

Why sing barbershop? Simple – it makes you feel good

Concert features seven singing quartets, groups



Photo by Sue Tone.

Members of the High Mountain Chordsmen rehearse Nov. 13 for the upcoming Best of Barbershop concert that takes place at 2 p.m. Nov. 10, at Prescott Mile High Middle School. Prescott Daily Courier Originally Published: November 8, 2018 7:24 p.m.

Barbershop. Some love it. Some don't. Some merely tolerate it. For about 40 high school students, singing barbershop is a way to feel good.

"Some choirs can get into a rut. With barbershop, you have to feel it, you get emotionally attached," said Alexandria Semien, Bradshaw Mountain High School student.

And for Bradshaw choir director Amy Van Winkle, barbershop “is all about beauty, fun and love.”

In their first practice Oct. 31 for the upcoming The Best of Barbershop concert on Saturday, Nov. 10, nine Bradshaw students ran through their parts for “Harmony” under Van Winkle’s skilled instruction. They and 15 other Bradshaw students and nearly 20 Prescott High School students make up Youth in Harmony, which will join the High Mountain Chordsmen (HMC) at the concert.

The HMC, a local group of about 20 four-part harmony singers, host an annual concert in which Youth in Harmony also will perform. Several in the men’s group visited Van Winkle’s class, exposed them to barbershop quartet music, and invited them to participate in the concert.

“We taught them a ‘tag,’” said Dick Patton, HMC lead singer. “A tag is when you think the song is over, there’s another little section that follows.”

Each student has access to their singing parts, or learning tracks, on a CD, in addition to the printed music.



By Sue Tone

Students from Bradshaw Mountain High School rehearse under the direction of music director Amy Van Winkle Oct. 31 for the upcoming Best of Barbershop concert that takes place at 2 p.m. Nov. 10, at Prescott Mile High Middle School.

Although her students all can read music, Van Winkle said traditionally, songs were taught aurally – people heard the music, sang it in parts to their students, who repeated it back.

“Your part is an individual melody, and then you put them all together,” Van Winkle told her students. One by one, she taught the individual parts, then combined part by part until everyone was singing in close harmony.

“People with good ears do very well,” she said. “It will feel relaxing to you rather than ‘I’m forced to read it.’”

For those who do read music, the notation can be confusing – especially for female singers who now find themselves labeled tenors, leads, baritones and bass. The notes are written in the bass clef, but sung an octave higher.

For the male singers, the classification names are the same, but the top line is inverted down an octave.

Bass singer Cameo Richter looked pleased as she hit a low note and Van Winkle responded by saying, “Yea, baby!”

Van Winkle said the baritone part is the most difficult, but also the “funnest.” She knows; she sang baritone and bass parts in an all-girls quartet for four years in high school.

Patton said he sings lead with the HMC because the lead part is the melody and therefore easiest to learn. The tenor sings above the lead, the bass sings below, and the baritone sings everything in between.

“It’s what makes the harmony,” said Rich Ludwigson, tenor, acknowledging that the baritone’s part by itself sounds terrible.

Ludwigson’s mother played piano, his father sang tenor and an uncle sang bass. He started singing in his grade school choir, continued in high school, “where I got to sing with beautiful girls – my voice was still high,” and traveled throughout the Midwest with a gospel quartet in the summers. He was part of a quartet while attending Macalester College, Minnesota.

Ludwigson, 92, still sings barbershop with HMC and with The Antique Parts, a quartet comprised of singers with a combined age of 331 years. They will perform several songs, including “Daydream,” in Saturday afternoon’s concert.

Now in his final year as director, Ludwigson said, “I will be singing in a chorus until I die.”

Patton said he never considered singing barbershop until he saw an ad as an adult living in California that said “Come Sing.”

“I find it very fulfilling. The fellowship we have is unparalleled,” he said, adding that he loves harmony music and listened to doo-wop all his life. Patton has been singing since age 4 with a sister and his parents.

When the HMC first invited young people to sing with them in 2009, they called the new group “Real Men Sing” – it was for boys only. This past year, they renamed it “Youth in Harmony,” opened it to girls, and expanded membership from 10 to more than 30.

Bradshaw student Andrew Jensen said he likes barbershop and its repertoire as “up kinds of music.” Another student called it “bubbly.”

Youth in Harmony will perform with the HMC a four-part harmony song, “Africa,” and an eight-part piece called “Harmony.”

Bradshaw’s Emma Steverson said she loves singing barbershop because “there’s so many parts, you have to hold your own and be confident in it. You feel so accomplished.”

Tickets are \$15 general admission, available at the door, and also available through [Evenbrite.com](https://www.evenbrite.com). Following the show, the cafeteria will be opened for the Afterglow lasagna dinner. Tickets for the dinner are available for \$10. Please RSVP for dinners by Thursday, Nov. 8, by calling 928-277-6954. A limited number of dinners will be available for purchase following the show.