

BARBERSHOP HARMONY:

AN EDUCATOR'S GUIDE TO A UNIQUE VOCAL TRADITION

1. Introduction to Barbershop Music: A Unique American Vocal Tradition

Overview of Barbershop Harmony

- **Uniquely American Art Form:** Barbershop harmony is recognized as one of the few music styles originating in America, sharing roots with jazz.
- **A Cappella Tradition:** Characterized by four-part harmony sung without instrumental accompaniment.

Defining Features of Barbershop Music

- **Melody and Harmony:** The melody is typically sung by the 'lead' in the second-highest voice part, with a 'tenor' harmonizing above, a 'bass' providing fundamental harmonies, and a 'baritone' filling in the chord.
- **Chord Structure:** Emphasis on the "barbershop seventh" chord and other complex chord progressions.
- **Arrangement Style:** Designed to showcase full four-part chords for every melody note, minimizing octave doubling.

Historical Roots

- **Origins:** Emerged from African-American improvisational traditions in the late 19th century, particularly in the South and New Orleans.
- **Cultural Significance:** Barbershop music evolved from instrumental improvisations of early jazz and blues to vocal harmony, incorporating elements like swipes, back times, and pickups.

Barbershop in Modern Context

- **Inclusivity:** Barbershop is not limited to men's quartets but includes all genders in various ensemble forms.
- **Variety in Music:** Encompasses a wide range of music, including contest pieces, show tunes, gospel, religious, and patriotic songs.

Distinction from Other A Cappella Forms

- **Unique Vocal Arrangement:** Unlike typical SATB or TTBB arrangements where the melody is in the uppermost part, barbershop places the melody in the second-highest voice part.
- **Emphasis on Overtones:** The specific chord structures in barbershop are aimed at creating ringing overtones, a hallmark of the style.

Educational Value for Music Teachers

- **Teaching Tool:** Offers an engaging way to teach harmony, voice leading, and ensemble singing.
- **Enhances Musical Understanding:** Helps students appreciate the complexity and beauty of vocal harmonies and chord structures.

2. Historical Origins of Barbershop Music: From Jazz and Blues to Vocal Harmony

The Roots of Barbershop in African-American Traditions

- **Cultural Melting Pot:** Barbershop harmony emerged from the rich tapestry of African-American musical traditions.
- **Improvisational Beginnings:** Its origins can be traced back to the improvisational practices common in African-American music, particularly in the Southern United States.

The New Orleans Connection

- **Birthplace of Jazz:** New Orleans, a key city in the development of jazz, played a significant role in the early evolution of barbershop harmony.
- **From Instrumental to Vocal:** Musicians in New Orleans, known for their jazz and blues performances, began experimenting with vocal harmonization, laying the groundwork for what would become barbershop music.

The Evolution of Barbershop Harmony

- **Harmonic Experimentation:** In the late 19th century, African-American musicians started blending traditional harmonic structures with new improvisational elements, leading to the unique sound of barbershop.
- **Early Barbershop Venues:** Barbershops, as social hubs in African-American communities, became natural venues for this vocal experimentation.

From Blues to Barbershop

- **Influence of Blues Music:** The early blues tradition, with its emotive melodies and rhythms, significantly influenced the development of barbershop harmony.

- **Vocal Adaptation of Instrumental Techniques:** Techniques characteristic of blues and jazz instrumental music, such as swipes and pickups, were creatively adapted into vocal forms in barbershop music.

The Transition to Mainstream

- **Widening Popularity:** Barbershop harmony gradually gained popularity beyond its African-American roots, becoming part of mainstream American culture.
- **Cultural Integration:** The style began to incorporate influences from various other musical traditions, broadening its appeal and complexity.

Educational Insights for Music Teachers

- **Teaching Cultural History:** Understanding the origins of barbershop music provides valuable insights into American musical history and the cultural significance of African-American contributions to the arts.
- **Linking Musical Genres:** Educators can use the history of barbershop to demonstrate the interconnectedness of different musical genres, from blues and jazz to vocal harmony.

