

Barbershop chorus celebrates 35 years



Lorin McLain/The Daily Courier
 The High Mountain Chordsmen perform in Sharlot Hall Museum's Blue Rose Theater on Jan. 24.
Originally Published: February 2, 2009 10:36 p.m.

PRESCOTT - As it continues to warm audiences' hearts with smooth melodies, the High Mountain Chordsmen barbershop chorus marks its 35th anniversary in Prescott this fall.

The men's a cappella group, primarily composed of seniors, is preparing for its hallmark annual show, which this year is on Nov. 7 and titled, "The Celebration of Harmony."

In December, the Chordsmen put on 13 performances at several venues, such as retirement homes and care centers in Prescott and Prescott Valley.

Over the weekend at [Sharlot Hall Museum](#), the chorus opened the Blue Rose Theater's stage season with two shows of Western-themed music.

On Feb. 13 and 14, pre-selected quartets will offer "Singing Valentines" for \$20 apiece to anyone in the community. Quartets sing two love songs and deliver candy and a personalized card to the recipient.

The Chordsmen, whose 25-member chorus belongs to the international Barbershop Harmony Society, practice every Thursday night from 7 to 9:30 at the Seventh Day Adventist Church, 2980 Willow Creek Road.

They sing together as well as split into several quartets, each featuring a bass, baritone, lead and tenor.

In barbershop, unlike standard quartets, the tenor sings the high part above the lead, who provides the melody. The bass sets the foundation for the harmony, while the baritone and tenor fill in the notes in between.

Quartets belt out everything from old standards to more contemporary arrangements, such as Beatles and Elvis songs.

Joe LaBarge, president of the Chordsmen, got his start with a chorus in central Pennsylvania 35 years ago.

"I like the fact that four men can get together, sing and create beauty," said LaBarge, 71. "We live in a culture in which there's so much emphasis on technology and gadgets. I find barbershop harmony is simple, but elegant."

Sam Stimple, the chorus' director, assigns each singer his part based on a short tryout.

Stimple, a baritone, plays a wide range of notes on the piano to determine each man's vocal part and how well he can pick up a harmony.

"Barbershop becomes more than just a way of life - it becomes a passion," said Stimple, a barbershop singer of 38 years. "I've developed some deep friendships."

Chordsman Ed Massa, a lead, got into barbershop after singing with a group of guys at a cocktail party decades ago in San Jose, Calif. Like others in the group, Massa enjoys the camaraderie among quartets, which harmonize to similar tunes and coach each other.

"We memorize everything that we sing," said Massa, 71.

"I can go visit a chorus in Yuma and be able to sing with it when I walk in the door."

Rich Ludwigson, a tenor who has sung with at least five other choruses, joined the Chordsmen a decade ago.

"Barbershop music has a far brighter and more exciting sound than a regular chorus," said Ludwigson, 82, a barbershop singer of 26 years. "The harmonic sound catches your ear."

Massa said barbershop is "struggling" with membership despite a broader age group's interest in it.

"There are several very good quartets made up of young men whose fathers have been singing barbershop and got them into it," he said. "We're constantly trying to get young people involved."

For more information about the Chordsmen, call Massa at 772-3175.