations and lessons learned which have been included in this document. Many thanks to those contributors to this guidebook, who are listed in the Acknowledgements section.

# THE QUARTET

## FINDING AND QUALIFYING MEMBERS

Potential members for your quartet can be found in the local barbershop chorus, from Singing Valentines quartets, at novice quartet competitions, and in church or community choirs. Many quartets have been formed by four members getting together and singing tags after chorus practice.



If you want to join or form a quartet, let local chorus directors know what you are doing. Contact other local quartets and let local community choruses or other groups know as well. Talk to district and division officers as they can help you network. [Quartet Matchup](#) and [Find a Quartet](#) are two online resources for those looking for members and those looking to join a quartet.

If you're joining a quartet or seeking quartet members, be prepared to thoroughly discuss needs, desires, priorities, direction, and expectations, including quartet vision (social versus performance versus contest, etc.). There is more about this in the Quartet Agreement section below.

Over time, many quartets will find a need to replace a member due to illness, retirement, job relocation, loss of interest, etc. Replacements for these members can be found from these same sources as original members. When replacing a member, all existing members should have veto power in selecting the replacement.

An audition is helpful in determining singing skill for members forming a new group as well as for replacement members. Although most quartets may just focus on blend, other areas will help the quartet identify strengths and weaknesses of each member which are important to the continued growth and capability of the quartet.

1. A cappella is demanding, and quartet members need to be able to sing complex passages in tune and stand on their own without being thrown off by other singers. Some good tests for the prospective member are:
  - Playing complex patterns or intervals and have the prospect sing them back
  - Repeating difficult rhythms
  - Matching vowel sounds and vocal patterns
  - Singing the same musical phrase starting on different pitches
2. Having the ear to effectively listen to other singers or to blend their part in is very important in close-harmony singing. Some good tests are to play three notes on a keyboard (start with simple chords, and work your way to more complex combinations of notes) and have the singer listen and sing the missing one.
3. Have the singer do a little sight reading for you by simply looking at the music. If this kind of sight singing doesn't work, you can move on to see how quickly the person can learn by ear by playing or singing the part once, and then having him sing it back.
4. Sing a Barberpolecat or other simple song with the new member singing their part and the other quartet members singing their parts. Listen for the ability to blend in with your voices, compensating pitch, timbre, and volume to match. Also make sure this person can maintain their part and won't drift onto one of the other parts.

## ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS

A barbershop group is a combination of three things: a creative ensemble, a business, and a family. There are important things you should take into consideration when forming a quartet to address each of these three areas. Certainly picking members who can sing their parts independently is a priority. However, the two other important things to remember are finding three friends who share similar goals with you, and who enjoy sharing the many hours together of rehearsals and performances throughout your tenure as a quartet.

*"We have performed for some large groups in notable venues but the most fun is for the small, 20-30 people groups that we perform for at birthday parties, anniversaries, or private Christmas parties. Being able to see the expressions on their faces and play to the audience is what we find most enjoyable and rewarding. And we can find so many opportunities to do these types of performances."* – **Smooth Brew**

Because of the intimacy involved in being part of a barbershop quartet, extra tolerance and understanding are often needed. There will be times when nerves become frayed and tempers flare. When this occurs, it should be quickly addressed, resolved, forgotten, apologies made and good relations (and good singing) resumed.



Also consider one more role: the part your family plays in your quartet career. As we all know, your quartet and other barbershop activities require time. If you have a spouse and/or children, they are surely making sacrifices for your quartetting. Be aware of this fact and let them know how much you appreciate what they are doing to support you in your barbershopping. You may wish to include them in barbershop activities that they would enjoy. Family resistance to quartetting can cause complications. These are best dealt with as diplomatically as possible. If your family members do support your quartet involvement, you are doubly blessed.

Celebrate your achievements and successes. Enjoy each other's company when together. Share your music with those less fortunate than you. A cappella music has a strange, ineffable ability to strike a deep chord within people (those who sing as well as those who listen), and you should never forget how great this feels, and how wonderful it is to share with others.

As your quartet learns and gains experience, its workings will become more complex. There are many duties to be performed in a quartet, which, if sensibly distributed, make the administrative tasks much easier. Every group is different, as the individuals in that group combine to make up a unique dynamic. However, all groups are common in that they need a division of responsibility and leadership. Who runs rehearsals? Who takes calls from interested gig opportunities? Who handles the finances? Whether your group will be run as a democracy with shared responsibility or a benevolent dictatorship with one or two people doing all the work behind the scenes, make sure the responsibilities are clearly spelled out and understood by all.

The following is a list of possible roles to be filled by the quartet personnel: contact person, treasurer, uniform person, music arranger, music librarian, show producer, show spokesperson, marketing person, and live sound/recording person. Be sure to consider what roles your group needs, and even who is appropriate for those roles, before creating and filling those positions. Allow the specific individuals in your group to dictate what roles should exist and who should fill them.

As an example, the quartet **Smooth Brew** has allocated the following roles in the quartet based on interest as well as ability:

- Website and marketing material – build and maintain the web site and Facebook; develop and print business cards, flyers and posters
- Quotes and performance coordination – respond to all quote requests and coordinate with the patron on performance details
- Music learning tracks – put sheet music into Finale to generate learning tracks when learning tracks are not available
- Recording and Live Sound – record rehearsals; develop song snippets for the web site; set up and run the sound equipment for performances as well as work with onsite sound person for venues that provide sound



- Rehearsal admin – develop agenda for rehearsals and provide notes from rehearsals; maintain music library
- Rehearsal leader – lead the warm-up and the performance rehearsal
- Finance – file for necessary tax ID, set up and maintain a bank account; process patron payment invoices and payments; distribute shared profits; take care of income tax filing issues

## LEGAL ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES

The type of formal organization will depend on your quartet's degree of singing activity, among other factors. Types of organizations to consider are sole proprietorship, partnership, or Limited Liability Corporation. Many quartets start out with setting up a sole proprietorship with tax ID number. A tax ID number is helpful as an IRS form W-9 (certification of taxpayer identification number) is required by many institutions in order to process payment. An Assumed Name is required for the tax ID application. You will need to file for an Assumed Name Certificate (also referred to as filing a DBA, i.e., Doing Business As) with the local county clerk at the county courthouse of your quartet mailing address. Call or visit your county clerk for the appropriate forms.

As the quartet grows, a more formal organization can be considered and structured. Should you decide on some form of formal organization, you will need advice from a tax professional.

As a performing quartet, you will be receiving and disbursing monies. These monies are taxable income on your federal income tax return according to Internal Revenue Service regulations. The quartet should set up an appropriate bank account and record keeping system to handle this matter. If an Assumed Name has been filed, the bank account should be opened for the Assumed Name.

*"Our quartet has been together for 22 years and has not only provided many people with good entertainment and great times, but has created a family of our wives who have lived and passed, laughed and cried, enjoyed and loved, travelled with, partied with, entertained with, and most of all loved the sounds of barbershop harmonies while singing and performing."* – **Upscale**

The simplest approach is to set up your record-keeping system to handle a cash-basis accounting method. This approach identifies only income and expense items. Income items could include performance fees, travel expense fees, recording income and miscellaneous income. Fixed assets—for example, sound equipment—are considered an expense in the year the disbursement is made. For more specific advice, contact an accountant or local IRS office.

Remember that all monies you receive directly or indirectly are reportable as income to the quartet. Of course, the expenses the quartet incurs are reductions to that income. Any net

profit or loss needs to be accounted for through the appropriate income tax channels. For more specific advice, contact an accountant or local IRS office.

In addition to a bank account, a Paypal account in the name of the quartet is also helpful as some customers prefer paying online with a credit card rather than by check.

The quartet can deduct expenses from the income received. Expense items could include:

- Uniforms—both the purchase and maintenance of uniforms
- Music—purchasing sheet music, arranging and coaching fees
- Travel—the cost of arriving at a singing location and returning home, any overnight lodging and meals that are necessary for you to be in this location for the period of time your services are required
- Advertising—any advertising or promotion, whether done through district publications, The Harmonizer or other media. This includes purchase of quartet business cards
- Schools and clinics—the cost of attending clinics or coaching schools either as a quartet or individually
- Office—registration fees, postage, telephone, stationery, mailing or similar expenses
- Props/Scenery—expense for materials associated with the enhancement of the quartet performance
- Recordings—expense incurred in production and sale of recordings

Disclaimer – The above information is not legal advice. Always consult your tax advisor or accountant on tax or financial matters.

## QUARTET AGREEMENT

A barbershop a cappella group is a combination of three things: a creative ensemble, a business, and a family. In order to maintain harmony with all three aspects, all quartets should consider some form of agreement that is a consensus between the members.

After a discussion of each individual's personal views, the quartet should attempt to reach a consensus on each of the following areas in the quartet agreement. Each singer should then set aside individual desires and commit to support the consensus for the specified term of the agreement. This approach will permit a framework for the quartet to operate as a unified group and function with a minimum of misunderstanding and miscommunication.

## Sample Quartet Agreement

- Do we all want to sing in a barbershop quartet of some kind?
- If sound were the only consideration, are we satisfied enough to make this group a quartet?
- In what type of quartet are we each interested in singing? Show? Comedy? Fun? Semi-professional? Other, or some combination of the above?
- What are our individual goals for quartetting?
- What kind of quartet image do we want to project?
- How much time do we want to devote to quartetting? Rehearsal? Performance? Combined rehearsal and performance?
- What days and times could we rehearse and/or perform?
- Where can we rehearse that is mutually agreeable?
- How long should our rehearsals be?
- Will our personal commitments (family, church, work, school, social activities, etc.) permit this schedule?
- What level of interest and support do we anticipate and/or desire from our families, spouses and significant others?
- Are we aware of any potential compatibility problems involving quartet members, spouses, families, and significant others?
- Do we want to use a coach (or coaches)? Paid? Unpaid? Reimburse for expenses?
- What kind of coach do we want? Specialist(s)? A single coach?
- How often should we have a coach at rehearsals?
- Should we take individual voice lessons? How long? Reimbursed by quartet or individually financed?
- Can we take constructive criticism?
- What will be our relationship to the Barbershop Harmony Society and to our chapter(s), individually and as a quartet?

