



*Eight-time International Chorus Champions*

## **The Masters of Harmony Music Committee**

**By Bill Roth**

Every Wednesday night, after the regular weekly rehearsal has ended, a select group of MOH members go into a separate room and shut the door. Twenty to 40 minutes later they reappear, going their separate ways into the night. At one time or another most every chapter member has had to wonder, “What goes on in that room, and why do the meetings last so long?” The mystery is no doubt heightened after an occasional chapter member has politely asked to sit in on the meeting, only to be told “no”! After all, board meetings are open to chapter members, why not this one?

The weekly gathering of the music committee of the Masters of Harmony has long inspired speculation some might even say fear and trepidation but this article will attempt to provide a little illumination on the subject. First, to clarify terminology, the “music team” is an umbrella term referring to all those who, in an organizational sense, are accountable to the chapter’s music and performance vice president. Thus, team members include such positions as music librarian, tape librarian, makeup coordinator, etc. The music committee is part of the music team, but the committee is also the entity to whom the board of directors has given oversight responsibility for the chapter’s entire musical program.

The music director and the music and performance vice president choose the members of the music committee jointly, and the current organization and composition of this body are the result of an evolutionary process spanning several years. Every person on the committee has a specific job title, and, collectively, they represent all those responsible for the quality of the chapter’s musical and theatrical product. In addition to the music director and music and performance vice president, the committee consists of, at a minimum, the assistant director, the four section leaders, the production director (who is responsible for on-stage aspects of all performances), and three coordinators who oversee specific areas: presentation (formerly stage presence), auditions, and repertoire. The chapter president is an ex-officio member of the committee, and regularly attends as an observer.

The meeting itself is chaired by the music and performance vice president, who begins by going through a list of topics he has written down throughout the week. Generally, there are anywhere from five to 15 items, ranging from simple informational announcements (“the auditorium needs us to conform with union requirements”), questions about individuals (“how did [Sam] do tonight in his audition?”), strategy questions (“when should we introduce the new song?”), planning questions (“should we have another recording session in the spring?”), and occasionally some chorus personnel questions (“Is it true that [Rod] is having trouble with notes? What can we do about it?”).

As each item is raised, any member is free to say whatever he might wish. Frequently, one topic will lead into others, and a general conversation may ensue. When the music and performance vice president has finished with his list of topics, any member is able to raise new issues or voice a concern. Matters from the general membership are frequently brought to the committee’s attention in this way. Most all committee decisions are reached by consensus, and formal votes are rarely needed or taken.

The music director, of course, ultimately makes many decisions, but the very process of open discussion greatly helps to clarify issues, as well as ensuring that everyone is kept informed of developments.

One of the most important characteristics of the committee is the respect and mutual trust that has developed among the members, most of whom have served in their respective roles for many years. As a consequence, total candor is possible, and healthy exchanges of ideas regularly occur. The reason meetings are generally closed to non-members is to preserve and facilitate this openness. In addition, from time to time, some very personal matters need to be discussed, such as serious health or disciplinary problems.

In the Santa Fe Springs Chapter, the committee is also charged with the responsibility of determining and enforcing the musical standards of the Masters of Harmony. Sometimes sensitive matters are addressed and very difficult decisions reached. The process frequently takes a long time, as every effort is made to explore workable alternatives and arrive at results that are, in the last analysis, in the best interests of the chorus and the Society.

The way the music committee of the Masters of Harmony functions may well be somewhat unusual in the world of barbershop. But its structure, combined with the many talents of its members, has enabled the chapter to remain true to its founding motto: "Dedicated to Musical Excellence."

(Text revised December 2007)