



Quartet Series, Part 5

by Brian Philbin

Keys to a Successful Performance

The performance is the product of everything we do in barbershop. If we didn't perform, who would hear our music? How would we otherwise present the gift of our talents? Certainly we would not presume to perform only amongst ourselves.

This is an art form to be shared in a very public fashion. That being said, it is important to note that every time you sing, whether the audience is 20 or 20,000, you are performing. Keep in mind what "performance" means to you and your quartet at all times. Appearing at a banquet is a performance. Singing on a chapter show is a performance. Competing at a barbershop convention is a performance.

There are obstacles leading up to and during every performance that may prevent you from fully sharing your gift with the audience. Here are ways to overcome them and be successful.

Be prepared

Preparation is the foremost key to every performance. What occurs in rehearsal will reflect directly on what occurs in the performance. Concentration on the elements most important to your quartet will allow you to demonstrate those elements most favorably. If you have rehearsed well, you can perform well — it's just that simple. Your quartet will feel more at home performing familiar patterns and executing a well thought out plan.

Allow sufficient warm-up time

The warm-up time allowed at the performance venue is a key factor which may affect how well you perform. Going on "cold" is rarely a good idea unless everyone in the quartet is accustomed to it and favors it over taking preparation time just before the performance. Warming up and going over the plan will always allow the quartet to feel more confident of the patterns involved.

Remove the distractions

Distractions come in many forms and the smallest distractions can, at times, cause the greatest hindrance in a performance. Begin with the most obvious distractions and work your way down the list. For instance, have everything you need when you arrive at the venue. The quartet should have a standardized list of everything to bring to each performance, as well as a customized list for each individual (Joe brings the pitch pipe, Jeff brings the make-up kit, etc.).

Be informed

Also important is knowing the *what, where, when* and *how* of each performance and venue. The better informed your quartet is about the details, the more energy you can assert toward your performance, rather than being preoccupied by the small stuff. Making this information available in written form to each member will also be helpful in removing it as an obstacle.

Communicate openly

There are other small obstacles, but they are mostly unique to each quartet. The thought that Joe always blows

the pitch pipe too long or too late is an aspect of the performance. The thought that Jeff always forgets the make-up kit is also an aspect of detail preparation. In some cases, it takes open, honest communication to work out these details. In others, it is simply a matter of learning to live with each other's personality traits and planning around them. (You might want to give the make-up kit job to someone other than Jeff, for instance.)

Take responsibility

Once you have done your jobs and removed those outward obstacles, there are still others to conquer. There remain obstacles within the performance itself to overcome. Some are of an individual nature, while others are a group responsibility. For example, choosing the right music and pacing the performance are group responsibilities. Staying focused and mentally prepared are individual responsibilities. Then again, overcoming personal distractions is the individual's responsibility. Getting assistance from quartet members is a group responsibility. Sometimes the thing that helps most is allowing each other the time and space to do what is needed to surmount those preoccupations and distractions.

Eliminate performance errors

Once on stage, the performers must concentrate their energies in a united fashion in order to give a group performance that is greater than the sum of its parts. This requires a commitment from each member to focus on his own job while supporting the other members in their jobs. Again, performance errors and other unexpected occurrences will rear their ugly heads. It is important to focus on the whole performance and what's ahead, rather than on a foible that you can't correct. Heck, even if it happened two seconds ago, it's in the past and without the "wayback machine" you might as well forget it for the time being. Do what you can about the remainder of the performance. Once the performance is over, you can always review your mistakes and find ways to avoid them. Decide if they were simply due to circumstances unique to the appearance and write them off as performance errors.

Stay motivated

Motivation should always be strong for each performance. When performing, many and varied opportunities present themselves and the idea is to "make your mark" in the minds of that audience. Your performance — whether based in comedy, variety, ballads, etc. — should set you apart from other groups the audience may have experienced.

Know your audience

A contest performance, likely your shortest type of performance, requires only two songs but just as much preparation and concentration as a show performance. The contest will likely bring together the most geographically-varied group of barbershoppers to see you perform.

A show performance, on the other hand, is longer and requires more stamina. It requires professionalism at all times to ensure a well-executed plan, as this is likely the highest paying audience you will encounter. It's important to give them their money's worth. Show audiences comprise both barbershop and non-barbershop members, and the opportunity to make a good first impression is always present. Likewise, performing at a banquet is an opportunity to present barbershop to a new audience and so it requires the same dedication as a barbershop show. You want people to truly appreciate this form of entertainment, and you are the ambassadors of barbershop at those functions.

Each of these performances provides a unique cross section of a different community as well as opportunities yet untapped. You never know who will be in any given audience — an old friend, a future employer of your quartet, or even the author of a song you are performing. That and the opportunity to showcase your talent at every performance should provide the quartet with great motivation.

Finally, it is important to note that nothing will help you create a pinnacle performance better than experience. Repeated performances are yet additional rehearsals to learn from and build upon. Each time you combine motivation, preparation, removal of distractions, and all the other ways suggested here, you have the opportunity to improve and better understand what works best for you. That leads to the greatest opportunity of all...the chance to create a championship performance.