- What kind of performances do we want? – Paid, free or expenses only for: Our own chapter show(s)? Other performances of our chapter(s)? Other chapter shows? Charitable organizations / churches? Profit-making organizations?
- How much should we charge for our performances? Flat fee? Expenses plus fee? Expenses only?
- How should we handle our finances? Business Manager? (External or internal?) Quartet checking and/or savings account?
- Financial dissolution – what will the arrangements be if one or more members leave the quartet?
- Who owns the name?
- How are profits paid? (How often and in what format)
- Are departing members responsible for gigs and commitments agreed to before their departure was announced?
- Will everyone be paid equally, or do certain members get more money for executing certain duties?
- How should we select our uniforms/costumes? By mutual consent, or by one individual?
- Uniforms to be used for performance only, or is personal use permitted? Street clothes or stage outfits?
- What should be the split of responsibilities within the quartet? (i.e. contact person, treasurer, uniform person, music arranger, music librarian, show producer, show spokesperson, marketing person, live sound/recording person, and/or others)
- How will disputes within the quartet be settled? One of us? Coach? Another third party? Simple majority?
- Are there any personal traits that may cause problems? Health/drugs? Drinking? Smoking? Profanity/Vulgarity? Religious Beliefs? Temper?
- Do we have any personal hang-ups about the quartet? About each other?
- Can we become friends and show consideration toward one another's needs and problems?
- Will our spouses, families, or significant others be included in our quartet activities and to what extent?

- What will be the length of our commitment to this Agreement before we reopen the discussion to form a new consensus?
- Is there anything else we should discuss that this Agreement does not cover?

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

*“Practice with singers after chorus. Start with chorus songs and get used to holding your own part without a section. Work on locking and ringing, then ask them if they want to be in a quartet with you.” – 3 Handsome Gentlemen*

*“Find four compatible singers. Be very free with constructive criticism of one another and always accept it in good humor. Don’t take yourselves too seriously...but always strive to sing as well as possible.” – Boomerang*

*“Stay in the game, come prepared, learn from each other, and be willing to talk openly with each other about group and individual goals as well as issues of frustration.” – Slice*

*“Our advice would be not to look for ‘gold medalist’ quality singers right now. Find people you can grow and learn with and the rest will come.” – Gimme Four*

*“We have had to replace our baritone three times due to a retirement, health issues, and other interests. It has taken six to eight months of no performances until the new person has learned enough of the repertoire to do performances again. This will happen – just deal with it and don’t fold the quartet.” – Smooth Brew*

*“Do not give up on a quartet too early. It takes about a year for our voices to automatically match well. I have been in quartets where a member quits after less than two months and that is not enough time.” – Sound Encounter*

*“Two chorus members discussed the desire to put together a ‘chorus’ quartet. Initial discussions centered on personnel personalities, perceived commitment to music, a willingness and commitment to work on quartet music, and availability/flexibility. Several names were discussed and contacted with a couple of individuals declining interest initially. (Vocal and ‘part’ flexibility was considered.) We were familiar with the vocal skills of those who eventually joined the quartet. Obviously, before the “official” assembling and naming of the quartet occurred, and after several meetings identifying quartet vision, quartet hopes and desires were clearly understood. (Vision included individual preferences, music, style, etc.)” – Reveliers*

*“Just try it and wait for success to come. It probably took The Four Old Parts a year to establish a blend and to acquire enough repertoire to take our show on the road. But from the beginning we’ve had a great time being together and singing together and learning together. The camaraderie is a big part of the whole thing.” – Four Old Parts*

*“Singing in a quartet greatly enhances choral sound. In a quartet, you learn to listen, blend, and match the remaining components of the group. You tend to learn songs better because you have no others to ‘lean’ on. You not only have to carry your part but you must ‘sell’ the song – you cannot rely on others. Confidence is gained as experiences grow. Individual coaching, primarily with the other quartet members, is given and received. Individual attention can and should be rendered and received. Your ‘tool,’ the voice, improves with practice and frequent singing, helping to improve the chorus experience. Dueting, trioing, individually listening, singing and coaching other members of the quartet all contribute to increased skill sets.” – Reveliers*

*“Start somewhere and find three singers who can sing their parts and are all willing to work hard and contribute to constant improvement. After that, get along with your members. Things change and roll with it. Keep it moving forward and be willing to accept criticism. In fact, welcome it.” – Stay Tuned*

*“Sing with people you enjoy singing with. Sing with your friends and it will always be fun. DO NOT let contest score and placement define you or threaten to break you up. Be open to criticism and implement the advice you can use. Sing wherever you get invited. The weirder it is, the more memorable it is! Attend local and national Harmony College/University events to learn how to keep improving. Don’t be afraid to take a chance if you have a vision.” – ‘Round Midnight*

## MUSIC

### PLANNING THE REPERTOIRE

Your repertoire is your quartet’s performance backpack. In it you should find items you use every day (crowd pleasing favorites), items you only use at specific times of the year (holidays) and items you use for specific events (National Anthems.)



Start planning your repertoire when the quartet is first organized. There are a number of factors to consider in determining what arrangements are to be included in the basic repertoire.

First, what is the goal and personality of the quartet? You should step back and do a little self-assessment to get a big picture sense of your group's talents, abilities, and desires. Most likely your music will be an extension of your personalities, your upbringing, your age, and your music collection. Look for songs that you're good at and play into your strengths.

Second, what are the musical capabilities of the quartet members? An honest evaluation here will help you to determine the degree of difficulty and types of arrangements to be used. Avoid the pitfall of singing an arrangement because you enjoyed hearing an international champion quartet perform it. Consider, rather, what your quartet can best handle.

Third, plan to present a well-balanced program. Types of songs to consider are: uptunes, easy-beat, ballads, novelty, comedy, sacred, patriotic, and inspirational. The average quartet repertoire might consist of 15 to 25 numbers. From this total, the quartet can build variety shows, holiday shows, and special occasion shows.

## Resources

[Expert tips for developing entertaining repertoire – Harmonizer November/December 2016, pp.8-9](#)

[Perform Songs That Attract bigger audiences – Harmonizer March/April 2016, pp. 8-9](#)

## SELECTING THE MUSIC

Three questions are frequently asked in relation to song selection. One, where do quartets get arrangements? Two, what are some of the guidelines for choosing songs? Three, how much music do we need?

The [Barbershop Harmony Society Marketplace](#) is the best single source for good, singable arrangements. A large number of excellent arrangements are available for purchase and some have learning tracks available as well. Anyone can download songs and tags in the [Free 'n' Easy series](#) and you may make as many copies of these as you wish.

Effective January 2018 the Barbershop Harmony Society has begun moving all of the music publications toward a published-only model. In accordance with music publishing best practices, all commercially available arrangements must have a formal print license from the publisher of the music. "Unpublished" category arrangements controlled by the publisher Hal Leonard have been vetted with some moving to the "Published" category after obtaining a formal print license and the remainder have been moved to a "Special Order" category. If a quartet wants a specific arrangement that is not available for sale as a published arrangement, they will be able to identify it on the publicly viewable Special Order spreadsheet and request clearance by securing a custom license for use of the arrangement.

For those titles controlled/administered by publishers other than Hal Leonard, those titles will continue to be made available as "Unpublished." However, the Barbershop Harmony Society



will be eventually moving toward a published-only model for all titles available through the [marketplace](#).

Other sources of music include:

- There is an increasing number of talented barbershop style arrangers with arrangements for sale. A [list of arrangers](#) is maintained on the Barbershop Harmony Society website and there are a number of other private arrangers who provide suitable arrangements as well.
- The CASA arrangement library – free arrangements are available to members based on membership level. There's a database of original and public domain songs in various styles that can help you get started. The majority of the CASA arrangements are not in TTBB voicing or in the barbershop style, but they are worth checking out.
- There are a number of other outlets for a cappella sheet music. [Contemporary A Cappella Publishing](#), [Hal Leonard](#), and [Primarily A Cappella/Singers.com](#) are several of the better ones.

**Every performer must have a legally-purchased copy of music.** It is illegal to learn an arrangement in any manner that would be in lieu of purchase of the music. The most reliable sources for legal arrangements are the Barbershop Harmony Society Music Catalog of arrangements and reputable music stores and catalogs. Purchase one copy for every member of the quartet.

It's important that your quartet understand and abide by [copyright law](#). The penalties can be severe: hundreds of thousands of dollars in penalties can be assessed on individuals who willingly make illegal arrangements, copies of arrangements, and more. For more information about copyright guidelines, please refer to the resources section below.

*"Getting four friends together to blend in harmony on a regular basis is an amazing feat! If you can do it, by all means do it! The experience is indescribable!" – EKG*

If you plan to create an arrangement (a derivative work) of an existing copyrighted work, you may do so only WITH PERMISSION from the copyright holder. The Barbershop Harmony Society provides a [service](#) for securing such permission.

Here are some guidelines for picking songs for your repertoire. Keep in mind that entertainment value should weigh more heavily on selecting a song than anything else.

- Lyrics – G-rated, always.
- Age of audience – Try to have a variety of eras in your show. It will allow you to connect with a wider audience.

- Familiarity – Audiences love the familiar. You can see the crowd have the “oh, yeah” moment when their faces say, “I know that song.”
- Difficulty – Difficult does not always equal better. Consider each song as an investment. You might love an A-level quartet arrangement, but if it requires a refresh at every rehearsal to be in the set list, it isn’t worth it. Consider an easier arrangement of the same song – it will get the same crowd response and take much less rehearsal time.
- Tempo – Remember the tempo. Too much of anything gets boring. You’ll need some exciting uptunes, some medium-speed swing or groove songs, and ballads. That way, you can provide variety and flow to your set.

How much music do you need? If you plan to do community engagements for hire, you’ll need at least a 20–30 minute set which is about 7 – 10 songs. Ten songs, plus applause and some talking with the audience, will yield a good package to present for a 30 minute show. There are, however, many people who would like 45–60 minutes of music, and then you’d have to double that number. However, it is not a good idea to try to expand your repertoire too fast. You will likely wish to learn a lot of songs, but don’t sacrifice quality for quantity. Concentrate on singing well what you have already learned.

A few other considerations when selecting songs:

- Any chart can be vetoed by any quartet member for any reason. If singers don’t buy in, they won’t be performing at their best.
- Make sure that songs are both appealing and entertaining to non-barbershop audiences and barbershop audiences. This includes avoiding comedy that is founded around barbershop inside jokes as well as music that perpetuates negative barbershop stereotypes.
- Entertainment value should weigh more heavily on selecting a song than anything else.

