

WEST LONDON BARBERSHOP HARMONY CLUB

EVERYTHING YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT CONVENTION (BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK)

What's convention all about?

As you're all well aware by now, Capital Chorus is competing in a couple of weeks at the BABS 2010 convention at the Harrogate International Centre, but there are probably quite a few of us who don't really understand what it's all about. Although some final details are still to be decided upon, I hope these brief notes will help to explain a bit about what goes on at the British Association of Barbershop Singers (BABS) annual convention...

THE CONTEST

BABS have been running contests for choruses and quartets for the past 35 years or so and the finals of these contests take place at the annual convention.

Quartets A preliminary contest, or "prelims," is held for quartets each October to determine which quartets will qualify to sing at convention. The 16 quartets with the highest scores sing in the semi-final on the Friday of convention and the top 6 quartets from the semi-final go forward to Sunday's final. (This year, there are also 2 past gold medallist quartets competing to represent BABS at next years International Convention in Kansas City and these quartets will sing in 17th and 18th position in the semi-final and probably the final as well. They are not part of the main contest. The champion quartet plus 1 or 2 others are eligible to compete at the International.)

Choruses There used to be regional prelims for choruses as well, but this has fallen by the wayside over the past few years, so any BABS chorus is now eligible to sing at convention. There is a possibility that chorus prelims will be reintroduced in the next couple of years due to the high number of choruses competing. This year, 37 choruses have entered the contest.

The first two choruses or quartets appearing on the contest stage are known as Mike Warmers. The Mike Warmers job is to act as a sound check and to "Attune the judges' ears and minds to the barbershop sound and style" and although they don't receive a published score, the judges will still be marking them.

Competitors perform two songs in each round and are awarded marks by a panel of judges. The judging panel usually has nine members, 3 from each of the judging categories. The categories are:

Music Judging the song and arrangement, as performed

Singing Judging intonation, vocal quality, vocal unity and expanded sound

Presentation Judging vocal and visual entertainment value in a performance.

Full details of how each category operates can be found on the BABS judges' website by following the link from www.singbarbershop.com. Each judge awards marks in their own specialist category, as well as judging "Common Ground" which is a general overview of the whole performance. Each judge gives marks out of 100 for each song, giving a maximum possible score of 1800. The marks received are converted to a percentage score and the complete results are published shortly after the contest.

The names of the top three competitors are announced at the end of each contest, with each one presented with a trophy. There are also a couple of other awards announced, such as best novice quartet and best small chorus. The winner of the small chorus award is determined by adding the

number of singers in the chorus to the final placing the chorus achieves, with the chorus achieving the smallest total winning. This award can't be given to any chorus that's won it in the past 5 years, so as we won it in 2007, we're not eligible this time round. There is, of course, a Most Improved Chorus trophy up for grabs: the current holders of this award are a certain chorus from the West London area!

SHOWS

Apart from the competitions, there will be shows on Saturday and Sunday night as well as Sunday afternoon. Among this year's special guests on the shows are Storm Front, a top American quartet, who are well worth watching.

AFTERGLOWS

Each show is followed by a traditional barbershop afterglow, which involves lots of singing in the bar and a lot of drinking! This is a great chance for you to sing loads of the polecat songs, try a few tags and generally have a great time. So-called 'gang singing' will break out spontaneously all over the place. Often this will involve groups of people from different choruses, including some from abroad (there are usually visitors from America, Holland, Germany and Sweden). It's great fun - just join in, and if you don't know the song, then find someone in the group who is singing your part, and listen to them. You might want to brush up on some of the songs that are often sung in these groups:

Polecats such as:

- My Wild Irish Rose
- The Story Of The Rose (Heart Of My Heart)
- Sweet And Lovely (That's What You Are To Me)
- Down Our Way
- Honey — Little 'Lize Medley
- Let Me Call You Sweetheart
- Shine On Me
- Sweet, Sweet Roses Of Morn
- Wait Till The Sun Shines, Nellie
- You're The Flower Of My Heart, Sweet Adeline

Other songs:

- When I'm 64
- Hello, Mary Lou
- Barbershop Song
- Under the Boardwalk

Sometimes, you'll find four people singing together. Listen by all means, but don't join in unless they invite you to. Joining in with a quartet uninvited is called 'fifth wheeling', and is considered bad manners.

The bars at the convention centre usually stay open until the small hours of the morning, but if you enjoy a decent pint, it's usually best to find a local pub, as the beer at convention centres is usually pretty poor quality. Harrogate has a number of decent real ale pubs and I'll be patrolling some of them over the weekend to ensure that everyone is behaving themselves. You'll all be welcome to join me.

