



## Quartet Series, Part 1

by Brian Philbin

# Forming a Quartet

Many of the members of the **Masters of Harmony** have, at one time or another, been members of quartets. Many others desire to be in a quartet, but have never had the opportunity. If you are in either category, I believe there will be something in this series of articles that will be of interest to you in refining or finding a quartet, or just finding something of note that will make quartetting a more enjoyable experience.

There are many aspects to quartetting such as (a) finding others to sing with, (b) developing a repertoire that the members enjoy, (c) putting a show package together, (d) performing, (e) getting ready for contest, (f) choosing a quartet uniform/costume, (g) performing in contests, (h) singing for hire, (i) performing for different sizes of audiences in different venues, (j) getting coached, and more.

This article will deal with the first and most basic fundamental of quartetting: finding three other guys to sing with. This isn't as easy as it may sound.

If you're interested in singing in a quartet, you really need to take the first step. No one will spontaneously think of you if they have no idea that you wish to sing in a quartet. The desire to sing in a quartet is not something we presume of everyone in the Society. Many men sing in choruses and are content with that experience and have no desire to sing with a smaller group.

So, your first step is to let people know that you want to sing in a quartet. Find out if there are any other singers looking for someone who sings your part. Ask someone that you'd like to sing with if they'd like to put a quartet together. Once you have at least one cohort, you're a step ahead of the next guy.

If you have two or three people to sing with and are looking to complete your ensemble, you will need to develop a "network" of people who will help you keep an eye out for the remaining part(s). Attend conventions of all sizes. Attend shows. Go to other chapter meetings. You will meet people and learn a great deal along the way, as well as develop that network of people who are aware of your desire to sing. One of those people may even be a potential member of your quartet.

I suppose I should also mention here (although this might be self-evident) that you should spend time with the people you intend to sing with. Talk in detail about what you'd like to do in a quartet. Ascertain how compatible you are as people in a social situation.

This is a wonderful hobby and an extremely enjoyable art form. But make no mistake that you will be fraternizing with the members of your quartet for many hours while quartetting and, likely, the entire time that you are involved in barbershopping. If you are incompatible, there is a strong chance that, at some point, a conflict could arise that might impair your enjoyment of the quartet experience. This is just one of those things you might want to avoid.

The criteria for selecting quartet members varies depending upon your goals for the quartet. The key is to have four members who have common ideals and goals for quartetting. For instance, if you want to sing in

a group that performs only ballads, you would want to sing with three others who want to sing nothing but ballads. If you have a member whose desire it is to perform novelty numbers, you probably won't have much material to satisfy him. You will end up with a mismatch and eventually the difference in desires will require either the dissolution of the quartet or the replacement of that quartet member. The best time you can have in a quartet is working together on something you are collectively passionate about. It increases the enjoyment and decreases the workload for everyone involved.

Once you have attended every feasible avenue of finding quartet members, you must continually reinforce the fact that you are seriously looking to sing with a group. You can't rely completely on others to do the work for you. Your desire has to be accompanied by an outward display of that aspiration. You need to exhibit your barbershop acumen and show your willingness to learn and grow musically. These qualities will always attract other singers. A demonstrative manifestation of your desire is just as important as the desire itself.

Even if you follow the steps set forth above, they do not, in and of themselves, assure success. Anything can happen, anything can impede progress. You have to keep at it and actively search for the right people to sing with. There will be times when it is not so easy to continue and there will be events that will cause you to feel like giving up. But the quality most necessary in order to accomplish developing a group is *perseverance*.

I know of quartet men who have had less than gregarious experiences in quartets and have considered the time spent in those groups as wasted. However, just like any endeavor, there is something to be learned from each experience, negative or positive. Sometimes the most important thing you learn is that you don't like something, or have a keen interest in something few others share. That's when you have developed the ability to start looking for others who share your likes or dislikes. Remember that the right combination may be just around the corner.

The only way you can find the right quartet is by going out and trying. There may be changes along the way and your choices may seem to narrow. In actuality, your choices will eventually be refined in the direction that is right for you. Don't give up!

So, to recap:

- Advertise your desire to sing in a quartet.
- Develop a "network" of people helping you look for people to sing with.
- Attend every event you can that will broaden the scope of that network.
- Actively sing around at events that you attend.
- Try to find people to sing with that you are compatible with.
- Be aware of what you want to accomplish in the quartet.
- Make certain that your goals are shared with the people you intend to sing with.
- Have fun.
- Never, ever give up!

It's up to you to take the first step. No one can do it for you. So, if it's a quartet you want, get your hine out there and start.