

# GUIDELINES FOR FORMING A QUARTET



SWEET ADELINES

INTERNATIONAL

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## **MISSION STATEMENT**

Sweet Adelines International is a worldwide organization of women singers committed to advancing the musical art form of barbershop harmony through education and performance.

## INTRODUCTION

Sweet Adelines International comprises more than 28,000 members who enjoy singing a variety of music arranged in four-part harmony. Most members belong to choruses where they receive training in barbershop harmony while experiencing the joy of singing.

In addition to chorus participation, members may voluntarily form quartets to pursue another avenue of their hobby of singing barbershop harmony. The Guidelines for Forming a Quartet is designed to facilitate this pursuit.

### ***JUDGING CATEGORY DESCRIPTION BOOK (JCDB)***

The *Judging Category Description Book (JCDB)* referred to in this handbook is available through Harmony Bazaar at international headquarters. It is an invaluable tool containing complete information about each of the four judging categories.

## **ORGANIZING THE QUARTET**

Participation in a quartet provides a unique opportunity for four singers who share similar interests with respect to their goals and development as a musical, performing unit. However, to be successful, it involves more than singing together a few minutes following chorus rehearsal each week. Quartet members must work both individually and as a unit on all aspects of vocal production and performance skills. Decisions regarding administrative responsibilities and educational opportunities are important to a quartet and must be shared by and coordinated to the satisfaction of all four members.

### **QUARTET GOALS**

Quartets form for a variety of reasons and usually continue when the blend of voices and personalities is mutually satisfying. The quartet continues to develop as a performing unit because the members share similar goals.

Before the decision is made to become an organized quartet, members should devote time to discussing their goals as individual quartet members and as a performing unit. For example:

- Do all four members want to perform exclusively for civic organizations or on chorus shows and afterglows?
- Or do all four members also want to compete in regional competition?
- What are the members' goals relative to competition?
  - to compete for the fun and educational benefit?
  - to place in the top five regionally?
  - to be the regional champion?
  - to become an international semifinalist?
  - to become a Sweet Adelines International Champion Quartet?

The goals that are identified for the quartet will determine the level of commitment required from each member. As the quartet develops, or as personal priorities change, goals also may change and should be evaluated periodically and, if necessary, amended.

In addition to musical and performance goals, potential quartet members need to consider the personal relationships that will develop within a quartet. The key to success in this area is open communication. Each member should be responsible for providing honest feedback in an appropriate manner when necessary. Expectations and disappointments should be openly discussed within the quartet. It is important to remember that emotional issues, and issues that involve one's pride, are the hardest ones to confront.

When a quartet is first forming, just like with a marriage, all parties want to believe that this is a relationship for life. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. Too often a minor or major disagreement develops and a quartet does not know how to deal with and resolve the conflict. A potential quartet would be wise to draw up a pre-quartetting agreement. The contract should outline such things as:

- How will the quartet deal with disagreements?
- Will selection of songs, costumes, dismissal of a member, etc. be a unanimous decision or a majority vote?
- If a member leaves the quartet, what are the financial obligations regarding quartet property, such as music and costumes?
- What are a member's responsibilities regarding property ownership, financial matters, administrative assignments?
- How often should the quartet relationship be reviewed?

## **ADMINISTRATIVE ASSIGNMENTS**

While most decisions regarding the quartet should be made by the unit, many administrative tasks are best assigned to specific members according to individual skills. The following areas are examples of task assignments that could be made:

### **Quartet Contact**

The quartet registration form specifies that one member be designated as the quartet contact. As the quartet's official liaison with international headquarters, the contact receives all correspondence regarding competitions and quartet education programs. This key person is responsible for meeting deadlines for submitting required paperwork to and corresponding with international headquarters and the region. The quartet contact is the only person in the quartet that can access their online information for renewing, personnel changes, competitions.

### **Performance Manager**

A member of the quartet may be responsible for making all arrangements regarding quartet performances. In this capacity she usually finalizes, in advance, such details as fees (amount and payment details), performance start and finish time, dressing/warm-up room provisions, sound, stage and lighting requirements, etc.

### **Financial Manager**

It is important that an accurate record of the quartet's expenses and income be maintained. A member of the quartet should be responsible for maintaining the funds and remitting payment for expenses.