What do we do when we're there?

ON ARRIVAL

On arrival at the convention centre, go to the BABS reception desk to collect your souvenir programme and name badge holder. Everyone attending convention, including non-competitors, must be registered and you will need to wear your name badge at all times while attending convention events (except on stage). If you haven't registered yet, you can do this at reception when you arrive or on-line before the event (www.singbarbershop.com).

FRIDAY 28th MAY

Friday is quartet semi-final day and I hope that most of you will be there to watch and cheer on Catch 22, starring Simon Laight, Greg Nixon, Andy Wheeler and Paul Gordon. We're singing 3rd out of 16 competitors and will be on stage at about 8pm. We'd be extremely grateful if you could be there to support us.

SATURDAY 23rd MAY

Saturday is chorus contest day. We're singing in 19th position and will be on stage at around 1:30pm. We'll be meeting at the convention reception desk at 9am and from there we'll go for a warm up. We don't know where we'll be warming up yet, so it's important that everyone's there for 9am, otherwise you may not find us. Once we're together, we'll be staying together until after we've competed (Simon Laight will miss most of our warm up as he's also competing with Reading's Thames Valley Chorus who are singing in 15th position). At our allocated reporting time, we'll be met by our courier, who will be responsible for taking us between the changing room, the contest warm up room, the stage and back again. We have an official warm up of about 20 minutes immediately before the contest, which is in addition to our own early morning warm up. Our courier can look after valuables, watches, keys etc until we're off stage. From warm up, we'll be taken to the holding area back stage until it's the big moment and we're on!

There are no curtains front of stage, so we'll be walking on in full view of everyone. Although we're not being marked until Aidan gives a signal to the judges that we're ready to sing our first song, try to look relaxed and confident going on and head straight for our position in the middle of the risers. The way we walk on stage gives the judges a clue as to what sort of chorus we are! If we need to move around a bit to get windows right, that's no problem. The auditorium will be fairly dark, so we won't see much of the audience. We'll be able to see the judges as they all have desk lamps, but don't be put off by them. As we'll be watching the director all the time, we won't even notice if some of the judges are making notes or seeming to ignore us: it's part of their job and they all seem to act a bit differently to one another. It will probably look like there are far more than nine of them out there, but this is because there are trainee "shadow judges," auditors and contest managers sitting with them. Once we start to sing, the stage acoustics will make the sound seem really dead and you might feel like you're singing a solo. This is quite normal, so don't let it put you off, just sing well with loads of confidence and a big smile: it's a fantastic experience being up there.

Our performance will be recorded on CD and DVD and still photos will be taken, all of which we'll be unaware of as we sing. I'm sure we'll do ourselves proud and come off stage to loads of applause wondering how it was all over so quickly and looking forward to competing again next year. After singing and getting changed, try to watch some of the other choruses in the contest. If you've never seen any other barbershop apart from us before, you'll be amazed at the high quality of some of the performances you'll see and also see performers where you'll think that we're much better than they are.

SUNDAY 24th MAY

Convention Sunday starts with a Church service, followed by the last of the competitions, the quartet final. With a bit of luck, this might include the second appearance of the weekend of some of West London's finest, Catch 22. If we are singing in the final, please do your best to stay and support us. We'd be ever so grateful! The final starts at 11am and will be finished by about 12:45pm.

Don't Forget...

Uniform: Does everything fit you OK? Do any repairs need doing? Make sure it's clean and pressed. Our number 1 uniform is white jacket, waistcoat, bow tie, white dress shirt, black dress trousers, black socks and black patent shoes. We'll be wearing this on stage, so you'll need it with you at 9 o'clock on Saturday morning. Try not to leave any of your uniform at home like someone did a few years ago, it looks a bit odd on stage! Some people will be wearing number 2/walkout uniform during the day on Saturday, which is turquoise chorus shirt, black trousers, black trousers and black chorus pullover.

Convention Tickets: If you've pre-registered for convention, then you should receive your tickets very soon. Make sure you take them with you to Harrogate – it will cost you dearly if you need buy replacements. If you haven't pre-registered, then you can do so at the BABS registration desk at the convention centre. Do this as soon as you can after arrival.

These Notes: Please print them before leaving for Harrogate and keep them in a safe place so you can refer to them at convention.

I hope these notes have helped explain a bit about what goes on at the BABS convention. If you've got any questions, just ask. The most important thing to remember in all this is to have a great time, join in the afterglows and come away from the weekend with a sense of achievement. No matter what the result, we'll have done well and I for one am proud to be singing with such a great little chorus.

Paul Gordon