3. Defining Characteristics of Barbershop Music:

Harmony in Four Parts

The Essence of Barbershop Harmony

- **Unique Vocal Structure:** Barbershop music is characterized by its distinctive four-part harmony, which creates a rich and resonant sound.

The Four Parts of Barbershop Harmony

1. Lead:

- **Role:** Sings the melody, typically in the second-highest voice part.
- **Contribution:** Provides the central theme and tune that the other parts harmonize around.

2. Tenor:

- **Role:** Harmonizes above the lead, often using a falsetto or light voice.
- **Contribution:** Adds brightness and top-end harmonics to the chord structure, enhancing the overall sound.

3. Baritone:

- **Role:** Sings harmony above and below the melody, filling in the chord.
- **Contribution:** Offers a rich, middle texture to the harmony, bridging the gap between the lead and bass.

4. Bass:

- **Role:** Provides the lowest harmonizing notes, typically singing fundamental harmonies like roots and fifths.
- **Contribution:** Lays the foundation for the chord, giving depth and resonance to the ensemble sound.

The Harmony in Action

- **Chord Structure:** Barbershop arrangements emphasize full four-part chords for every note of the melody, with a minimum of doubling on octaves.
- **Signature Sound:** The hallmark 'barbershop seventh' chord, along with other complex harmonies, is frequently used to create the distinctive barbershop sound.
- **Just Intonation:** Tuning of chords in barbershop is done with careful attention to just intonation, aiming for perfectly tuned chords that produce a 'ringing' or 'locked' sound.

The Role of Each Voice in Creating the Barbershop Sound

- **Lead as the Storyteller:** Carries the main tune and lyrical content, driving the narrative of the song.
- **Tenor as the Sparkle:** Adds a shimmering layer to the harmony, enhancing the emotional impact.
- **Baritone as the Filler:** Provides balance and fullness to the harmony, connecting the top and bottom parts.
- **Bass as the Anchor:** Grounds the harmony with its depth, giving a solid base to the ensemble's sound.

Educational Application for Music Teachers

- **Teaching Harmony:** Use the structure of barbershop harmony to teach students about chord construction and voice leading.
- **Vocal Development:** Help students explore different vocal roles and how each contributes to the overall harmony in ensemble singing.

4. The Barbershop Melody: A Unique Approach to Vocal Harmony

Understanding Melody Placement in Barbershop Music

- **Second-Highest Voice Part:** In barbershop harmony, the melody is uniquely placed in the 'lead', which is the second-highest voice part, distinct from traditional choral arrangements.
- **Role of the Lead:** The lead singer carries the main melody, providing the central theme around which the other parts harmonize.

Comparison with Traditional SATB

- **Traditional SATB Format:** In standard Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass (SATB) arrangements, the melody is typically carried by the soprano part, the highest voice.
- **Melody in the Uppermost Part:** This traditional placement allows the soprano voice to dominate the musical texture, with other voices providing supporting harmonies.

The Impact of Melody Placement in Barbershop

- **Emphasis on Ensemble Harmony:** By placing the melody in the second-highest voice, barbershop music emphasizes a more balanced ensemble sound, where no single part dominates the others.
- **Harmonic Interplay:** This arrangement allows for a rich interplay of harmonies, as the tenor, baritone, and bass parts weave around the melody, creating the distinctive barbershop sound.

Educational Insights for Music Educators

- **Teaching Voice Leading:** Educators can use the barbershop melody placement to teach students about voice leading and how different parts interact to create harmony.
- **Enhancing Musical Understanding:** Students can learn how varying melody placement affects the overall sound and texture of a piece, broadening their understanding of vocal arrangement and ensemble singing.

5. Chord Structure and Harmony in Barbershop Music

The Role of Chord Structure in Barbershop

- **Core Element:** Chord structure is a fundamental aspect of barbershop music, differentiating it from other a cappella styles.
- **Emphasis on Full Chords:** Barbershop arrangements focus on full four-part chords for each note, minimizing octave doubling to enhance the richness of the harmony.

The "Barbershop Seventh" Chord

- **Defining Characteristic:** The "barbershop seventh" chord (a dominant seventh chord) is a hallmark of barbershop harmony.
- **Frequent Use:** This chord type, comprising the root, major third, perfect fifth, and minor seventh, appears frequently in barbershop arrangements, contributing significantly to the style's distinctive sound.

