



**BRIDGE TOWN SOUND**

www.bridgetownsound.org

## Portland Metro Chapter Men's Barbershop Chorus

Six-Time Evergreen Division IV Champions

### SOUND - Bites

August 6, 2013



## From your Musical Director

John Burri wrote the following article for the August edition of the Evergreen District's online newsletter, *Timbre*. With his permission, we are reprinting it here.

*John Burri*

### How To (Re)Build A Chorus - A Bridge Town Sound Story

Portland Metro Chapter, Bridge Town Sound, was chartered in 2001 to be a "benchmark" chapter/chorus in Portland and EVG. I had the good fortune to become the director in spring of 2002, and we rode a wave of growth in membership and musical achievement up to a high point in 2007. We placed 3<sup>rd</sup> in District with 46 on stage and our highest scores ever, and had over 60 members on paper. Things seemed to be going pretty well. Unfortunately, what we had was not sustainable, and we fell both in membership numbers and quality musical performance soon thereafter.

Here's what happened ... our mission and goals and expectations were not clearly communicated to the membership, and if and when they were, we didn't live by them or hold ourselves accountable to them. Spirit and joy and musical satisfaction waned and members voted with their feet. Something needed to be done. We realized we couldn't be all things to all people.

Inspired by Donny Rose and his efforts with the Bellevue Chapter, Northwest Sound, we embarked on a journey of musical excellence through continual improvement. We developed criteria for qualification to be in our performing chorus. This was received with mixed reviews as some felt that it was a plan for exclusion and not inclusion. More members left, but a small nucleus believed, and we moved forward. Our minimum expectation was that the member must demonstrate mastery of the music (notes and words). We provided multiple avenues for qualification (personal recordings on the riser, quartet opportunities, VLQ opportunities, recording at home

against learning tracks), and offered and provided remedial help outside of meetings through individual and group sessions.

As soon as a singer qualifies on any song, he can sing that song in any performance. We have had singers stepping on and off the risers in between songs so they could participate. We do this to encourage and reward the singer, and to adhere and maintain the standards we have set.

In fall of 2010 we had enough singers to compete on only one of our two contest songs, but competed anyway for the experience. In spring of 2011, we could not qualify enough singers so we didn't compete and therefore could not compete in the fall of 2011 either. In the spring of 2012 we qualified a chorus and placed 2<sup>nd</sup> by 2 points, followed by a 9<sup>th</sup> place finish in the fall of 2012. Spring of 2012 we became DIV IV champs and have the 5<sup>th</sup> highest qualifying score going in to District in Boise this fall.

Our chapter meetings are becoming better and better attended, our membership is growing, and we're attracting guests who like and appreciate the commitment to musical excellence of our singers, and the tools we provide to succeed. Former members, both the "higher achievers" who left after the fall and those who left because they didn't like this redirection we took then, are now returning as well.

Here's the major takeaway for any chapter and chorus ... it's ok to be whatever type of chapter you want to be. But to succeed you must be absolutely clear and unwavering in your mission, and provide whatever tools will be needed to accomplish the mission. Talk the walk, and walk the talk. And whatever and however you do it, be sure to do so with great love and kindness.

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We meet every Tuesday from 7-9:30 pm  
at Holladay Park Church of God,  
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Please join us!

Bridge Town Sound is affiliated with the  
Barbershop Harmony Society



## Norm's Two-Minute Report

By Norm Lawson

The subject of my report wasn't home so I got a woman's perspective on a former Bridge Town Sound chorus standout, Vern Emra. You may recall that Vern had a bout with cancer a while back, but he's in remission and is going as strong as ever. Vern's wife, Velma, says they are both well and very happy.

Vern has taken a break from singing, but he has fond memories of barbershop, having sung for over 40 years. He sang in his church choir, but has taken a leave from it as well.

Velma says that he enjoys maintaining the Oregon City Park. The city has a nice park but no funds for maintenance, so Vern volunteers to keep it up. He still enjoys playing golf, and has worked from time to time at restoring old cars.

The Emras have three grandchildren here by their daughter and son-in-law, and another three grandchildren in L.A. by their son and daughter-in-law.

They love to travel to see those grandchildren in southern California.

Vern and Velma enjoy bringing up *Sound-Bites* on their computer to see how Bridge Town Sound is doing. I told her to look for a copy with this report in it.



Vern & Velma Emra



By Doug Watson

Ticket Sales Coordinator

We are looking for volunteers who will go to area Barbershop Harmony Society and Sweet Adeline International chapters on their rehearsal evenings to plug our *Spaghetti Spectacular* cabaret, taking flyers and tickets and talking it up in brief presentations..

Hopefully we can get flyers posted in various places as well as some on-site ticket sales or orders. Plan on two visits and doing some follow-up.

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