## Resources

[Who is Making Arrangements](#)  
[BHS Sheet Music Catalog](#)  
[BHS Free ‘n’ Easy Series](#)  
[Contemporary A Cappella Publishing](#)  
[Primary A Cappella/Singers.com](#)  
[Contemporary A Cappella Society](#)  
[Copyright basics for Barbershoppers](#)  
[Frequently Asked Copyright Questions by Barbershoppers](#)  
[Arrangement and Reproduction Request Form](#)

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

*"We try to learn three to five new songs a year and add to our repertoire."* – **3 Handsome Gentleman**

*"Ask the other three what they want to sing. If all three wish to learn a particular new song, we do that when we have time."* – **Habitat 4 Harmony**

*"We choose songs we all like that we can sing reasonably well and that fit into our program. Some songs are picked from chorus repertoire."* – **The Chordmasters**

*"We poll all our members to see how they feel about a given song, and all members are equally empowered to suggest music. We try to decide if the music fits our style and performance criteria."* – **Under the Radar**

*"We have chosen songs that we like but have started working closer to supporting our brand and working with our coaches."* – **The Front Line Quartet**

*"If any one of the four of us can't get behind a particular song, then we won't sing it. We tend to select more up-tempo songs and arrangements that we can see ourselves having fun with."* – **The Newfangled Four**

*"We have developed our own style and stay true to it in selecting music, writing parodies, building a show package, and putting it on stage. We know our personality, we know what is expected of us, and we try very hard to deliver and not disappoint."* – **Razzmatazz**

*"For the most part we choose songs that are well-known. We can see that familiar songs are most popular when we do gigs. Oftentimes we see audience members singing along."* – **Boomerang**

*"We try to develop repertoire that best fits our identity and sound. Our quartet tends to sing higher-voiced songs, so that is always a consideration. Singing songs the audience loves is an important part of the songs we choose for shows."* – **Gimme Four**

*"Vocality has 4 types of repertoire: Contest, Gospel, Christmas, and Shows. We look for unique arrangements and tunes that a broad audience (not just barbershoppers) will recognize."* – **Vocality**

*“We use Barbershop Harmony Society unpublished and published sheet music almost exclusively. We have found the Society learning tracks (for those songs that have them) to be invaluable, but have also developed our own learning tracks using Finale for those that don’t.” – Smooth Brew*

*“Have a repertoire that has a broad selection of music, including doo-wop, gospel, country & western, patriotic, Broadway, and classic barbershop.” – 5th Avenue Quartet*

*“We do music that is recognizable by our audiences. We don’t sing songs or arrangements that you have to do vocal gymnastics to sing. We do songs that are about the song and NOT the arrangement or us!” – Four in Accord*

## REHEARSING

### SCHEDULING AND STRUCTURING REHEARSALS

Rehearsals are one of the most important elements of quartetting. Ideally, rehearsals are rewarding and fun, where camaraderie and togetherness can flourish. Setting aside time for rehearsals should be a priority for all quartets. Regular practice sessions are necessary to polish a performance, learn new material, and exchange ideas among quartet members. It is important to discuss as a quartet what you want to accomplish during your rehearsals. With this understanding, you can work together to improve your presentation.



There are many different ways a quartet can rehearse. Your quartet should develop the format that works best for you. Here are some general guidelines you may find helpful.

- Discussions of the day’s tribulations, excessive joking and the like should be kept to a minimum. The discipline required for you to sing well as a quartet will be easier if you remember this. Plan to leave some time for socializing, though, when your rehearsal period is over.

- Each member of your quartet has different strengths and weaknesses, so approach your rehearsals with patience. Even though rehearsals are serious business, maintaining a sense of humor will help things go more smoothly. Make sure your suggestions to each other are musical in nature, avoiding personal criticism. On the other hand, you cannot spend the whole time walking on eggshells, either. Over sensitivity to criticism is not conducive to individual or quartet improvement. Work to balance criticism and encouragement.
- You practice in order to learn to do well as many things as you can. Since whatever you do repeatedly becomes a habit, practice doing it right! Errors can become habits as well. Discipline yourself to make as few of them as possible. Remember, there is no good time to sing poorly. Strive to sing the very best you can at all times.
- The number of rehearsals you have and their length will likely correlate strongly with the quality and success of your group. If you meet once a week for two hours you'll likely take a long time before you have an hour's worth of music and a smooth show. If you can afford the time, twice or three times a week is exponentially better than once a week, because the more often you rehearse, the less you forget between meetings. Also, a performance is often as efficient as a rehearsal in solidifying music and making your group a better performing unit, so as time progresses you may lose a rehearsal in lieu of a gig.
- Save time by doing business via email, text, or web-based tools for reliable distribution of gig information. You'd be surprised how much time you can spend just dictating and clarifying gig information and directions.
- Save all business for the end of each rehearsal. There isn't a group in existence that won't begin to eat into their singing time if discussions are placed before singing. In fact, for many groups, this is a big problem. Build a good habit of music first, then discussion. Consider having separate music-only rehearsals and business-only meetings.
- Develop a schedule for learning songs and work towards that goal.
- Maintain a spreadsheet of repertoire songs followed by new, and track what is rehearsed.
- Keep an open rehearsal and encourage each member to speak up and provide feedback. A quartet is four members, and each has a right to an opinion.
- Don't make your rehearsals an endurance test. Especially at the beginning, use common sense and avoid unnecessary strain on your voices. As you progress and develop the fundamentals of good singing, you will find that you can comfortably rehearse for longer periods of time.

It is helpful to make a rehearsal schedule and follow it. A sample plan might consist of each of the following:

1. Individual Warm-up – Plan to arrive at rehearsal with your voice already warmed up. Perhaps you can do this while driving to practice. If not, make other plans for accomplishing your vocal exercises. In any case, do not waste the group's valuable time on your personal warm-up.
2. Quartet calibration – These are exercises focused on specific areas such as blending, vowel matching, rhythmic syncing, etc. Be careful not to use up too much of the rehearsal time on calibration. If quartet members have done their individual warm-up, then the quartet calibration will quickly get all members mentally and physically ready to rehearse.
3. Polishing repertoire – Next, to help solidify the mood and focus, it's often a good idea to sing through a tune or two you already know well without stopping. Once you get songs to a certain level of preparedness, it's best to get used to singing them all the way through, saving your comments for the end; otherwise, you may find you continue to have problems with the same transitional passages where you find you always stop. In addition, it helps get the group in the mind set of "once you start a tune, you need to focus on it and finish it." Oddly enough, this is difficult for some perfectionists, who crinkle their nose at every tuning issue or wrong note. Full "performance situation" run-throughs will help break this habit, which "telegraphs" errors to the audience through facial expressions.

*"There's really nothing like it. Try to learn and grow, but don't get hung up on trying to win contests. Enjoy the experience. Share the love with your buddies. Have a ball."* – **Fireside Quartet**

Each song goes through two phases (with no clear line between the two): the learning and the polishing. Be sure some time in each rehearsal is spent on each. That is, spend some time learning new songs, but be sure to take some time to run songs that you already know and make comments or work on difficult sections to improve them.

- New Songs – Learning music is an important aspect of any rehearsal. Some groups can sight read well, while others prefer to have someone play the parts on a keyboard one by one. Still others learn by ear, relying on having their parts sung to them or through part-predominant learning tracks and memorizing them before rehearsal. Take the time initially to find out how each individual learns best, and come up with a system that will maximize your in-rehearsal productivity.
- Quartet development, critique and planning – An important principle to apply to your musical learning is the psychological concept of "transfer." In quartetting terms, this means that a good singing practice that you follow in one instance should be followed in another similar instance, without your having to learn it all over again. In learning to sing

well together, you discover many small ways of experiencing success. If each of these aspects has to be relearned in every new situation, you will spend a lot of time at the same level, rather than improving.

As you spend more time together, you'll fall into a comfortable rehearsal pattern that will best suit your group's talent, comfort, and needs.

## INTERNAL COACHING

In the process of internal coaching and improving your barbershop quartet singing, don't concentrate only on correcting mistakes. You should also give attention to what you are doing right. Be sure to give each other praise and positive reinforcement for things that are being done well or, at least, improved upon. Psychological research has shown that positive reinforcement is a far more reliable shaper of behavior than negative reinforcement. Keep your quartet going in the right direction with frequent positive words.

The following guidelines can be used for effective internal coaching for your quartet:

- Singing in duets, with the other two members offering advice, can be beneficial. The duet usually includes your lead. This technique is most helpful for vowel matching and can also improve intonation.
- Trios can be used too, with someone other than the lead listening.
- Pay special attention to duets between the lead and bass. These two parts are the foundation of a barbershop quartet. Some lead/bass combinations hold rehearsals on their own. This can be useful, though it is good to have an outside ear present.
- Singing with the three harmony parts facing the lead can also be beneficial. Greater uniformity in many areas can be attained by the use of this procedure. Among these areas are vowel sounds, facial expression, and precision.
- Facing each other in a square makes it easier to hear. But you should regularly move into your performance formation, so that the lessened sound of facing in the same direction is also comfortable to you.

Your quartet will naturally be concerned with the mechanics of singing, but you also need to spend time reaching agreement on the message contained in each song. Just what is it you are trying to communicate to your audience? How do you intend to do so? Do not assume that you are all automatically thinking alike. In order for your quartet to truly sing songs, attention needs to be paid to this matter. This is also discussed in more detail in The Visual Image section.

*"Quartetting is the most rewarding thing you can do in music. Standing up with four of your best friends and making music is really what it's all about."* – **Yonge Guns**



Spend time interpreting the song visually, bringing energy and vitality to the face and body while singing. Look like a singer and be an actor when you perform. Show your complete involvement and commitment to the music. This takes effort, but the rewards to you and your audience are well worth the investment. The use of mirrors can be quite advantageous for developing the song visually. Hand mirrors reveal a lot about mouth posture and facial expression, enabling the quartet members to better see themselves as the audience might see them. Full-length mirrors can greatly aid your group's visual presentation.

Once you get your music to an acceptable level of preparedness, you should consider recording your songs for feedback. You can all listen to the group as a whole more easily than you can while singing, and may discover opportunities for improvement that weren't as obvious when everyone was focusing on their own part. Regularly using recordings for feedback and analysis will allow you to check intonation, diction, intervals, precision, and balance. Recording can be done as simply as using a smartphone to record with an external Bluetooth speaker for playback. As your quartet progresses, you could consider a handheld recorder or even a 4-track recorder with individual microphones for each member.