Creating Overtones through Just Intonation

- **Tuning Method:** Barbershop singers use 'just intonation' for tuning chords, as opposed to equal temperament used in most Western music.
- **Objective:** This tuning method allows for chords to be perfectly in tune, maximizing the creation of overtones and the 'ringing' quality unique to barbershop harmony.

Chord Balancing in Barbershop

- **Part-Volume Relationships:** Achieving the right balance between the four parts is crucial in barbershop harmony, with each voice contributing equally to the chord.
- **Enhancing Harmonic Overtones:** Proper chord balancing and tuning in just intonation result in a fuller, more resonant sound with pronounced overtones, a key characteristic of the barbershop style.

Educational Application for Music Teachers

- **Teaching Advanced Harmony:** Use the barbershop seventh chord and its usage as a tool to teach students about complex harmony structures.
- **Exploring Tuning Systems:** Introduce the concept of just intonation as a way to explore different tuning systems and their effects on harmonic sound.

6. Cultural and Musical Evolution of Barbershop Music

Transition from African-American Roots to Mainstream

- **Origins in African-American Music:** Barbershop harmony originated from African-American musical traditions, blending elements of gospel, jazz, and blues.
- **Evolution into Mainstream:** Over time, barbershop music transcended its initial cultural boundaries, becoming a popular form in mainstream American music.
- **Impact on Barbershop Style:** This transition influenced the development of barbershop, leading to a broader stylistic range and greater diversity in its repertoire.

Addressing Stereotypes and Misconceptions

- **Breaking Down Stereotypes:** Despite common stereotypes of barbershop quartets as exclusively consisting of middle-aged white men in striped vests and straw hats, the reality is far more diverse.
- **Inclusive Nature of Modern Barbershop:** Today's barbershop scene is inclusive of all ages, genders, and cultural backgrounds, reflecting a more accurate picture of its origins and evolution.

- **Educational Opportunity:** Educators have a unique opportunity to address these misconceptions, teaching the true, inclusive nature of barbershop music and its rich cultural heritage.

The Interplay of Barbershop with Other Genres

- **Influence of Jazz and Blues:** The improvisational elements of jazz and the emotional expressiveness of blues have significantly shaped the barbershop style.
- **Adaptation and Growth:** As barbershop music has adapted elements from various genres over time, it has grown into a distinct form with its own conventions and stylistic nuances.

The Role of Barbershop in Cultural Understanding

- **Music as a Reflection of History:** The evolution of barbershop music offers insights into broader historical and cultural trends, particularly in the context of American music.
- **Teaching Cultural Sensitivity:** Music educators can use barbershop's history to foster cultural sensitivity and appreciation for diverse musical traditions among students.

7. Barbershop Today: Celebrating Inclusivity and Diversity

Embracing Inclusivity in Modern Barbershop

- **Beyond Traditional Boundaries:** Barbershop music has evolved to become a welcoming and inclusive art form, embracing singers of all genders and cultural backgrounds.
- **Expanding Participation:** Once predominantly male, barbershop groups now include women's and mixed-voice ensembles, reflecting a broader diversity in its community.

Diverse Musical Repertoire

- **Contemporary Adaptations:** Modern barbershop has widened its musical scope to include contemporary hits and popular music, adapting these songs to its unique harmonic style.
- **Versatile Arrangements:** This expansion of repertoire allows barbershop to remain relevant and appealing to younger audiences and singers, bridging the gap between traditional harmony and modern tastes.

Impact on the Barbershop Community

- **Cultural Exchange:** The inclusion of diverse cultural backgrounds and musical influences enriches the barbershop community, fostering a richer exchange of ideas and styles.
- **Educational Opportunities:** For music educators, this diversity offers an opportunity to explore a wide range of music with students, using barbershop as a versatile and engaging teaching tool.

Barbershop as a Unifying Force

- **Building Community Through Music:** The inclusive nature of modern barbershop helps build a sense of community among singers, united by their love for harmony and ensemble singing.
- **Promoting Cultural Understanding:** By encompassing a variety of musical genres and cultural influences, barbershop music can be a powerful tool for promoting cultural understanding and appreciation.

