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Quartet singing ... know your strengths (and your weaknesses)

A good quartet performance needs planning.

One area of quartet singing that many foursomes never come to understand is what each member can bring to the quartet. A quartet is comprised of four individual singers, each with his own personality, strengths and weaknesses. One of the first things a quartet must learn when starting out, is how to identify those strengths and weaknesses. This will lead to better planning for the quartet down the road. Here are two examples to get you started.

Song selection

Choose songs in which all four parts can easily be sung by your quartet members. There are several questions that need to be asked when choosing a song. What type of song is it, ballad, rhythm, up-tune, comedy? What type of song does our quartet sing well? What type of song does our quartet not sing well? How rangy is the lead line; how low is the bass line? Does this quartet have the "voices" that are able to sing this song? Is each singer able to sing his own part accurately and with good quality? Many quartets will choose a song because they heard an international quartet champion sing it and really liked it. The average quartet usually is not capable of singing the songs that the champions sing. This process is easier said than done. It may take several months, or even years to figure out what types of songs fit your quartet; but once you do, you'll notice you quartet personality develop, and that is when it really becomes fun.

Stage speaking

The time between songs is full of opportunities to enhance quartet's overall presentation. It is an area that can make or break a successful quartet performance. Many times we rehearse and rehearse so we can sing our best. When it is performance time, however, we decide the rehearsal before who is going to do all of the talking while on stage, but usually never rehearse that part of the performance. Immediately decide who is the best person to speak. All four quartet members may not be good public speakers. Choose, and choose wisely, who you want to speak. Here are a couple of suggestions for things to include when speaking between songs: You may want to introduce the quartet, or talk about the Barbershop Harmony Society. You may want to use this time to set up a song. You could give the history of a song (most can be found by doing some research online, or at a library), or you can tell a story relating to a song. Both can be very effective in the performance of the song, and how the audience listens to the lyrics. The non-singing portion of your performance should be included frequently in the process of a "regular" rehearsal.

These are just two of the many aspects of performing in a quartet, but the same thought process applies to all other areas as well. Play to your strengths, be aware of your

weaknesses, and good things will result.

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