As a performance gets closer, sometimes you just need to run your whole set for critique without stopping, complete with logistics such as making your entrance, singing, talking, and exiting. A great thing to do as you near a performance is to videotape a set, watch the video, discuss it, and then run it again. In addition, video recording your group is an excellent way to see how you look when you sing. Look at facial expression, movement, and how the physicality of your group adheres to the music.

It is OK to make a single audio or video recording of a rehearsal or show for archival, educational, or study purposes and to make one back up copy for security.

## EXTERNAL COACHING

You may want to consider bringing in an experienced coach or musical friend to critique and work with your group. An outside opinion is always a good way to gain perspective, and sometimes a detached individual can address issues clearly without the distraction of interpersonal or ego issues getting in the way of the message. An external coach is also helpful in the early stages of a quartet's life when members may not trust that the person doing the internal coaching is knowledgeable about the topic being coached.

The term "coach" can mean a multitude of things. Some coaches are skilled at dissecting a quartet performance and putting it together again as a far-superior production. Some are very good at interpreting a song, either vocally or visually. Others excel in sound production. Of course, many coaches can help a quartet in more than one area.

Coaching a quartet is a tremendous responsibility and is not to be taken lightly. Depending on the methods used, and the effects they have on the individuals involved, new habits are formed, voices are improved or damaged, and lives are changed. Take care to find a coach who serves your quartet's needs. Avoid anyone whose efforts seem counterproductive.

*“The quartet is the heart of the barbershopping experience, both in the music and the fellowship. Whether for casual fun or for serious competition, it’s something every Barbershopper should experience. Not to be missed!” – hmmm*

A coach needs to have knowledge of vocal technique, as well as a grasp of music fundamentals. The coach should understand the purpose and philosophy of barbershopping and must be a person who creates a feeling of confidence. Ideally, a coach is willing to continue ongoing musical education in order to become more effective in the coaching role. Finally, the coach must be willing to devote considerable time and energy to your quartet.

It is usual for coaches ask a fee for their services, though for some it is a labor of love. Reimburse your coach for any expenses that might be incurred.

Talented coaches are everywhere. The ranks of certified judges and chorus directors are obviously good places to look for coaches. Your district music and performance vice president will be able to introduce you to other qualified people, as can other quartets and resources in your area who may have several good recommendations. You can find the contact information for your district VP of Music and Performance from the [list of District websites](#). Of course, you have an opportunity to have your quartet coached by expert Barbershoppers at [Harmony University](#).

## PERSONAL PRACTICE AND LEARNING

Rehearsal is what you do together as a group. Practice is what each singer does individually to be ready for rehearsal.

Do as much individual work as you can so that your time together as a quartet can be fully utilized. It is enormously helpful if each member learns the music prior to rehearsal. In this way, you will avoid perhaps the greatest roadblock faced by a quartet – being musically unprepared. Unless you put some time and effort into learning your music outside of rehearsals, you will soon discover how tedious and time consuming being unprepared can become. This is an important point which will make your rehearsals more enjoyable and productive.

*“There is no greater feeling than having someone tell you that you ‘made their day’, and you’ll never have a better bond with a friend than what you get by singing with them.” – Trade Secret*

Individuals should learn notes and music on their own, and then the quartet works out the interpretation plan and practices together to perfect it and correct any errors. There are various technology aids to learning music. Many popular songs from BHS have learning tracks available. There are also Barbershoppers who develop [learning tracks](#).

If voice learning tracks are not available, it helps to have someone in the quartet who is adept at creating learning tracks using software such as Finale, Noteworthy, Muse Score, or Sibelius.

This software can be used to input notes and lyrics from sheet music and generate MIDI learning tracks which are full mix or part dominant.

District schools and [Harmony University](#) offer fine opportunities for you to learn. Courses on sight singing, music fundamentals, and the theory of barbershop harmony can help you be a better singer. But there is no reason to limit your barbershop education only to formal classes. Make use of the Barbershop Harmony Society's educational materials, available [online](#). Put some time into studying other performers, both barbershop and non-barbershop. There is much to learn from people who are already top-flight singers and entertainers.

## Resources

[Who is Making Learning Tracks](#)  
[Educational Opportunities](#)  
[How to be a great Tenor](#)  
[How to be a great Lead](#)  
[How to be a great Baritone](#)  
[How to be a great Bass](#)

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

*"Have a structure, know what songs you are going to sing, keep the songs within your abilities, and don't beat a problem to death. Plan about 2-1/2 hours for rehearsals."* – **The Chordmasters**

*"Focus on improving musical and entertainment factors. Use rehearsal time wisely."* – **Habitat 4 Harmony**

*"Try to avoid cancelling rehearsals, even if someone is not singing their best. They can sing softly, sing while sitting down, or lay out of a song that might be vocally demanding for them. Keeping the rehearsal helps to maintain group camaraderie."* – **Smooth Brew**

*"Our performance coach has encouraged us to be our most natural selves and to be vulnerable and open to things that we are uncomfortable with."* – **The Newfangled Four**

*"We have learning tracks made for each of our songs, so we set deadlines with each other with the expectation that the songs are ready to go by our next rehearsal."* – **The Newfangled Four**

*"Have a plan for each rehearsal, a general goal for what you want to accomplish and make sure you do. Don't be too hard on each other. Have fun and spend time on non-barbershop, non-quartet discussion. Get to know each other and your families and spend time together."* – **Razzmatazz**

*"Practice unison singing and dueting, and get coaching whenever you can get it. Our bass' wife is a Sweet Adelines director and has been a good coach for us."* – **Bay Bridge Connection**

*“Duets. And trios. Bass/bari, lead/tenor, etc. Also get universal agreement on interpretation, theme, etc. Discover and resolve vowel disagreements and those sort of technical details.” – Boomerang*

*“Rehearse the non-singing portions of the programs as well as the singing.” – hmmm*

*“We record songs at rehearsal both for saving our interp and for putting snippets on the website. The recordings are helpful when we need to get certain songs back up to full speed after not singing them for a while. They’re particular useful for our Christmas songs.” – Smooth Brew*

*“Predictable weekly, dueting and trioing, record trouble spots to help reduce continually troubleshooting while singing.” – Men in Stripes*

*“Be critical, but be nice. We stop when we hear something that doesn’t sound right, and we repeat problem sections to fix them.” – Summer Time*

*“Set up a regular time and keep it. When we cancel it’s usually for illnesses. If there is a conflict later in the day on our regular rehearsal day (Sunday), we meet a little earlier rather than cancel. The more you make the rehearsal something that is required, the longer the quartet will exist. Have a set agenda for the rehearsal, but vary the warmup exercises or add some fun things like woodshedding a song or singing tags.” – Smooth Brew*

*“Our performance coach has helped us to see new things and grasp new concepts. We were not aware of many ideas and were unskilled with this. Our coach has helped us to grow tremendously. Get as many coaches as possible.” – The Front Line Quartet*

*“Use an agenda published two, three, or four days prior to rehearsal with expectations and deliverables, including timelines. Rehearse regularly (weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, etc.). Work on quartet music between rehearsals.” – Reveliers*

*“We set aside 2½ hours every Sunday afternoon for rehearsals. Typically we run a few songs in our repertoire to keep them fresh, work on new songs (we add about 4 new songs each year), and record some songs for capturing our unique interp. We have a section of our website that has the next rehearsal’s agenda so we can be prepared.” – Smooth Brew*

*“Always make a plan for the rehearsal. Feel free to vary from it a bit if a certain song or part requires more attention than allotted. Dueting and trioing have proven to be quite useful.” – Vocal Point*

*“Be willing to try anything and everything that your coaches suggest. Not all of it will work for your group, so keep whatever works, discard the rest, and carry on.” – Vocal Point*

*“Leave the attitude at the door when it comes to rehearsing. Coaching from within shouldn’t be taken negatively, and if you are the one providing feedback, keep it positive. Song selection should always be a four-party agreement. For us, a one-person veto is all it takes. Know when to*

*let go of a song if it isn't working for you. There are thousands more to choose from.*" – **Vocal Point**

*"We have a private, internal webpage where we keep a calendar marked with all our vacations and availability. We also put our rehearsal agenda on the site. All of the upcoming performances with location, uniform, song list, and logistics information are on the site as well. These have been valuable in keep all members informed."* – **Smooth Brew**

*"Planning out the timelines and specific goals for rehearsals are helpful. Flexibility is necessary, but we strive to stick to an agreed upon agenda for the rehearsal. This helps maximize value and efficiency and raises everybody's focus to the task at hand. Outside of rehearsal time, we also have a fair amount chill-time where we just hang out and just enjoy each other's company."* – **The Regulars Quartet**

## MARKETING

Once you've chosen your members and decided what style of music you'll be performing, it's time to choose a name. Your group name is the single most important marketing decision you'll make, as it will conjure images in the head of everyone who's never heard you, and act as your trademark for those who have.



Before you finalize your name, you'll also want to check to see if your desired website name is available. It is also useful to check popular social media sites as well. Your name is your calling card. Make sure it's yours, and once it is, protect it.

## BUILDING A PRESS KIT

Eventually, you'll need more than a business card and word-of-mouth to get you gigs. Most groups offer an Electronic Press Kit, or EPK, directly on their website, but some still offer a physical press kit upon request.

A Press Kit should have the following:

1. Overview – Quartet, genre, date founded, members, history, web address
2. Quartet member info – experience and background on each member
3. Repertoire list – list of your various set packages or repertoire
4. Music samples – links to music samples online
5. Endorsements – nothing can sell a quartet faster than review quotes or testimonials if you are fortunate to have them
6. Media coverage – all the media outlets that have covered you with list of the outlets, articles, and dates.
7. Photo and Logo – the 8" × 10" photo is the size most often used by venues. A logo file will also allow customers to include your logo on performance announcements.
8. Video link – possibly the most effective part of your press kit would be a link to a YouTube video of your group in action.
9. Booking and Pricing Info – for event booking, don't forget to add your pricing information. It's also OK to say "contact us for pricing info."

Make sure the content is consistent, accurate, and arresting. Studies have shown that you only have about six seconds to grab attention with your press kit. It should be visually arresting and should give prospective customers the information they want quickly.