8. Barbershop in Education: Harmonizing Classroom Learning

Integrating Barbershop into School Music Programs

Educational Benefits of Barbershop Music

- **Harmony and Ear Training:** Learning barbershop music enhances students' ability to hear and understand complex harmonies, improving overall musical ear training.
- **Vocal Technique and Ensemble Skills:** Students develop strong vocal techniques and ensemble singing skills, crucial for any choral setting.
- **Musical Diversity and Creativity:** Barbershop introduces students to a unique American musical tradition, fostering an appreciation for musical diversity and creativity.

Curriculum Integration

- **Complementing Traditional Choir:** Barbershop can be integrated into existing choir programs, offering a contrasting style to classical and contemporary choral music.
- **Cross-Curricular Opportunities:** The history and evolution of barbershop music offer cross-curricular connections with American history and cultural studies.

Teaching Strategies for Barbershop Harmony

Starting with the Basics

- **Understanding Four-Part Harmony:** Begin with teaching the basics of four-part harmony – lead, tenor, baritone, and bass – and their roles in creating the barbershop sound.
- **Simple Arrangements:** Start with simpler songs to build confidence and understanding of the barbershop style.

Advanced Techniques

- **Just Intonation and Tuning:** Teach students about just intonation and its importance in achieving the signature barbershop 'ring'.
- **Articulation and Expression:** Focus on articulation, dynamics, and expressive singing, which are key elements of barbershop performance.

Performance and Engagement

- ***Small Group Opportunities:*** Encourage formation of quartets or small groups to practice and perform, fostering teamwork and individual responsibility.
- ***Community Performances:*** Organize performances for school events or community gatherings, giving students practical experience and exposure.

9. Barbershop Repertoire for Educators: Embracing the Barberpole Cat Songs

Introduction to Barberpole Cat Songs

- ***Foundational Repertoire:*** The Barberpole Cat songs are a collection of classic barbershop tunes that serve as a standard repertoire for barbershoppers globally.
- ***Role in Education:*** These songs are used as a fundamental learning tool for those new to barbershop, making them ideal for educational settings.

Features of Barberpole Cat Songs

- ***Variety of Tunes:*** The collection includes a variety of songs, each exemplifying key elements of barbershop harmony.
- ***Accessibility:*** These songs are known for their relatively simple melodies and harmonies, making them accessible to singers of all skill levels.

Teaching Barbershop Harmony through Barberpole Cats

- ***Building Blocks:*** Start with Barberpole Cat songs to introduce students to the basics of barbershop harmony, including chord structures and voice leading.
- ***Harmonization Skills:*** These songs allow students to practice harmonizing in a barbershop style, enhancing their ear for harmony and ensemble singing.

Integrating Barberpole Cats into Classroom Teaching

- ***Group Singing:*** Use these songs for group singing exercises, encouraging students to listen to and blend with each other.
- ***Voice Part Exploration:*** Have students try singing different voice parts (lead, tenor, baritone, bass) to understand each role in creating the barbershop sound.
- ***Performance Opportunities:*** Organize performances of Barberpole Cat songs, either as part of school concerts or informal gatherings, to showcase students' progress.

10. Barbershop Tags: Ringing Harmonies

Understanding Barbershop Tags

- **Defining Tags:** In barbershop music, tags are the dramatic concluding sections of songs, characterized by their intricate harmonies and emotional impact.
- **Musical Significance:** Tags are often the most harmonically rich and emotionally engaging parts of a barbershop arrangement, leaving a lasting impression on both the singer and the listener.

The Appeal of Barbershop Tags

- **Emotional Climax:** Tags are often the most emotionally charged and harmonically complex part of a barbershop song, creating a memorable and impactful ending.
- **Showcasing Vocal Talent:** They provide an opportunity for singers to demonstrate their range, control, and ability to blend and tune complex chords.
- **Community Aspect:** There is a strong culture in the barbershop community of sharing and singing tags, creating a bond among singers.

