

Longs Peak Chorus blends tones for the perfect pitch

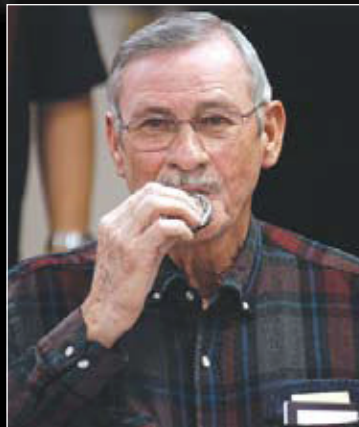
60 Years of Harmony

BY KRISTI RITTER



While Bob Grigsby has never had formal vocal training, he's been singing since junior high. While attending the University of Maryland, he and his fraternity brothers started a small singing group that would go around to sorority houses and perform on the front steps. But in those days, the singing had to be wrapped up before curfew.

After class, he'd head over to a local barbershop group rehearsal, listening intently to the sounds and harmony coming from their voices. It didn't take long before he joined, adding his voice to a diverse group of barbershoppers, a term used to describe the style of music sung in unaccom-



David Waddell gets everyone on the right key during rehearsal at St. Stephens Episcopal Church in Longmont. (Paul Litman/Times-Call)
Main photo of Rocky Mountain District's annual convention and competition in Colorado Springs. (Courtesy of Steve Zimmermann)

panied four-part harmony that perfectly blends the tones.

The Washington, D.C., barbershop chapter allowed for all kinds of singing for the large choruses and smaller quartets, which gave the men a little more versatility in performance, and greater flexibility in where you could sing.

Grigsby sings tenor, requiring him to hit some higher tones. "I believe that if you sing tenor or baritone, you can always find work," he says. "Although, men want to sing baritone or bass. I think it's a man thing."

Singing in the groups has taken Grigsby to a variety of locations throughout

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Jim Cole, the Longs Peak Chorus assistant director, warms up the group before practice at St. Stephens Episcopal Church in Longmont. Below: Chris Vaughan, director, conducts practice as singers go over some holiday music they will be singing this season. (Paul Litman/Times-Call)

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his 58 years in a barbershop chorus, but the wildest place in which he's sung has to be Carnegie Hall, the ultimate musical location in New York.

"When you're on that stage and looking at all of those balconies, it's pretty inspiring and a real thrill," he says.

Grigsby joined the Longs Peak Chorus in Longmont in 1965, and although he's not the oldest member of the group, he does carry the record for the most years of involvement in a barbershop group. "It's probably one of the most rewarding things I've ever been involved with. When you've got voices that are in tune with chords ringing, there's nothing like that thrill."

Longs Peak Chorus member Dave Waddell agrees. "When you get four parts in the perfect pitch and the hair stands up on your arm,

you know you're right on," he says.

Waddell started his 40th year in a barbershop chorus in October, but says his first solo was at the age of 5. He also sings in a local church choir, which led him to his first barbershop group.



The Longs Peak Chorus is made up of 55 members of the Longmont chapter of the Barbershop Harmony Society, an organization with approximately 33,000 members, 820 chapters and 2,500 quartets worldwide. As part of the Rocky Mountain District, the Longmont chapter was founded in 1948 by a local quartet named The Swedes, marking 2008 as the 60th anniversary of the group's founding.

The chorus has grown since its humble beginning, with a surge of 14 new members in 2007 ranging from age 10 to 80. Members come from every kind of background, including doctors, farmers, bankers, mechanics and

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students. While some are trained singers, many are not and simply enjoy the idea of getting together with friends.

Gerry Swank, president of the Longs Peak Chorus, says, "We're there to have fun, have a good time, build relationships and sing for our own enjoyment."

The singers enjoy getting to know new and old members alike, but embrace new members who learn the unique four-part music they sing. "A person doesn't have to show up and be a professional in three hours. We make it easy for them to learn," he says.

Songs are usually pretty recognizable and are primarily traditional music ranging from Broadway show tunes to country, patriotic, gospel and love ballads.

Swank, who has been involved in a barbershop group for 14 years, has seen the chorus change and grow throughout the years, due in part to the directors who've lead them.

The current director, Chris Vaughn, started singing barbershop at age 13, going on to sing with international choruses. His quartet, Gotcha!, became the International Quartet Champion in 2004 and continues to perform internationally. That year, Vaughn took over as director



Gene Melick sings lead, which is the melody, in the Longs Peak Chorus. (Paul Litman/Times-Call)



Bob Plass sings bass during rehearsals at St. Stephens Episcopal Church in Longmont. The chorus meets weekly to practice for annual concerts, as well as competitions. (Paul Litman/Times-Call)

of the Longs Peak Chorus, earning the group the title of Most Improved Chorus in 2004 and 2005 at the Rocky Mountain District contests, an honor that no other chorus has achieved in the nine-state district, says Waddell.

Swank adds, "Directors are key to understanding barbershop harmony, and Chris can really make our songs sound spectacular."

Competitions occur in the spring and fall, with the spring primarily qualifying quartets to go to international contests, and the fall including choruses and quartets. Groups are scored on how they entertain, the music and their interpretation. Within the Longmont chapter there are four quartets that sing at various locations with or without the chorus, including conferences, club meetings, nursing homes, parties and more.

Waddell says barbershop singing is often a stress reducer for many men because after a long day at work, an evening among friends singing favorite songs will put a smile on their faces and lift their spirits. "The music is central to our meetings, but there is a lot of fellowship and friendship involved."

The Longs Peak Chorus is always seeking new members. Rehearsals are every Monday from 7 to 9:30 p.m. at the St. Stephens Episcopal Church, 1303 S. Bross Lane in Longmont. For more information, contact Dave Waddell at 303-678-9967 or visit www.harmonize.com/longmont.

See Them Perform

The Longs Peak Chorus has some signature annual events, including holiday caroling, singing Valentines and a large spring concert.

- Christmas Show — Dec. 12 at 7 p.m. at the First United Methodist Church, 350 11th Ave. in Longmont.
- Decking the Halls — Caroling during the holidays will take members into the community to share their talents at places like nursing homes, hospitals and children's homes.
- Singing Valentines — Valentine's Day is the best day of the year for members of the quartets as they deliver singing Valentines Feb. 13 to 15 to people's sweethearts for a fee.
- Spring Show — May 16, 2009 at Vance Brand Civic Auditorium in Longmont.