## Resources

[Press Kit Guide](#)  
[Creating a Press Kit](#)

## GETTING GIGS

The best way to get gigs is to gig. That doesn't make sense, you say? Well, there's no better way, and nothing's keeping you from taking the first step: perform for free – as often as possible – in public locations. Even if you only know a handful of songs, you should agree to meet on weekends and spontaneously jam on the street corner. Just make sure that your performance is public-ready. Ask your coach or trusted chorus colleague for feedback.

Nothing hones performance instincts more than performing, and it's the best way to get lots of people really excited about your group. Initially, this means performing at friends' parties, street-singing in tourist areas, volunteering at charity events, entertaining at office parties, etc. There are many people and organizations interested in free entertainment – explore

performance opportunities with friends, fellow students, and co-workers. People who have enjoyed hearing your group perform in person are now all doing word-of-mouth advertising for your group. Make sure they all get business cards, which all group members should carry, and get their names on your mailing list! That will pay dividends for a long time.

*“We never thought that we would all get to experience what we have together, so go out there and give it all you’ve got. You just never know!”– The Newfangled Four*

The next way to get gigs is to actively network and market your quartet. Just like a good job hunt, talk to as many people as possible about good places to sing. Ask if you can sing on a radio show, have a friend hire you to sing at the mall, or send your recording of the National Anthem to every sports franchise within driving distance. The more contacts you make and the more people you impress with your musicality and professionalism, the more fun the whole experience will become.

This kind of thing requires dedication from the entire group, not just one obsessive person. Make sure everyone is looking out for and generating opportunities. The initial hard work will pay endless dividends down the road.

Some ideas of areas to network and market your group include:

- Register as vendors at large senior living corporations
- Reach out to local churches who have a need for entertainment at scheduled social events
- Contact social and business organizations
- Leave information with social directors of country clubs and local banquet centers
- Contact social directors at retirement centers
- Search for local open mic nights
- Search for local arts-related organizations such as a songwriters group, music association, music store or school art department that hold workshops or public events
- Search for local fundraising events and charities you might team up with. Every year you should probably perform at least one or two charity fundraising events. Doing so is a good idea for many reasons. For starters, it feels good to help a nonprofit organization and help with a worthy cause. As an added benefit, you can get a lot of exposure to new audiences.
- If you’re interested in getting your music in a theatrical performance, contact the local theater, improvisation, or sketch-comedy community in your area.



- [House concerts](#) are private events in the homes of music fans. Friends, neighbors, and acquaintances are typically invited to attend a performance. Often there's a pot luck dinner or dessert
- Apply at local festivals that could use live entertainment

Two web-based entertainment booking sites that have been used successfully by several quartets are [GigSalad](#) and [GigMasters](#). Both provide a means to market your capability as well as receive requests for bids on a performance. They also solicit ratings and testimonials from your patrons that can be helpful in getting new patrons to book you.

## Resources

[Musicians Guide to House Concerts](#)

[Concerts in your home](#)

[Publicizing Your Event](#)

[Gig Salad](#)

[Gig Masters](#)

[Getting gigs – Deke Sharon](#)

## WEBSITES AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The Internet is making it easier than ever to market your quartet and get performance requests. The following are some examples of technology available to you in marketing your group:

- Facebook is the avenue that most groups use for candid media (i.e. photos and videos) and to communicate with supporters.
- A website provides a professional image with information on upcoming performances, information about the quartet, repertoire, contact information, press kit, media coverage, photo gallery, and endorsements.
- Twitter and Instagram can be used for quick communication with supporters and sharing candid photos.
- YouTube has become the platform of choice for sharing videos of quartets in action.
- SoundCloud is a way to give people full-track streaming audio samples.

One thing to keep in mind is to maintain consistency between social networking profiles. For starters, think about how you'll want to speak to your fans. This is a business page, after all, so you'll probably want to avoid using too much slang or abbreviated speech. However, it is important that you sound like YOU. It's also a good idea to use similar themes or images across the board. For example, if you have a CD coming out next month, it's wise to include a graphic

announcing the album drop date in your Facebook cover photo. You can also use a similar image as your Twitter header photo. Being consistent in your voice and image makes your act seem more credible as a business and is just a good marketing practice.

*“For me, quartetting is where it is at. It’s so different from singing in the chorus. Trust is the biggest thing to have between the members of the quartet.” – 4th Dimension*

While a presence on social media is important, establishing an actual website increases the professional appearance and legitimacy of your group. If you aren’t skilled in web design, there are many [programs on the web](#) (some are free) that can help you get started, or may offer consultant services. Or contact your high school or college for a web-savvy student who wants experience for a small fee.

Keep your site easy to navigate and make sure you update it frequently. If someone checks out your page to book you and your upcoming gig list includes shows from six months prior, they may assume you’ve gone on hiatus.

Some key elements of a website for quartets include:

1. Homepage -It all starts with a great header image. This could be a professional photo of your group, or a professionally-shot live photo from an event you performed at. You should also include a short bio, along with a strong testimonial from a previous client. Including a video of a live performance or a demo/show reel will also help to give a great first impression to potential clients. Also be sure to have a clear call-to-action to book your quartet!
2. About – This page should tell the story of your group, with an emphasis on past experience, the types of gigs that you have performed, as well as a few strong testimonials from past clients. Once again you should include a strong call-to-action to book the group.
3. Song List- You can organize the lists by era, genre, or simply in alphabetical order by artist or song title. Snippets of songs can also help get you booked by showcasing your harmony as well as making sure that the prospective customer knows what the song sounds like if they might be unfamiliar with the title.
4. Testimonials – Positive reviews will help get your group booked at more gigs, so this might be the most important section for your website. Even though you should have a few testimonials on your Home and About pages, you should also have an entire section on your site dedicated to displaying testimonials from past clients.
5. Future Shows – Even though many of your gigs will likely be private events, it’s important to show how active your quartet is. If a potential client sees that you have a bunch of shows booked, that makes you look good!

6. Photos- You can use your Photos section to display high quality photos from past events. Photos that show the quartet in action, as well as an engaged crowd, can help get you booked.
7. Videos- Even better than photos would be to have a few good quality videos that show the group performing. This will give potential clients a very good idea of what the experience will be if they hire you. If those videos show an enthusiastic crowd that is dancing, clapping, and cheering, even better!
8. FAQ – A section for Frequently Asked Questions can be helpful for potential clients. Here you should include information about the steps in hiring the quartet, and what can be expected of the quartet before, during and after the show. You can also include what the needs of the quartet will be in terms of sound equipment (do you bring your own, client needs to rent, etc.), performance fees, and how payment can be made and when.
9. Booking/Contact- Finally, make sure to have a clear way to contact the group both by email and by phone. Many clients will still want to pick up the phone and talk to someone directly. You can also place a booking form right there on the page.

## Resources

[Building Your Website](#)

[Site Builder Report \(review of website software\)](#)

[Instagram for Musicians](#)

[Twitter for Musicians](#)

[YouTube for Musicians](#)

[Suggestions for Social Media for Musicians](#)

## RECORDING A CD OR DEMO VIDEO

At some point in the quartet's lifecycle, recording a CD will be considered, either as a marketing tool or as a source of revenue. [Many of the steps](#) your quartet will need to go through in a recording project are the same regardless of the format(s) you choose. Your personal involvement will vary, depending on whether you are working with an organization that does most or all of the work for you, or if you are going to handle the details yourself.

The actual recording sessions are the first major step. The options range from first-rate major recording studios to basement studios to semi-professional on location individuals. Prices range from \$30 per hour to more than \$100 per hour. A higher price does not always mean better end result. Many top-price studios do not understand the barbershop sound, and they may not be interested in the unique challenges it presents and how best to record and process it.

The second major step is referred to as editing, post or mix-down. Songs are put in final order, volume levels are adjusted, etc. During this time, ambiance (echo, reverb, etc.) may be added

to dry studio recordings, or too much ambiance from live (show or contest) recordings may be processed to lessen the effect. Careful work here can make or break the final product.

The third major area is the actual production (mastering and duplication) of the product. You will likely receive a proof copy from your [duplicator](#). This is your final chance to review the CD itself as well as any artwork for the finished project. Most duplicator companies will not begin the duplication process without final approval from you.

Finally, the packaging needs to be prepared. Design, copy, layout, typesetting, artwork, photography, color separations, and printing are the major concerns here. How plain or fancy you get depends on time, budget, and taste.

An alternative to the CD is an MP3 download which doesn't require the packaging step but still requires the first three steps.

If you are recording a CD or recording for download, a mechanical license is required. Fortunately, this has become easier to obtain than in the past. Three excellent sources for licensing are [Easy Song Licensing](#), and [Songfile](#). Any of the three companies will file the proper paperwork with publishers in order to lawfully license the song for you. They take into account the distribution methods of the song, and provide you with a mechanical license that allows you to record the song. They charge around a \$15 service fee per song, plus the publisher royalty for the mechanical license of 9.1 cents per song on a CD or 9.1 cents per download.

Some quartets are turning to video as a marketing tool as well. If you go this route, it is best to use a dedicated, high quality video recorder (as opposed to, say, a smart phone video camera) and have the audio connected directly into the video recorder rather than through the video recorder microphone. Never upload raw video from the camera. Always use editing software to edit and enhance the video clip. If you need help here, contact your local high school or college and ask for someone in their creative arts department. Remember that you want to put your best foot forward and quality does matter in a video.

YouTube is the video publishing platform of choice. Since YouTube is a video platform, you would technically need a synchronization license to legally post a cover there. But because it's so difficult for independent artists to get a response from large publishers, and would be even harder to negotiate a synch rate, YouTube will automatically contact the owner of the song when uploaded and either have the owner agree to not charge a fee or will display ads on the video. So, if you're just going to release a video of a cover song on YouTube but won't be selling it, you don't need to obtain mechanical license. YouTube will simply pay royalties to the publishers from the monies collected through ads displayed on your video. As this licensing process may change in the future, contact YouTube for the latest information.

