

Learning Your Music

One of the most frustrating tasks for some of us barbershoppers is that of learning new music ... notes and words. Not merely learning them, but learning them correctly. However, music is precisely what we are all about. If you are someone who always seems to be one of the last "off the paper" in the chorus or your quartet perhaps this article may help. This will not address issues for those fortunate enough to learn from the sheet music and not require a learning CD/tape; rather it is for those of us who must use a part of the brain that requires seeing, hearing, and repetition.

Learning new music was a real struggle for me for several years. Then, in 2000 I was invited to attend the North Carolina Harmony Brigade. To participate I was required to learn 12 songs in about 4-1/2 months, and learn them well enough to hold my part in a quartet. Some of the songs were difficult arrangements. I soon realized that what I had been doing in the past was not going to work. The following is a process that was a result of that challenge. If you have difficulty learning new material, I encourage you to try it. The process initially takes about 1 to 1-1/2 hours of uninterrupted time at home. The rest you can do during drive time.

1st Sit down with music in hand and a learning CD in your player. Listen and read through the music 10 times. It's also an advantage if you have headphones as your part will be more predominant and you won't encourage others in the house to do something they will later regret by having to listen to the same song over and over again. This is especially true if you are learning the bari part. It's important that you resist the temptation to sing at this point (very hard to do). Just read and listen. I repeat, no singing. This will take 30 to 45 minutes depending on the length of the song.

2nd Immediately listen to the song and sing along 10 times while reading the music. As you do this, make note of any measure(s) that seem to be difficult. If these parts continue to be a problem you can go back later and work on them. However, you will probably find that by doing steps 1 and 2 you will eventually be able to visualize certain measures, especially difficult ones, as you work on step 3.

3rd File the music away and put the CD in your car to rehearse during drive time. If you drive much at all you should be able to learn about any arrangement in about a week. My average is now 4 to 7 days depending on the arrangement. My office is only about 2 miles from home, so you can see I don't get a lot of drive time unless I take a long trip.

One other thing that I have found helpful is to make a learning CD/tape of all your chorus and/or quartet repertoire. Playing it occasionally will keep the music fresh in your mind.

Will it work for you? I guess you won't know unless you try it. I found the more I used this process, the easier it became to learn a new arrangement.

Duane

Duane Henry, a member of NCHB, is co-founder of the Indiana Harmony Brigade.