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**IN HARMONY:** The chorus includes, from left, Dewayne Meats of Long Beach, between director's hands; Shawn York of Santa Ana and Joey Buss of Huntington Beach.

CHRISTINA EILER, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

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## Harmony Under the Stars

The Westminster Chorus is the headline act at the 28th annual Harmony Under the Stars concert. The family musical show starts at 8 p.m. Saturday at Anaheim's Pearson Park. For ticket information, call 714-633-7294. The Orange Empire Chorus, one of four barbershop choruses in Orange County, donates all proceeds to music-education programs for youth in the county.  
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# The Westminster Chorus has silver medal, and groupies

## Like rock stars of harmony, chorus is big hit at the internationals.

By LORI BASHEDA  
The Orange County Register

**COSTA MESA** - They're like a cross between pop heartthrob Justin Timberlake and Disneyland's Main Street-strolling Dapper Dans.

And in this topsy-turvy world we live in, it should come as no surprise that a lot of girls are going for that combo.

Yes, the Westminster (barbershop) Chorus has groupies. Hundreds of groupies. Groupies who are under the age of 50.

"Is there anyone in this chorus who ISN'T painfully hot?" one young lass recently wrote on the chorus' My Space page.

Your typical barbershop crooner is in his 50s, 60s, 70s (and wearing a bow-tie, a mustache and perhaps a straw hat). Westminster Chorus members are in their teens and 20s. (and wearing jeans, flip-flops and, in one case, a safety pin through the ear).

Last month, Westminster became the youngest four-part harmony chorus ever to take the stage at the international barbershop championship in Indianapolis.

They walked away with a silver medal, electrifying the crowd of 10,000. It's what barbershop has been waiting for since membership began declining in, like, 1975: young blood.

"You guys ROCKED in Indy," a woman told the guys on their MySpace page. "I love cute chorus boys. I'm now an official groupie."

Some of the old-school barbershop singers are groupies too, and it has nothing to do with anyone being cute. "What is so exciting is their vocal quality," says Orange Empire Chorus singer Al Bell.

Commentators on a recent barbershop podcast in the Bay Area spent a third of the show questioning Westminster's second-place finish. The host replayed the moment it was announced that they got silver. "Oh my goodness," one commentator said. "You're actually hearing booing." The barbershop crowd never boos.

With 56 singers (the chorus that beat them had 141), Westminster manages to create a big sound. At the same time, their personalities come through with the warmth of a quartet.

"Getting to the heart of the message in the song is what it's really all about," says Royce Ferguson, chorus director and 1998 gold-medal quartet winner.

Out of 3,000 possible points, there was only a 17-point difference between Westminster and gold-medal winner, The Vocal Majority from Texas.

Saturday was Westminster's first rehearsal since becoming "overnight" a cappella sensations – they've been around only four years compared with some choruses that date back to 1953.

The guys took a few victory laps, reliving competition day: the hair-raising moment a barbershop legend approached to shake their hands, or when a little kid walked up to them in the hotel lobby to ask if he could sing with them.

Ferguson told the guys that their chief rival for 2007 (The Ambassadors of Harmony from Missouri) had already called an emergency meeting to figure out how to deal with them in Denver next July.

Then Ferguson showed them a video of their silver-medal performance; they sang the Frank Sinatra ballad "The Way You Look Tonight" and the uptune barbershop classic "South Rampart Street Parade."

"I could watch myself all day," 19-year-old bass Kevin Brown said dreamily, getting laughs. More laughs came pretty much every time the camera zoomed in on one of their smiling faces stretching to hold a note.

After practice, the group always heads to the Taco Bell on 17th Street in Costa Mesa for what is known in barbershop parlance as an afterglow.

On Saturday they took up two tables. Among the crowd was Dewayne Meats, a 22-year-old Marine who just got back from fighting in Iraq; Joey Buss, a tap-dancing student at Edison High School in Huntington Beach; Leo James, an 18-year-old world juggling champion; and Adrian Arteaga, who at 20 just made it through the first round of tryouts for "American Idol."

First they inhaled large amounts of food. Then they trickled out to the patio, broke into groups and launched into old classic lyrics like "In a gingham gown, you stole my heart."

People pretty much ignored them.

"I don't think younger people know (barbershop singing) as a legitimate art form," said David Rakita, a USC student. "They think of vaudeville or Disneyland ... a spoof."

Some of the Westminster Chorus singers have dads or uncles who are barbershop alums. Others got involved through music programs.

But they pretty much all have the same story. Once they rang a chord with three other guys (the sound that rises from achieving perfect four-part harmony), they were hooked.

"It's addictive," said Chris Burns, who at 31 is the old man of the chorus.

"Barbershop is life," said Cal State Fullerton student Brian Jackson.

The chorus recently had T-shirts made that say "Westminster – Barbershop for the 21st Century." They're hoping other youths follow their lead and strapping young barbershop choruses spread across the land.

Even if they have to share their groupies.

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