

Hints for a Successful Quartet

Get involved!

Join one, form one, beg borrow or steal a tenor!

Choose Wisely

The best people to have in a quartet are not necessarily the best singers. You will be spending a lot of time together in houses, cars, lifts and bathrooms, so you had better get on together, and if you happen to like each other then that's a bonus.

Set goals and guidelines

The group must first identify each individual's goals for themselves and the quartet, and then negotiate to a common quartet goal.

Different quartets have different goals. Here are some examples of goals. Most quartets would find that they have a combination of some these goals, plus some others:

- Social experience - just get together for a cup of tea and a couple of songs
- Make money
- Increase performance skills
- Increase vocal skills
- Do well at convention (Top 5? Top 10? C+ level?)
- Sing different songs to the type sung at chorus
- International champions

It is very important that all quartet members have similar goals. A quartet where two members are looking for a social experience, and the other two want to be international champions may not be successful.

It is also wise to set guidelines for the quartet, including

- Frequency, duration and outline of rehearsals
- Number of songs to be learned in a given time period
- Learning methods and practise expectation

Have a Trial Period

Despite the fact that you have got involved and chosen wisely, it may just not work. There could be a variety of reasons; not a good blend of voices, not enough time available, different tastes in songs, different goals (see the last point). You may need several decision points in your trial periods.

For example, try one night first, then four weeks, then maybe three months. Make sure that the group identifies when the trial periods are over. This should be when all members are satisfied.

Allocate Tasks

To make a quartet successful, there are a number of tasks that need to be done. It is best to identify these tasks early and allocate them fairly based on individual strengths and time. Here are some examples of positions and tasks they might include.

- Treasurer - Manage bank account, cheque book, billing for performances, retaining receipts for purchases and expenses
- Secretary - Make note of decisions, organise copying of music, point of contact for international, quartet name registration, quartet convention registration
- Performance coordinator - Seek out and organise performances, liaise with agents
- Other musical tasks - Choose music, interpret music, coaching within the quartet, make learning tapes, record quartet for analysis on audio/video tape, liaise with coaches/judges.

- Other administrative tasks - Website, email address, mailing lists

Coaching

What you need naturally depends on your goals. A coach need not be your director or a member of the music staff. Anyone who has a bit of an ear, who can tactfully say 'that last bit didn't sound quite right', can be a great asset to a quartet. Coaches can fix or at least draw attention to areas that require work, including incorrect notes and works, balance, coning, blend, vowels and visual presentation. They can also provide encouragement, an audience and a shoulder to cry on. They might help you with your false eyelashes and hold your stuff for you while you sing. They could even be a man!

If you decide to have some coaching, you need to make sure that your coach understands your quartet goals, both for the long term and for the period of the coaching session. You need to work out if you only want the coach to come one time, or if you would like them to be a regular coach. If they are to be regular, you might also like to consider a trial period for them, as they may not work out.

Also consider financial remuneration. Many coaches charge for their time, in particular travelling regional and international faculty. You may need to budget for a coaching session.

Use other resources

Make use of resources such as:

- Your director and music staff
- Your chorus music library, if you have one
- Arrangers lists and websites
- Visiting educators
- Regional resources library
- Audio and video cassettes of choruses and quartets
- Websites, including www.sweetadelineintl.org and www.sweetadelines.org.au

Choosing Repertoire

Many new quartets make the mistake of selecting repertoire that is too complex for their skill level. This often occurs by choosing songs from the recording of international champs. Most arrangers and international music sales grade their arrangements by difficulty level, choose songs at your level.

Also look at your strengths and weaknesses. If your lead sings better high, choose arrangements with a higher melody. Don't choose music with a bass solo if your bass is not strong. Work out what parts of your voices are best and choose music that highlights your strengths.

Also consider your goals and likely audience. If you want to compete, make sure you choose some strong contestable material. If you want to sing at weddings, look for positive love songs not break up-tearjerkers.

You may like to discuss your song choices with your director, to avoid selecting the same material. Different choruses have different views on quartets singing chorus repertoire, so find out what yours is. Choruses may also have retired songs that are available for quartets to sing. Be aware that some arrangers require that the arrangers fee is paid separately by quartets when singing chorus repertoire. Harmony Bazaar music does not need to be purchased separately, as it is sold on a per sheet basis.

Costume

All of the above applies. Choose a costume that fits with your goals, your image and your repertoire.

Auditioning for performances.

Before any quartet can perform in public, they must be auditioned. This can be done by the musical director, or if the musical director is a member of the quartet, a committee of three chorus members.

The quartet must perform three songs with appropriate MC material and some costuming at a minimum of a C+ level in order to be approved for public performance. This includes correct notes and words, basic balance and blend and suitable visual presentation.

The quartet may be approved for a single performance, or given general permission to perform, based on the audition.

The only time that a quartet may perform in public without passing the audition is in the convention competition.

Performing at chorus performances.

Quartets are not automatically entitled to perform at chorus performances. It depends on a number of factors, including suitability to the venue and the audience and the time available.

Payment of quartets for singing at chorus performances is dealt with in 'Guidelines for Public Performance'.

Quartet Registration

Quartets may register with international. Registration is currently \$45US per year, subject to change. Registration runs from calendar year to calendar year, May to May. It guarantees that a quartet's unique name is not used by other quartets for that year. If registration is not renewed, the quartet name becomes available for use by other quartets.

Names of quartets who have achieved medal status at international are permanently reserved.

Quartets wishing to compete at convention must be fully registered quartets by January of the competition year.

When it's all over

No quartet sings together forever, and eventually members leave or quartets break up. There can be a variety of reasons - changes in lifestyles, relocation, changes in goals and voices. When this occurs, mourn it, accept it, and move on to that next challenge! Of course, the most important thing to remember is have lots of fun!

Cheers, Glenda
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