

Quartet Night

I have organized a monthly quartet night, away from a chapter meeting, for several years. Trying numerous formats and schemes, I have settled on this style that works well for us. I'm sure that there are many variations that would also work well.

We always meet at a large house that has a big family room and several smaller rooms for quartets. But any similar facility would work OK. I have always done this as a 'by invitation' only function to ensure a balance of parts. All of the invitees are known to be able to hold their part in a quartet and many can sing multiple parts. Not all have been in an organized quartet before though. On occasion, we will have a 'real' quartet show up just because they know about it and want to join in the fun. The attendance list includes present BHS members, some former BHS members and a couple of guys that have never been in the Society.

We have had 12 or 16 attendees (once even 20), always dependent upon the number of Tenors available, either real ones or guys that can do some Tenor.

I have a 3" binder (very full) with maybe 50 songs, 4 copies each. (This is very important to success) All of the songs are simple and very basic Barbershop and usually well known. This makes it easy to find chords and to have success, right from the start. I think this is also very important. In the beginning, guys would bring copies of the latest song that their chorus was taking to contest or some A level song of an International level quartet. Predictably, this proved to be frustrating and discouraging. I have selected songs from the Heritage of Harmony Book and from the old Songs For Men series, since I have the complete set. Also included are some of the Society's Free and Easy songs. In most cases, we use only the chorus. Introductions and verses are usually less well known.

I've tried several methods of quartet assignment and have finally found one that seems to work for us.

In advance, I have small cards made up with names on one side and voice part on the other. Many guys have multiple cards, of course. I place all the cards on the table face down and grouped by part, being sure that each singer is in only one part at a time. Then the Leads draw their quartet. I also have the music spread out and each Lead selects the song for his quartet, usually with a lot of 'suggestions' from the other 3.

Then the quartets find a room and see what they can do with their song in 15 minutes. Everyone reconvenes and singing their song for the others is optional. Those who do can be assured of lots of fun filled commentary. There are always a lot of laughs.

Then, it's back to the draw for another quartet and a new song, with lots of parts switching and the cycle repeats. We can usually get 5-6 different foursomes in an evening.

We nearly always have a Tag of the Night, taught by a tag aficionado. I always ask him to select a short and fairly simple tag and to bring multiple copies. When he does not do that, it becomes long and drawn out as well as frustrating. A few foursomes will usually try the tag for the group.

In an attempt to add some variety, I have tried to include one segment of Woodshedding using several of the basic tunes, again in sets of four. The Lead selects the song. This has had limited success because the Leads often do not know the tune and cannot sight read it.

I think that the thing to strive for is to keep it simple. The objective is to ring a few chords, find some reward in just creating some music. Leave the complicated and challenging songs for another time and place.

Rule One: The evening must be high on camaraderie and low on stress.

Rule Two: Read Rule One.

However one would structure an evening such as this, it's a virtual certainty that all will leave with a smile on their face and a song in their heart. Those who don't should dust off their bowling ball.

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