### **Travel Manager**

If the quartet is traveling as a unit, one member accepts the responsibility of making travel and housing arrangements.

These are merely a few of the tasks that may be assigned, based upon the needs of the performing unit. Care in assigning responsibilities will result in less worry about administrative details, freeing the quartet to enjoy the benefits of singing and attaining their goals.

## **CHOOSING A NAME**

### **Registration**

Since no two Sweet Adelines International quartets may use the same name, each quartet should register its chosen name, for protection purposes, with international headquarters. To register, a completed "Quartet Registration Form" should be sent to international headquarters, along with the \$80.00 registration fee. Payment may be made by check, Visa or MasterCard. Registration may also be made online at our website [www.sweetadelineintl.org](http://www.sweetadelineintl.org) A Quartet Registration Packet, containing current information for quartets, will be supplied to each registered quartet.

Points to remember are:

- (1) A \$50.00 late fee will be charged to any quartet registering between January 16 and March 31. Quartets must be registered by January 15 prior to competing in regional contests.
- (2) A member may belong to more than one registered quartet, but she may compete in \_\_\_\_\_ only one quartet per Sweet Adelines International contest.
- (3) The name of a registered quartet is protected from registration by another quartet for the fiscal year of initial registration. To assure retention of the quartet name, the quartet must register the name each succeeding fiscal year (beginning May 1). If the quartet name has not been registered by July 31 of the fiscal year, it will become available to another quartet.
- (4) It is necessary to for the contact to notify international headquarters in the event of a change in quartet personnel or a change of address of the contact.
- (5) A change in the name of a quartet may not be made except at the beginning of each fiscal year.

It is also important to note that all requirements for charter renewal of the quartet member's chapter must be met before quartet registration/renewal can be processed at international headquarters. Should the quartet registration be received at international headquarters before the chapter's charter renewal is processed, the registration will be held until the chapter renews its charter.

### **Restrictions on Registration**

- (1) A currently registered quartet must retain two (2) members in order to maintain its quartet name.
- (2) The names of current or past international championship quartets are protected and may not be used or registered by another quartet.
- (3) The names of international semifinalist quartets (those placing 2-15 in the international quartet competition) are protected and may not be used or registered by another quartet for a period of five (5) years from the end of the fiscal year, when the latest ranking as international semifinalists was achieved.
- (4) The name of an international semifinalist quartet which loses its ranking as a result of personnel changes may not be used nor registered by remaining members or another quartet for a period of five (5) years from the end of the fiscal year, when the latest ranking as international semifinalist was achieved.
- (5) The names of regional championship quartets are protected and may not be used nor registered by another quartet for a period of one (1) year from the end of the fiscal year when the latest ranking as regional championship quartet was achieved.
- (6) The name of a regional championship quartet or a wild card quartet, which loses its ranking as a result of personnel changes may not be used nor registered by remaining members or another quartet for a period of one (1) year from the end of the fiscal year, when the latest ranking as regional championship quartet was achieved.
- (7) It is necessary to for the contact to notify international headquarters, in writing or via email, in the event of a change in quartet personnel or the contact's address. A change in the name of a quartet may not be made except at the beginning of each fiscal year.

## THE MUSICAL PRODUCT AND VISUAL PRESENTATION

The International Board of Directors has adopted the following mission statement for the international organization:

*Sweet Adelines International is a worldwide organization of women singers committed to advancing the musical art form of barbershop harmony through education and performance.*

As a representative of Sweet Adelines International, as well as its individual chorus(es), a quartet will want to promote the best possible barbershop sound and style. Therefore, planning, time and effort must be devoted to developing the musical product and visual presentation.

### Quartet Rehearsal

Rehearsal is essential to the mastery of any technique. Listed below are recommendations regarding quartet rehearsals.

- Rehearsals should be held on a regular basis and with dates planned far enough in advance to avoid scheduling conflicts.
- When rehearsing for an important performance, consider a retreat type setting to help in avoiding all distractions.
- Rehearsals are often held in members' homes; however, they should be free from interruption.
- Rehearsals usually last about three hours, with longer rehearsals scheduled for coaching visits or competition preparation.

