

How Can I Keep From Singing?

by Dave Warmbrodt



I still recall my days as a grade school choir boy under the direction of Sister Mary Gerald. My other grade school memories have faded, but those from the choir room remain clearly with me to this day. After singing in a couple of musical revues in high school, my public singing career ended, and for the next 35 years I focused on raising a family with my wife, Barb, and pursuing a career.

Then one December night in 1993, Barb and I were out Christmas shopping, and from a distance, I heard the fascinating four-part harmony of a Christmas carol. The stage was like a magnet, drawing me nearer. The performers were the Ambassadors of Harmony, a male a cappella chorus. After thoroughly enjoying the remainder of their performance, we added our names to their mailing list and began receiving invitations to their semi-annual shows in St. Louis.

I attended Ambassador shows over the next seven years, often considering auditioning. Their performances, however, were of an incredibly high caliber; I could not even visualize myself standing on the risers with them. Besides, in addition to their excellent vocal arrangements, there was quite a bit of choreography, and this just strengthened my belief that this was better left to others more capable and daring than I.

Then, during the last verse of “Silent Night” at their Christmas show in 2000, the director asked the audience to sing along with the Ambassadors, who had processed into the aisles. As my voice blended with several basses standing close by, I decided I would take the chance.

Weeks later, I attended a rehearsal. After explaining that I was just there to listen and observe, one of the members persuaded me to join them on the risers. After singing the bass part that night in the middle of 60 other basses and hearing those resonant chords, I knew I needed to pursue this.

The first audition required me to sing the bass part in a quartet—something I had never done before, not to mention the fact that I could barely read music. Within five seconds, I was erroneously singing the lead part and

the audition committee advised me that more practice was in order. But as I attended additional rehearsals, I was drawn to the camaraderie in the group and their tremendous dedication to this art form. After singing the audition material to my wife, my mom, my sister, my neighbor—anyone else who would listen—I returned the next week and passed. A month later, I passed the second audition.

The Ambassadors are members of the Barbershop Harmony Society, which has approximately 31,000 singers in 820 chapters throughout the world. Each July the top chapters gather for the international choral competition. In 2001, the Ambassadors placed fourth, followed by two third place finishes in 2002 and 2003. We were excited as we approached the 2004 competition. Our songs were coupled with excellent choreography, and our director provided expert technical direction and interpretation, as well as generous amounts of encouragement. Our efforts culminated in Louisville, Kentucky, where the Ambassadors of Harmony became the 2004 international male chorus champions for the first time in their 40-year history. I came home with a gold medal and the indescribable rush of having stretched out for something that I thought was beyond my reach and grasped it.

I believe that each of us has undiscovered talents that need to be identified and nurtured for the good of our fellow human beings. It is a risk. But I found that in taking the risk, I was rewarded with a sense of accomplishment and pride in a skill I never suspected I would sharpen. My reward has also become a gift to the audiences with whom we share our music. ●

Dave Warmbrodt is a principal with the LarsonAllen Construction and Real Estate Group. Contact Dave at dwarmbrodt@larsonallen.com or 314/336-3725.

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