## Resources

[Copyright basics for Barbershoppers](#)  
[Frequently Asked Copyright Questions by Barbershoppers](#)  
[Recording Project Management](#)  
[Song File](#)  
[Easy Song Licensing](#)  
[Discmakers](#)  
[Making a Music Video](#)

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

*“Apply at local area events. Routinely contact senior and assisted care facilities.” – **Pride of Peoria***

*“Don’t rely on advertising in the paper or radio. Get out there and talk-it-up and sing-it-up.” – **EKG***

*“Technology has become central to our marketing. Being able to include a web address, Facebook page, and email on business cards and other publicity materials makes it easier for people to find us, and being able to continually update the digital media lets us make sure we get the latest info to those who need it.” – **hmmm***

*“It works best to have one single point of contact for scheduling, so all publicity should include contact info for that person”. – **hmmm***

*“Be active and get your music out there, then post about it in your social media and ask friends to do so as well”. – **Slice***

*“A demo video was a big step forward for us ... new customers wanted to see this or go to a gig before hiring us.” – **Men in Stripes***

*“Most people who reach out tell us that they read about us on our website and/or watched some of our YouTube videos.” – **Gimme Four***

*“Our website has links to a composite of various songs as well as short (20 second) snippets of all of our songs. Both have been helpful for helping prospective customers hear what we sound like.” – **Smooth Brew***

*“We have received lots of positive comments regarding our videos and CDs. The biggest lesson is that it is very hard to cut through the massive amount of “clutter” on social media to reach audiences beyond Barbershop.” – **Vocality***

*“Providing a professional appearance online, with uniforms and with printed material is key. We have developed our own website but if that capability doesn’t exist in the group, then an*

*investment in a web design firm is suggested. We have a Facebook site but find it doesn't do us much in getting new business and we don't really have a big following like a band that would find Facebook helpful. The reviews we have received from GigMasters and GigSalad customers are posted on those websites and we also put them on our website."* – **Smooth Brew**

*"The key is to get your name out there and to get yourself registered as a vendor for the types of organizations that hire quartets like ours."* – **Fireside**

*"As the saying goes, you're not really in business if you're not online."* – **Fireside**

*"Business cards help when the opportunity arises. Mostly our successes come from word of mouth after we have sung/performed. Always best to show the product first!"* – **Stay Tuned**

*"It's important to be easy to find on the internet and easy to contact. We give audio away for free because it grows our fan base, and we're still able to sell ample CDs at shows."* – **'Round Midnight**

*"Use a lead generating website like GigSalad or GigMasters if at all possible. It expands your marketing reach tremendously."* – **Smooth Brew**

*"We hand out business cards at every performance, and we always send a "thank you" letter to the person who hired us. These things get us a lot of repeat business."* – **Four Old Parts**

*"Our internal webpage has our recordings, song learning tracks and sheet music, our upcoming performance information, and our next rehearsal information."* – **Smooth Brew**

*"Our website and social media have made us infinitely more connected to our base and others alike. Our website especially has been a great tool for people searching for a quartet to find us and our social media has allowed us to cultivate an image."* – **Yonge Guns**

*"We use two entertainment web sites almost exclusively now for our marketing – GigSalad and GigMasters. Previously we had printed up flyers and posters as well as postcards to distribute to local businesses, retirement homes, and other venues. Both GigSalad and GigMasters have been so good in getting leads and business that they are essentially all the marketing we do. We have prepared a press kit for several local booking agencies and have received some business from them."* – **Smooth Brew**

*"Partner with as many organizations as possible. Include them in your promotions and craft your brand and activities such that your community partners resonate with your brand. Go out of your way to be deliberately inclusive. If somebody wants to partner with you and include you, say yes. Even if it doesn't seem like something a "barbershop quartet would do". Some of our most significant successes have been the result of our partnering with a local improv comedy group for one of their gigs, and we've ultimately gained many other opportunities from the connections we created through that."* – **The Regulars Quartet**

# PERFORMING

## BOOKING GIGS



When you receive a lead, the way you communicate that with a potential client can mean landing the gig or not. By including the right information and responding quickly, you can greatly increase your chances of being booked.

Some guidelines that have proven helpful for other quartets are:

- Respond as soon as possible- Responding as soon as you can shows the potential client that you're interested and quick to communicate.
- Send photos and clips – If you receive a request and it's not clear that the prospective customer is familiar with your group, include links to promo photos, songs or videos which display the capability of your group.
- Ask the right questions- When you receive a lead, ask questions about the audience, the venue, their organization, and what they are hoping to accomplish through the event. If the client does not include a phone number, send a message asking to hear more about what they're looking for and ask to speak to them directly. The important thing is to start the conversation however possible. After communicating with them or receiving more information, take the time to evaluate what was said to make sure you're a good fit for their event. With this information in hand, check with the other three members of the quartet and make a decision whether or not to accept the engagement. The quartet contact man may then inform the event of your availability.
- Know your target audience – You won't always take every lead that comes your way, even if you are all available. It's important to you that the client gets the outcome he/she



is looking for. You may not always be the best fit, and that's okay! Don't ignore those leads when they come in, but if after a conversation you realize that you're not really what they're looking for, recommend another group if applicable. Work with integrity and the rewards will come. Think long term and not short term. Clients appreciate your honesty. That client will remember you later when they (or a friend) have a gig that is more appropriate for you.

- What to charge – It's difficult to know how much money your group is worth if you've never performed before. However, you'll be called upon to quote a price at times, so it's good to gather the following information:
  - How much money are similar groups in your area receiving? If there aren't any, ask a group who used to be at your level, (who is now defunct or commanding higher fees) or a group in another similar region (cities will offer higher paying gigs than rural areas, for example).
  - What is their budget? Corporations will usually have more money than non-profit organizations. Individual budgets (weddings, parties) will vary.
  - Your best bet, until you get the hang of it, is to ask them to make an offer. If it's too low, you can easily tell them that you will need more, but if it's higher than your unspoken asking price, you've just saved yourself a bunch of negotiation, and you're getting a better fee than you intended.
- Stay connected after being booked – After booking an event, stay connected. Set calendar alerts to remind you to reach out to the client a month, a week, and a day prior to the event. Clients want their event to be a huge success so that they look good and this gives them a warm and comfy feeling when you keep in touch! Keeping the communication flowing is part of building a relationship of trust so that clients know they are being heard and can count on you.
- Make sure you say thank you – whether you book the gig or not. When a client has taken the time to reach out to you and engage with you, say thank you. If it's a gig you wanted but didn't get, keep the door open by appreciating the fact that they even reached out to you in the first place. Be sure they know that you would love to partner with them or their organization and you hope they'll consider you for future events. Again, keep thinking long term!
- Coordination and communication – Once the gig is booked you need to keep all members of the quartet aware of the date, time, place, set list, uniform, etc. Use online calendars such as Google Calendar, or develop/customize your own.

Once you receive the order, you need to prepare for the performance. The following checklist is helpful in making sure that all the pertinent information is captured and communicated.

### Sample Gig Booking Checklist

- Organization:
- Point of Contact:
- Email:
- Phone:
- Performance Date:
- Location:
- Meeting time for group:
- Departure time for group:
- Setup deadline:
- Performance time:
- Warmup room location:
- Length of set:
- Fee: Invoice needed Payment at gig Pre payment
- Gear needed:
  - Mics/wireless mics
  - Amplifier/speakers
  - Monitors
  - Other Equipment

A performance agreement is helpful to ensure common understanding between the purchaser and your quartet. The following is a sample performance agreement which can be tailored to fit the occasion and type of event.

## **Sample Performance Agreement**

THIS AGREEMENT for the personal services of Performers on the engagement described below between the undersigned, (enter Purchaser Name), as purchaser of performance services ("Purchaser") and the undersigned (enter quartet name), ("Performer") is made this (enter day) day of (enter month), 2018.

### **A. BASIC TERMS:**

1. Name of Performer Group:  
Telephone:  
E-mail:
2. Place of performance ("Venue"):
3. Date/time of performance:
4. Number of sets, breaks and duration:
5. Time for set-up:
6. Time for sound check:

### **B. PAYMENT OF PERFORMER FEES:**

1. Compensation agreed upon ("Fee"):
2. Amount of deposit:
3. Remaining fees of \$(enter amount) will be paid by Purchaser's check to be presented to Performer after performance on:
4. Performer requests its check be made payable to:

### **C. CONTRACTUAL PROVISIONS:**

#### **Dress Code**

The Performer will be suitably and tidily dressed during the Performance. The agreed upon uniform is:

#### **Performer Expenses**

The Performer agrees that the Fee is inclusive of all accommodations, traveling expenses to and from the Venue and covers any payments whatsoever due to other members of the group or unit, except as expressly provided in this Agreement.

**Sound Systems**

The (Performer/Purchaser) will provide all sound systems required to facilitate the Performance as agreed upon by both parties. The (Performer/Purchaser) warrants that all equipment is in good working order, and fit for its purpose. The Purchaser will be responsible for providing suitable power and electricity for the Performance.

**Security**

The Purchaser will take reasonable precautions for the safety of the Performer and the Performer's equipment during all aspects of the Performance and at all times while the Performer and the Performer's equipment is on the Venue premises.

**Force Majeure**

Neither the Performer nor the Purchaser will be held liable for any failure to perform its obligations under this Agreement where such breach is due to any of the following: acts or regulations of public authorities, labor difficulties or strike, inclement weather, epidemic, interruption or delay of transportation service, acts of God, or any other legitimate cause beyond the reasonable control of the Performer and the Purchaser. However, failure to perform will result in the Performer returning any and all deposits to the Purchaser.

**Sickness and Accidents**

The Performer agrees to meet its obligations under this Agreement subject to legitimate incapacity by sickness or accident. However, failure to perform will result in the Performer returning any and all deposits to the Purchaser.

**Indemnification**

The Performer is responsible only for its own conduct. The Performer will be compensated by the Purchaser for any and all damage done to the Performer's equipment by the Purchaser, its agents or guests. The Purchaser indemnifies and holds the Performer harmless for any and all property damage or personal injury that results from or is related to the Performance that is not directly caused by the Performer.

**Cancellation**

Performer reserves the right to cancel this Agreement without obligation upon notice to Purchaser thirty (30) days in advance of the Performance date. In the event of Performer's cancellation, the deposit payment (if any) shall be returned promptly.

If Purchaser cancels the performance less than thirty (30) days before the performance, Purchaser will pay Performer (enter percentage)% of the agreed upon Fee for the performance.

Performer:

By: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Purchaser:

By: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

## BUILDING A SET LIST

A set list is the list of songs in the order that you will be singing them for the performance, plus any planned comments. The goal is to create a set list that has flow—one that takes the audience on a journey. The quickest way to visualize this flow is to picture an hourglass. Trace it from the top down. It starts at the top at its widest point, then narrows gradually to the middle, then expands again to the bottom. Your set list should do the same. It should start with immense energy and presence, then transition to a slower, more subdued pace. After that, it should ramp up to a big finish.