Integrating Tags into Barbershop Education

- **Teaching Tool:** Tags are excellent for teaching students about chord progression, voice leading, and tuning in barbershop harmony.
- **Engagement:** The short length and emotional depth of tags make them engaging and accessible for students of all levels.

Resources for Learning and Teaching Tags

- **Barbershop Harmony Society's Tag Resources:** [BHS Tag Resources](#) - A comprehensive collection of barbershop tags with sheet music and learning tracks.
- **Tag Teaching Websites:** Websites like [BarbershopTags.com](#) offer a wide array of tags, along with recordings and learning aids.

The Enchantment of Barbershop Tags

Examples of Popular Barbershop Tags sung by Tim Waurick

- "Smile"
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qPyeevz0yIY>



- "Not While I'm Around"

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hG5U8JT0_Do



- "Cornbread!"
<https://youtu.be/OM4jRmEKiZ0?si=xrObLypFYET1cZgH>



11. Barbershop Music in Education: A Conclusion and Resource Guide








The Unique Educational Value of Barbershop Music

- **Enhancing Vocal Skills:** Barbershop music offers a unique approach to vocal harmony and ensemble singing, beneficial for developing students' vocal skills.
- **Broadening Musical Horizons:** It introduces students to a diverse range of musical styles and historical contexts, enriching their overall musical education.
- **Fostering Teamwork and Creativity:** The collaborative nature of barbershop singing promotes teamwork, creativity, and a deeper appreciation for vocal music.

Resources for Further Learning and Exploration

- **Barbershop Harmony Society (BHS):** [Barbershop Harmony Society Website](#) - Offers extensive resources, educational materials, and information about barbershop music.
- **Barberpole Cat Program:** [Barberpole Cat Songbook](#) - A collection of classic barbershop songs ideal for beginners.
- **Learning Tracks:** Various websites offer learning tracks for barbershop music, providing an auditory guide for each voice part.
- **YouTube Channels:** Channels like [Barbershop Harmony Society](#) provide numerous performance videos and educational content.

Comparative Study: Choral/Barbershop Arrangements

Song	Barbershop	Choral
<p>1. Seize the Day (from Newsies)</p>	<p>Rowdy Rhythm (Midwinter Convention 2020)</p> <p>https://youtu.be/sNvyOs37DW8?si=HlehfoMirbmltsbi</p> 	<p>Lake Park Choir (2017)</p> <p>https://youtu.be/W4h7Nj73bV8?si=AAAF0tnqzSr_PANw</p> 
<p>2. The Greatest Show/Come Alive (from the Greatest Showman)</p>	<p>Hurricane of Harmony (Midwinter Convention 2019)</p> <p>https://youtu.be/IV0T_NdzM-o?si=DqOcipTEeOU2EeIV</p> 	<p>Lake High School Choir (2018)</p> <p>https://youtu.be/pWmsN1ecp8A?si=cOc1PAu0aquF7nOf</p> 
<p>3. Can't Buy Me Love Beatles Cover</p>	<p>Chandler High School Treblemakers (Midwinter Convention 2020)</p> <p>https://youtu.be/702ThkJt9K4?si=cajCeeSDM8xFb0Vi</p> 	<p>Palo Verde High School Choir</p> <p>https://youtu.be/_j9mHoMnXSk?si=3qbUGX-iNF-AlxA</p> 
<p>4. I'm Sitting On Top of The World</p>	<p>Chandler High School Men's Choir (Midwinter Convention 2020)</p> <p>https://youtu.be/hhAd4BFMsze?si=cHPROaLcJC-ef7hC</p> 	<p>Sauk Rapids- Rice High School Choir</p> <p>https://youtu.be/yyOkY8bx7tA?si=J40Chzmb6-tLbM5t</p> 
<p>5. You're 16, You're Beautiful & You're Mine</p>	<p>Grandview High School Superwomen Chorus (Midwinter Convention 2018)</p> <p>https://youtu.be/bKvjvE_-Dmo?si=CGt7liIFCeSXIag1</p> 	<p>South Portland High AND Middle School Chorus High School Chamber Singers (2015)</p> <p>https://youtu.be/PxLtSicHQQU?si=LRD-nKOegZniRfg</p> 