Just as it is important to schedule quartet rehearsals on a regular basis, it is important to plan each rehearsal in advance. The following are recommended for each rehearsal plan:

- Perform approximately 20-30 minutes of vocal and physical warm-up exercises;
- Review and polish repertoire material, as needed, including choreography;
- Learn new music, including interpretation and choreography; and,
- Refine any performance packages.

## **MUSICAL PRODUCTION**

### **Vocal Production**

Perhaps the most important part of the musical product is vocal production. As a member develops her singing technique, the musical quality improves. When all four members of a quartet improve, the overall quality of the performance of the unit improves.

The foundation for good barbershop sound and technique is breath support. Without it, harmony accuracy is difficult to maintain, appropriate balance between all four parts will not be attained and dynamic levels will not vary. Good breath support comes only with knowledge and practice.

### **Balance and Blend**

The quality that makes barbershop harmony different from other choral music is the unique way in which the four parts blend to produce a cone-shaped sound. In order for the quartet to achieve this cone-shaped sound, each member must understand how and where her part fits within the cone. She also must understand the characteristics of each of the other three parts and how they interrelate.

#### Tenor

In barbershop harmony, the tenor is the highest part and is sung above the melody. The tenor sings with sufficient maturity of sound to complement the lower voices while maintaining clarity and brilliance. Excessive vibrato is removed.

#### Lead

The lead in a barbershop quartet is responsible for conveying the interpretation, emotion and inflection of the song, with the other parts supporting her with inflection, artistry and finesse. Since the lead generally carries the melody, she sings with authority, clarity and consistency between the extremes of her range.

#### Baritone

The baritone part in barbershop harmony is sung sometimes above and sometimes below the melody. Although singing within the same range as the lead, the baritone must sing with a depth of tone in order to fill the gap between the lead and bass.

#### Bass

The lowest note in a barbershop chord is that of the bass. Since the bass provides a firm foundation for the cone, this part is sung primarily in the lower register with a mellow and melodic quality. The tone produced should be rich, full and broad with clarity and focus and a minimum of vibrato. Her vocal quality should complement that of the lead voice.

The Judging Category Description Book provides additional detail for each part.

## **Music**

The primary consideration for selecting music is whether or not the song and the arrangement are suitable for the group. For example, because of the musical demands inherent in the arrangement, some chorus songs are not suitable for quartets. Likewise, a contest arrangement sung by an international championship quartet may be too difficult for a quartet that has not competed on the international stage.

The following factors should be considered when selecting music:

- Musical capabilities of the quartet and individual members;
- Members' experience in singing barbershop harmony;
- Vocal range of each part; and
- Appropriateness of the arrangement, including the lyrics, to the quartet's style and image.

One of the most difficult tasks is choosing competition material. The music category section of the Judging Category Description Book explains the category requirements of contest arrangements.

### Copyright Requirements

It is the policy of Sweet Adelines International to require that all necessary permissions, grants of rights, and licenses for the use of musical works in any public performance and on any recordings have been secured. That all applicable fees and/or royalties are paid for such uses.

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### Sources of Music

There are several sources of music from which quartets may select appropriate material.

#### •International Headquarters

The sales department at international headquarters maintains a list of all music published through Sweet Adelines International. This list is distributed periodically, free of charge, to all chapters and to individuals upon request. Songs on this list have been approved by the international organization as quality barbershop arrangements. Each song is coded for level of difficulty, tempo (ballad or uptune) and suitability for contest. This music is available from the international headquarters sales department.

#### •Arrangers' Music List

Distributed by the international headquarters sales department, this is a list of songs submitted by arrangers. These arrangements have received the necessary clearance from the copyright holder(s). The sheet music is available either from the arranger or international headquarters, as indicated on the list.

- **Arrangers**

A directory of all members of the International Music Arrangers Program (IMAP) is available to members of Sweet Adelines. A quartet may write directly to an arranger for information about non-published arrangements. When a quartet wants to obtain a song performed by another group and does not know who the arranger is, it is appropriate for the quartet to contact the performing group.

## **VISUAL PRESENTATION**

The visual characteristics of the barbershop style include high energy, natural body movement (in addition to planned choreography), facial animation, and unity of a contemporary appearance. The visual presentation of a quartet enhances the musical product and should never detract from it. This portion of a performance takes time to plan, rehearse and polish to achieve the desired overall impression of unity and precision.