Song selection is a critical element in structuring your performance. Variety and pacing are key elements to the development of a successful performance. The act should develop a sense of dramatic tension and release which leads to a logical climax. When constructing your set, start with a song that defines who you are— one of your best— then slowly increase the variety after establishing your core. Vary tempos and songs with different melody singers, as juxtaposition creates energy and keeps the audience’s attention. And save your best song for last, with one more great song up your sleeve if you get an encore. An example 7 song set might be constructed as follows:

- The opener should be an up-tune that is short, familiar and has a “hello” feeling to it. This will help to establish a good rapport with the audience.
- Another up-tune may be in order to keep the pace lively. Be sure that the second up-tune has a different key and different topic, to provide some variety.
- An easy-beat or swing number provides a change of pace, but be sure that you do not interrupt the toe tapping rhythm that songs such as this provide. A brisk waltz tempo also works well in this spot.
- A solid barbershop ballad helps to change the pace, again, but don’t present too many ballads in your performance.

- A novelty song can be used effectively here. It might be a song with comic lyrics, a parody, or comic actions. It could also be a song that features a voice, a patriotic number, a hymn or gospel tune, or a dance number.
- A medley or another easy-beat song is appropriate here. The medley should have a key change and at least one up-tune as part of it in order to provide variety and interest.
- A closer should be the best up-tune that you have in the repertoire. It should include a rousing tag and some believable staging. Sometimes a strong anthem such as “God Bless America” makes a fitting closer.

#### Additional guidelines in developing the set list would include:

- Place newer songs that are being performed for the first time in the middle of the set. Always open and close with confidence.
- Don’t forget the venue. If you’re singing for a church event or a retirement home, you’ll want to alter your set to include more songs that are appropriate for that audience.
- Think about programming your music to meet the needs of the people in the audience. Have variety, and see if you can program music that is at least 50% recognizable to your core audience, including some people under 30.
- A variety of music genres including contemporary songs interspersed with gospel, barbershop and parodies – also a mix of ballad and up-tunes. You need to know your audience in order to select the best mix of music. Audiences like to listen to songs they recognize so can hum along or mouth the words.
- Different audiences require different song sets, e.g., church congregations and groups, schools, senior groups, restaurants, etc.
- Leave them wanting more! If your act is too long or poorly paced, your audience will become restless and inattentive. Strive for comments such as, “I wish you could have done one more song!”

#### Resources

[Tips for singing to the non-vulgar public – Harmonizer July/August 2016, p 7](#)

[Put some Mo in that Show – Harmonizer May/June 2003, pp. 42-46](#)

[The Art of Performance – Harmonizer March/April 2016, pp 10-15](#)

[Win Audiences with Better Performance Glue – Harmonizer March/April 2012, pp. 8-9](#)

## PERFORMANCE GUIDELINES

You've spent time rehearsing songs, marketing and networking, responding to leads and developing the set list for that performance. Now it's important to look at some guidelines that will help make your performance the best it can be from an entertainment value while you are on the stage.

- Audience rapport – It's important that you have a rapport with your audience. Singing any number of songs back-to-back-to-back without the acknowledgement that there are real people in the audience is going to dampen enthusiasm. For most gigs you should have a few talking points in your show.
- Welcome and/or Introductions – Because you don't want the energy to die at the start of a show, it's a good idea to make this quick and possibly do it over a musical vamp.
- Song Introductions – Keep intros to about 3 meaty sentences. Work up a longer "story" intro for key songs, in case you need to stretch the set. End your intro with an audience-recognizable phrase from the song. If possible, don't have the speaker introduce a song that he has to kick off with a solo pickup. For songs with a vamp beginning such as "Under the Boardwalk", introduce the song with the vamp in the background.
- Thank You – Thank yous are great right before the last song. Each venue has different people that could be thanked – whomever hired you, the sound technician, other groups on the program, the audience, etc.
- Set List – You'll need a copy of the set list for your performance on stage for the singers to reference. Make sure the paper is large enough to be easily seen and use a Sharpie® or other fat marker to write the titles in large, clear lettering. It could be helpful to write the key of each song next to the title so the pitch-blower has a reference.
- Introduction to the act – Have a short, prepared, written introduction ready for the person who will introduce you. Many times, the host or emcee means well, but is inaccurate or misinformed in the introduction. This eventually reflects on your act in some way. If the introduction is prepared in advance, such problems can be avoided.
- Pitch-taking technique – Taking pitch is necessary for singing, but is not necessarily entertaining. It, too, needs to be rehearsed. The pitch can be taken at a cue word in the spokesman's introduction or during the applause. In either case, it is not creating a white spot in the performance and the pacing is not interrupted. Pitch-taking should be as unobtrusive as possible.
- Speaker – The role of the speaker is extremely important. The speaker can provide a bit of a breather for the other three singers. There's no need to be a stand-up comedian to be effective. Humor is good to have, but a steady stream of jokes does not provide variety. Telling a joke just before a ballad can be disastrous to the mood. Like the act

itself, the speaker's material needs to be prepared and rehearsed. The timing of the act depends on smooth transitions between singing and non-singing time. The speaker does not need to introduce every song. Sometimes it is better just to sing. There's also not necessarily a need to introduce the other members of the quartet, unless there is a good reason to do so. Try to write out everything that will be said and rehearse it so that it becomes natural and believable. Speaking duties might rotate among members of the quartet, which can add variety to the presentation. Of course, you should only place a willing and capable person in the speaking role. Do not force an unwilling or ill-prepared speaker upon your audience just for the sake of having all four speak.

- Variety – Incorporate as much variety as possible into your act. Simple things such as props, a quick costume change, adding a hat or coat, a change of level, choreography, or a change of singing position, can create ample visual variety for the audience. The order of songs, the introductions, the bits that are used, and other shtick can provide forms of variety. Whatever you choose to do, give the audience an act that holds their interest.
- Back-up plan – In every act, something can go wrong. Good entertainers prepare for the unexpected as much as possible. Determine as many things that could go wrong with your act as possible and prepare an alternate plan.
- Encore – Perhaps an encore is not the very best way to finish your act. If you have finished with your best number, how can you top it? Try taking a bow or working in a reprise. A reprise is simply the repeating of a few measures of a song, either the last one or one that was sung earlier in the program. The reprise should be rehearsed and ready if necessary. It should start before the applause dies down completely, in order to preserve the momentum.

## THE VISUAL IMAGE

In order for your performance to have maximum impact, all movement should reflect the music. Audiences like confident singers more than perfection, although we strive to provide them with both. The best compliment you can get is, "We loved watching you sing." This doesn't mean elaborate choreography or cruise ship banter or Vegas smooth production – it means focused, intense, emotionally engaged singing. If you're singing about sorrow, express sorrow. If you're singing about joy, smile! It should be obvious.

Only in a cappella do you have the most expressive human feature— the face— engaged directly with the audience, with each person expressing as themselves. This makes a cappella potentially the most compelling performing art, but only if it is done with a clarity of emotional expression.

In order for every member of the group to project a uniform visual image, they must all support the capsule concept. The capsule concept refers to the underlying message of a given song. When considering the capsule concept, start by trying to complete this sentence: "This song is about \_\_\_\_." Then try to take the song and distill it down to one emotional keyword. By doing



this, you can become truly unified as a group. Perhaps your one-sentence summary is: “This song is about someone who lost a love to another person.” Some of the singers might assume the emotional keyword is sad. Still others might think regret. Others might think jealousy. Maybe someone even thinks rage. There is a difference between sad and regret, just as there is a difference between happiness and anticipation. This might seem like an exercise in subtlety, but the capsule concept will influence every decision in a song. It will most directly affect your visual plan, because the cornerstone of every performance is what is projected on your faces.

*“Being in a quartet can be one of the most fun and sustainable activities anyone can do. Start with the music – but extend that to friendship – and ultimately extended family. Contests are great because they provide a reason to continue to improve, but singing with people who become like family is way better!” – **Vocality***

Every part of your visual plan should be created with the capsule concept in mind. In addition, every move must have a purpose that is motivated by that concept. If your quartet is merely executing choreography because “Barbershoppers are supposed to do that,” it will always look stilted and flat. Singers who move with purpose in order to express an emotion will always thrill an audience, even when their execution is not perfect. Remember, “ya gotta have heart!” Audiences do not want to be impressed by perfection. They want to be moved. If they get both, then so much the better.

Your song will have accents, echoes, group rests, and other places of brief unity within an otherwise complex texture. A brief hand gesture, body angle change, or movement freeze on such accents can provide extra pop to your performance. In addition to changing body angles, you can sometimes change body levels such as go down on one knee, putting one foot up on a stool or monitor. You will, of course, need wireless microphones to be able to make these types of movements. See the Live Sound section following for more information.

Your performance clothes are also part of your visual image. Have clothes that are just for performance and vary from your street clothes. Use color. People are visual and your show is visual as well as musical. It’s not “vain” or optional. It’s a part of the performance. It shows respect to the audience, and they are, when it comes down to it, your boss for that gig. If you need help with style or fashion or what looks good on you, get an outside opinion from someone you trust. Once you have selected your performance “look”, there are a number of online retailers of performance clothing advertising in [The Harmonizer](#).

## Resources

[On Stage Success – Tom Jackson](#)  
[Uniform Warehouse](#)

## LIVE SOUND

In some venues a sound system is critical, and in others it is not needed at all. The checklist in “Getting Gigs” section will help to ask the right questions to understand the audience, room size, and need for a sound system. A quartet just starting out may not be able to justify owning its own live sound system, but having the equipment will help in getting gigs when all the venue has to offer is a podium microphone for a room of 200 people.

Live sound equipment for a quartet typically consists of microphones, mixer, amplifier, speakers, and monitors.

- **Microphones** – The industry standard, the Shure SM-58, has been used for decades in all genres of music. It is known for its durability and consistency. The Shure SM-58 microphone is certainly a cost-effective place to start. One step above that would be a Shure Beta-58. It will have a better tone and give you a stronger sound than the standard SM-58. Equivalents of these models in a different brand would be the Sennheiser 835 and 845 respectively. There are also wireless counterparts to these same microphone models that will allow you to have freedom to have staging interest (see The Visual Image section above).