Several areas make up the visual presentation of a quartet's performance. Refer to the *JCDB* for the importance of each area in relation to competition.

### **Choreography**

Planned movements are used to illustrate the lyrics, as well as to add emphasis to specific phrases. Gestures are planned so they appear natural and spontaneous, and complement the quartet's style and image.

Movement should never detract from the musical production. Therefore, all gestures should be rehearsed - the entrance, the choreography, the bow for each song, the quartet's stance between songs, and the final bow and exit. When perfected, these result in a unit effect that enhances the musical presentation.

### **Costume**

The quartet's costume, as well as its choreography, should achieve a unit impression. The costume should be appropriate for the occasion and for the quartet's image. The style should be complimentary to all four members. If the costume is inappropriate for even one member of the quartet, it might result in a comedic impact, detracting from both the musical and visual presentation.

Within a contest, in order not to distract attention away from current performers, awards from other competitions should not be worn. In addition, awards won with previous quartets or choruses should never be worn by individual members of a quartet when the current quartet is in costume.

**Make-up**

Total communication with the audience is not achieved without discernible facial expressions. Facial expressions can be enhanced with the proper use of make-up. While make-up is only a small portion of the visual presentation, it should be worn during all presentations, with the occasion dictating the style and amount.

The primary component of a barbershop performance is unity, both in the musical production and visual presentation. With a unit sound, individual voices are heard only as components of the total chord, not as specific notes. Unity in the visual presentation means that neither the costume, make-up, nor physical movement detracts from the overall visual effect. Finally, total unity of performance is achieved when the musical and visual presentation complement and enhance one another.

## **PERFORMANCES**

A performance is any planned presentation by the quartet - from the two songs in a regional competition performance to the 10-12 minute package prepared for the international quartet finals to a program presented on a show. Regardless of the type of performance, the following components of an entertaining package remain constant, with only the number of songs or amount of spoken material varied:

- The material should be appropriate to the occasion.
- The singing must display basic musicianship skills.
- The emcees should display confidence and poise, and the content of the material should be in good taste.
- The quartet should display poise and the ability to handle unexpected situations.
- The performance package should exemplify creativity.

Entertaining performance packages don't happen spontaneously. Instead, they are the result of careful planning, diligent rehearsal, and a professional presentation. When all four members are well rehearsed - both individually and collectively - the quartet will be relaxed and able to focus its energy on communicating with the audience.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

### **Music Selection**

The number of songs to be included in the package depends on the quartet's repertoire and the length of the program. A performance of 15 to 20 minutes requires approximately 5-8 songs, depending on how much spoken material is included.

The type of audience should be considered when selecting material for a program: An audience of barbershoppers might appreciate hearing ballads, residents in a nursing home might prefer to hear cheerful uptunes. Quartets are often asked to perform their national anthem at sporting events. Whatever the event or occasion, all Sweet Adeline performing groups are expected to be mindful of subject matter, lyrics or presentations that may offend members and/or audiences.

Once the songs are selected, determine the sequence. The program should begin and end with enthusiasm and excitement that gains the audience's attention, then leave them wanting more. Ballads and novelty numbers should be placed in the middle of the performance. Although it is not necessary for all songs to have a common theme, it is important that the progression from one segment to the next be logical and smooth. Therefore, consideration must be given to the selection and placement of spoken material.

## **Emcee**

The emcee's presentation is important to the success of a performance package. She is responsible for introducing each song as well as for providing a smooth transition between segments and mood changes. The emcee should be poised, with an intuitive sense of timing as to when to begin talking after a song, or when to end a story and introduce the next segment.

The emcee should always be a positive reflection of the quartet's image while still recognizing and maintaining her own style and strengths. A quartet whose emcee has the ability to tell a joke or story and maintain the audience's attention will want to spotlight that talent. However, it is important to remember that the quartet was engaged for a musical performance, not stand-up comedy, and most of the performance should consist of singing.

Regardless of her individual style, the emcee should consider the following factors when planning the content and delivery of material:

- Know the audience.
- Material should be appropriate for the situation.
- Material should enhance the musical aspect of the performance.
- Avoid off-color jokes and use of profanity.
- Material should not surprise or embarrass other quartet members.

Whenever a quartet performs in public, it represents its own chorus(es) as well as the international organization. So no matter how large an audience or how important the performance, every aspect of the presentation - the musical quality, visual performance, and emcee material - should always be in keeping with the professional standards of the organization.

## **GUIDELINES FOR AUDITIONING QUARTETS**

Auditioning quartets not only assures the quality of Sweet Adelines International performing groups, but also assists them in improving the quality of their performances. Chapters generally require quartets to pass an audition prior to their first public performance. It is recommended that chapters use the Basic Criteria for Public Performance (found at the beginning of Section VIII of the Chapter Guide or in the Guidelines for Forming a Quartet) as the basis of evaluation.

Most chapters have established audition procedures to determine a quartet's readiness for public performances. Quartet auditions may be conducted by the chorus director, the music committee, or by a specially-formed audition committee. Members chosen to participate in the audition committee do not have to be experienced judges. Education coordinators are responsible for auditioning all chapter-at-large quartets.

## Guidelines For Forming A Quartet

The auditioning quartet is required to present a mini-performance of two or three songs, including emcee material and costumes. Following the performance, members of the audition committee should complete an "Audition Evaluation" form. Results of the evaluation should be given to the quartet as soon as possible after the audition. Specific comments regarding quality of musical product, choreography, and appearance are considered to be most helpful. If the quartet is not approved for public performance, audition committee members should offer suggestions for coaching help. Chapter-at-large quartets may submit their audition by sending a videotape of a 15-20 minute performance package, in costume and including emcee material, just like an actual performance.

If a quartet's members are from more than one chapter, the quartet should audition for all chapters involved. When one or more voice part is changed, the quartet should re-audition. Any quartet formed specifically to sing at a one-time performance such as a chapter show, church service or club meeting, also should be auditioned. To help quartet members feel at ease, a letter explaining the audition procedure and areas to be evaluated should be provided in advance to each quartet.

## THE QUARTET COACH

Because it is impossible for individual members of the quartet to hear the unit's sound as a whole, it is difficult for them to evaluate balance and blend, to pinpoint the cause of harmony inaccuracy, or to critique the visual presentation. A tape recorder, video camera and monitor can be valuable tools during a quartet rehearsal. By reviewing the rehearsal on tape, each member can determine areas where she needs to make adjustments.

Many quartets have also made arrangements to be coached on a regular basis. The coach is a "fifth ear" who hears and watches the unit, and who can provide direction which will enable the quartet to improve singing technique, as well as visual presentation. A quartet coach may be the chorus director, a knowledgeable chorus member, a member of the regional team faculty, a member of the International Music Faculty, or anyone who can effectively fit the needs of the quartet.

### Selecting a Coach

It is important that the quartet select the coach most compatible with the unit at their particular stage of development. Before selecting a coach, the quartet should carefully and honestly answer the following questions together:

- (1) What is the quartet's experience, both in the art form and as a performing unit?
- (2) What are the goals of the quartet?
- (3) What are the quartet's specific needs?
- (4) How much can the quartet afford to spend for coaching?
- (5) How often is a coaching session desired?
- (6) Who is available that meets the quartet's needs?

### Working With the Coach

Once a candidate is identified, the quartet should approach the individual regarding availability, fee and expense requirements, and personal expectations. The quartet should provide the coach with background information about the quartet, including their degree of experience, specific needs, and goals. All arrangements regarding fee, expenses, and dates of coaching sessions should be confirmed in writing.

In order to achieve maximum results from a coaching session, the quartet must be well prepared. Each member should know her music so well that she can stop and start at any point in any song. She should be just as familiar with the choreography.

#### Guidelines For Forming A Quartet

The coaching session is an intense workout, both physically and mentally. Standing and performing, perhaps for several hours, each member must maintain concentration on what is being said and how the direction relates to her. Members should keep in mind that the coach's comments are directed to improve the unit as a whole, and at individuals only as they fit into that unit.

Sometimes when a face-to-face coaching session is not possible, an audio and/or video tape can be quite beneficial. Many Education Coordinators have developed a "coach-by-tape" program, and several coaches use this system for interim coaching sessions. In making a tape, the quartet will want to present the complete package to be critiqued, using the best equipment available. The coach can then listen to the performance and evaluate each song, just as if she were on site.