**Microphone technique** – The positioning of a dynamic microphone such as the Shure SM-58, is important. Position the mic so the head is below but close to the bottom lip (about 1 inch) and the mic is extended up toward your mouth at an angle. This will allow the percussive consonants to pass over the top of the microphone and still allow the microphone to be placed close to the mouth for most benefit.

- **Mixer** – Also called a mixing board or sound board, this equipment is the centerpiece of the sound system. Every microphone on the stage will be connected into this unit and subsequently connected to the amplifiers and speakers as well. The mixing console controls everything from the volume of each individual microphone to the tone of the voice coming through that microphone.
- **Amplifier/Speakers/Stand**s – The speakers are the end of the equipment chain. Generally speaking, there are two classifications of speakers: powered and unpowered. Any speaker has to be powered by an amplifier in order to produce sound. Powered speakers will have the amplifier built-in, which means everything is packed into the same cabinet. Unpowered speakers do not have the amplifier built-in and therefore a separate amplifier must be purchased. The speakers are mounted on stands to provide better sound volume to an audience and connected with cables to the mixer. Speakers must be matched to the power output or the amplifier.
- **Monitors** – These are speakers that are on stage facing the quartet so they can hear themselves. It’s surprising how little you can hear on stage behind the main speakers if there are no stage monitors. Therefore, monitors are crucial to good blend and tuning. As with main speakers, powered and unpowered models are available for stage monitors.

The monitors will be controlled separately from the main speakers so the singers are able to hear their own mix without being affected by the adjustments being made for the audience.

Purchasing wireless microphones initially will also allow for situation where a venue may have the mixer, amplifier, and speakers, and the quartet just has to plug the wireless microphones into the venue system. This allows for flexibility for different situations as well as an interim solution to a complete sound system. Wireless microphones also make it easier to check out the room during a sound check without having a separate sound person in the audience.

Guidance on live sound equipment can be obtained from other quartets, your church A/V person, and even local colleges with performing arts groups that use live sound systems. Two online retailers that offer advice and equipment are [Sweetwater](#) and [Musicians Friend](#).

It is helpful to have a sound person to run the sound system during your performance. Some quartets have been able to teach a trusted individual the fundamentals as an easy way to obtain this expertise without being worried or distracted with sound system issues during the performance.

## Resources

[Sweetwater](#)

[Musicians Friend](#)

[Live Sound Fundamentals](#)

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

*“Play to your specific audience. Entertainment is usually more enjoyable for the audience than singing a terrific performance of unfamiliar songs.” – Habitat 4 Harmony*

*“Most audiences really appreciate comedy and variety in performances.” – Habitat 4 Harmony*

*“Mix comedic songs and parodies along with straight up barbershop tunes. Have a ‘theme’ with one song leading to another but don’t be a slave to it.” – The Chordmasters*

*“Our opinion is that the most important thing for the quartet is to have a good, entertaining product. Each member of the quartet should have an established character that is maintained and portrayed with each performance. Having a theme or a style to follow is a big help!” – Boardwalk*

*“Start with a toe tapper or two. Get the audience on board then go to the swing tunes and ballads. You have to get their attention and impress them to get them to stay to hear you. Our first set at Vive last year started with traditional barbershop and our wives said the audience wasn’t impressed. The next day, we sang three of those songs in the middle and the audience loved it. Of course, save two or three of your best songs till the end. In a longer show, tell some*

*jokes and interact with each other and the audience. The audience will have fun if you look like you're having fun."* – **3 Handsome Gentlemen**

*"We have learned that for most performances singing too many ballads (as fun as they may be to sing) is the kiss of death and you risk rapidly losing a non-barbershop audience. So we follow the rule of several uptunes or novelty tunes for each ballad performed."* – **Under the Radar**

*"We learned a long time ago that performing songs that people recognized went a long way to getting us invited back for subsequent performances."* – **Under the Radar**

*"Audiences want more than just music. One quartet member should come prepared for each performance to speak between songs and build a rapport with the audience. We've moved away from telling jokes – we find casual conversational style to work best, and often try to involve other quartet members."* – **Sing-Capella**

*"Do whatever you can to put on the most entertaining show you can; it's not about what you can do, it's what you can do for the audience!"* – **The Newfangled Four**

*"Make certain that there is adequate sound provided for the size of the audience. Practice every detail including the speaking. Know who is going to do what. Warm up for whatever time fits the quartet. Pay attention to your visual image."* – **C Nile Sound**

*"Be yourselves, maintain a consistent quartet personality, and select music and jokes that work for your quartet personality and are what the audience expects. Leave them wanting more. If we are not physically tired at the end of a performance, we probably haven't done our best job. Leave it all on stage, have fun, and show it. Enjoy each other, like each other, and show that too."* – **Razzmatazz**

*"Dress better than your audience. Warm up before you get there. Get there early and be flexible. Smile, relax, have fun, and be friendly. Keep your program 40 minutes or less if you can. Put variety in your songs and show. Add what works for you. In our case it's a fun bass with a great humor. Leave them wanting more, not tired of you."* – **Bay Bridge Connection**

*"Play to your audience. Don't sing songs that just make you as a singer feel good (i.e. don't just 'chord-worship,') but sing songs that you are able to make your audience understand and allows you to get a message to them."* – **Trade Secret**

*"Sing right through performance errors. The audience very seldom seems to notice."* – **Boomerang**

*"Never ever cancel a performance if at all possible. In 10 years, we have never had to cancel a performance, although we have come close once due to a last minute illness. Canceling a performance will generate an unfavorable review that the whole world can see on GigMasters or GigSalad."* – **Smooth Brew**

*“DO NOT ONLY FOCUS ON CONTEST! Focus on entertainment while continuing to hone your vocal and visual skills. Contest has turned out to be the deal-breaker for most quartets we’ve all participated in over the years. Very few quartets get it.” – Boardwalk*

*“ENTERTAIN! Keep the audience needs first. Don’t overstay your welcome. Have something to say. Editing and pacing are paramount. Spend as much or more time figuring out your pacing as you do on your singing – understand what you are ‘selling.’ It doesn’t matter how wonderful YOU think you are – it’s always about THEM. Less is more. Be yourself. Be willing to open yourself up to your audience. SHARE.” – Up All Night*

*“Have a program and manage customer expectations. Know if you will need a sound system or not, and know the area where you will sing to that you can plan the set up and know the acoustics. Know the audience and how that will impact song selection.” – Men in Stripes*

*“Have plenty of business cards. Have the mobile phone number of the event contact/sponsor for any last minute changes. Arrive 30 minutes before gig ... and sometimes you will be just in time.” – Men in Stripes*

*“Sing to the audience. Bring a smile of recognition, a tear of joy, lips singing along with us, etc. Most of our audiences are not barbershop ‘enthusiasts.’ They don’t understand ‘ringing’ the notes or overtones. They just want an entertaining show.” – Summer Time*

*“Be clear on timing, sound checks, desired length of performance, etc. Meet with the other performers and thank them for the opportunity to be on their show. Stick around after the show to mingle with the audience. Be very clear about sound system requirements/checks. Connecting with audiences in a genuine manner leads to great performances.” – Vocality*

*“Communicate with the customer often and keep them informed, especially the day before and the day of as you are on your way. The most embarrassing thing that can happen for them is to book you and then have you not show up.” – Smooth Brew*

*“Always leave your audience wanting more and don’t overstay your welcome. Include your audience in your performance wherever possible. Keep it light and lively, nothing off-color. OBVIOUSLY: it’s absolutely imperative that you KNOW your music and that your repertoire is audience specific – different notes for different folks.” – Reveliers*

*“Our job is to entertain. The audiences aren’t judges. They always think we’re fantastic and say that they’ve never heard anything like our sound, even though we’re a 70-level quartet and not even the best in our district.” – Fireside*

*“Have a written plan of which songs, the key, the first word(s) for each performance, and who will speak between songs. Rehearse the entire performance, including the emcee portions and banter.” – Stay Tuned*

*"As much as we enjoy performing ballads, up-tempo songs work much better in a show. More than two ballads in a 20 – 30 minute package risks putting your audience to sleep."* – **Vocal Point**

*"The main lesson we've learned is to have a plan and stick to it. It's very hard to ad lib successfully unless you're really experienced."* – **Fireside**

*"Always try to have more uptunes than ballads. Inject humor with tasteful jokes."* – **5th Avenue Quartet**

*"We have structured our shows in part after a Harmonizer article entitled "Put some MO in that show from the git go" (May/June 2003.) It outlines how to pace a show to ensure that the audience is entertained and rapport building is achieved."* – **'Round Midnight**

*"We learned that a great way to connect with an audience is to pace the show well and include some sort of audience participation at some point in the show."* – **'Round Midnight**

*"Listen to the audience! If they like what you're doing they'll let you know. Keep it moving. Don't talk between each song. They want you to sing not talk. Comedy/novelty numbers always go over well. Just keep it clean! Everything we do is rated 'G'!"* – **Four in Accord**

*"We have one person who responds to quote requests and then follows through after we get the business to keep the customer informed of our status. Our contact person helps the client select songs and our uniform, and they talk about any particulars of the venue that we need to know. We have a section of our website that documents each upcoming performance with song list, uniform requirements, and logistics."* – **Smooth Brew**

*"When the wheels get shaky and everyone in the quartet can feel the nervousness, you need to trust in the work you've put in, trust that the guys will all be there, and crush the gig even if there were a couple misses. Shake off any mistakes. Deliver your songs like they're brand new, exciting, and scare you a little bit."* – **The Regulars Quartet**

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to the following performing quartets for their contributions to the guidelines, recommendations and lessons learned in the initial release of this guidebook.

'Round Midnight  
3 Handsome Gentlemen  
4th Dimension  
5th Avenue Quartet  
Bay Bridge Connection  
Boardwalk  
Boomerang  
C Nile Sound  
EKG  
Fireside Quartet  
Four in Accord  
Four Old Parts  
Gimme Four  
Habitat 4 Harmony  
hmmm  
Men in Stripes  
Pride of Peoria  
Razzmatazz  
Reveliers  
Rip-Chords  
Sing-Capella  
Slice Quartet  
Smooth Brew  
Sound Encounter  
Stay Tuned Quartet  
Summer Time Quartet  
The Chordmasters  
The Front Line Quartet  
The Newfangled Four  
The Regulars Quartet  
Trade Secret Quartet  
Under the Radar  
Up All Night  
Upscale  
Vocal Point  
Vocality  
Yonge Guns