A productive coaching session is one in which all five individuals work together to achieve the net result - a better quartet. No coach is perfect, and the quartet may later decide not to incorporate all her suggestions. The advantage to working with a quartet coach, either in person or by tape, is that she can listen to and watch the unit, discern the problem areas for each part, critique the presentation objectively, and assist with the various facets of the performance, such as interpretation, lyrical expression, and the visual effect. Having a quartet coach does not guarantee success on the competition stage, but working regularly with a "fifth ear" will help the quartet achieve its potential as a musical unit.

## **CONCLUSION**

Singing in a quartet can be challenging, exciting, and self-fulfilling. The challenge lies in the effort to develop the technique of singing and performing in the barbershop style. Performing for an audience is exciting; for the quartet can share with many people simultaneously an appreciation and love for music, the universal language. Self-fulfillment results from the realization that because of hard work, a great deal of time, and much commitment on the part of each member, the quartet's goals have been met and a musical unit has evolved.

Many people will base their opinion of Sweet Adelines International on the performance of one quartet. Therefore, it is essential that every quartet present a musical and visual image which reflects positively on the organization and on the art form of barbershop harmony.

## **BASIC CRITERIA FOR PUBLIC PERFORMANCE**

Each chapter and quartet, as a part of Sweet Adelines International, is committed to advancing the musical art form of barbershop harmony through education and performance. In order to promote this appreciation, each chapter and quartet must present a professional performance that enhances the music and emphasizes the appropriate image.

In order to ensure the quality of our public performances, the Educational Coordinator (ED) is responsible for evaluating the musical abilities of chapters and prospective chapters, including their readiness for public performance. In addition, chapters are expected to establish quality control and auditioning procedures for quartets which represent their chapters. Although quality is difficult to specify, minimum standards must be established.

Listed below are the Basic Criteria for Public Performance adopted by the International Board of Directors. These criteria are used by the EDs in determining if a prospective or established chapter may perform in public. The International Board of Directors strongly urges chapters to use these same basic criteria when auditioning quartets.

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### BASIC CRITERIA FOR PUBLIC PERFORMANCE

#### I. PERFORMANCE

##### A. Musical Performance

1. Performing groups and their audiences enjoy variety (including novelty or comedy songs, solos, and songs with modern chords) in a performance. However, the performance should include predominant use of barbershop arrangements sung in barbershop style as defined in the Judging Category Description Book.
2. Public performances should include the following musical skills
  - a. Correct notes and words
  - b. In sync and in tune
  - c. Energy and forward motion

##### B. Visual Performance

1. Correct stage stance and posture
2. Even spacing between chorus and quartet members
3. Synchronization of planned movement
4. Display of appropriate facial expression and poise
5. Energy and emotional connection with the audience

- C. Appropriateness
  - 1. Subject matter, lyrics or presentation should not be offensive to members and/or audience
  - 2. Length of performance should fit the occasion and the audience
- D. Emcee
  - 1. Material is planned ahead and relevant to the audience
  - 2. Delivery enhances the performance and creates a sense of continuity throughout the program
  - 3. Uses appropriate material in good taste. Good singing is the emphasis; joke telling should be minimized and used with caution

## II. UNIT APPEARANCE

- A. Costume
  - 1. Proper fit
  - 2. Clean, pressed and in good repair
  - 3. Appropriate for venue and audience
- B. Grooming
  - 1. Hair that is neat, clean, and styled suitably for the costume
  - 2. Appropriate stage or street makeup applied in a uniform manner

## III. MEMBERS AS AMBASSADORS

- A. All performance related contacts between Sweet Adelines and the public should be business-like and pleasant. A generic plan, either formal or informal, should be developed that assigns responsibilities and ensures that all performance related administrative details are properly handled.
- B. Each chorus and quartet member should be aware that any interaction is a chance to make a positive impression. Of particular importance are:
  - 1. Interaction between the performance coordinator and those who hire the group to perform
  - 2. Interaction between the performing group and the audience, before, during and after the performance
  - 3. Interaction with personnel at the performance site