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www.SantaresMusicPeople.Com, and the directors
of the Fort Lauderdale Sunshine Chordsmen
present this online music theory series
(Barbershop Edition - Lesson #04)
<*))>< Andrew E. Reid, General Editor
Posted at: <http://www.barbershopchorus.com>
This message was made with recycled electrons.

Okay, it's about time... Music is usually separated and divided, and subsequently subdivided in all sorts of ways; into various time elements and structural formulations. As barbershoppers, we don't really need to concern ourselves with the various forms and analyses of symphonic and large scale compositions, but just be aware that our song structures have the same types of expectations, patterns, and expected resolutions that the larger musical compositions use, just on a smaller scale. Knowing these built-in structural divisions and rallying points gives the vocal leader a way to submit to the needs of the listener, and to justify interpretive decisions along the way. An experienced choral director may play with the emotions and expectations of the audience by suspending musical pleasure at various landmarks within an arrangement. Holding harmonic tension well beyond reasonable time expectations, pausing and gesturing at just the right moment, working with situational humor, and using learned musical techniques to trick or surprise the listener, is always and interesting addition to any song. Just doing the same thing in front of a panel of judges takes an extra degree of chutzpah!

Most songs have an introduction and various verses interspersed with a repeated section called the "Refrain" which is also called the "Chorus" just to confuse matters a bit, and when you hear that we are entering the "Reprise" or "Recap" zone, (short for the "Recapitulation,") we are again referring to the "Refrain" or the "Chorus" of the song. And then of course there may or may not be a "Bridge" in the song, a section of a composition which no one can seem to agree on what it is, except that it's not another verse and it's certainly not the refrain. The "hook" can be anywhere in the song, (and most good songs have at least one,) and that's the moment(s) in the music where the audience gets really cozy and thinks, "I really like that." Of course, barbershoppers have taken the "Tag" which used to be called the "Coda" to an all new level. This "ending" to barbershop arrangements will get full coverage in a later lesson.

When a song is said to be written in "common time," then the structured beat pattern that the composer decided to use is defined as having four steady beats to the bar, each beat represented by a quarter note, with the quarter note receiving one count. "To the bar" refers to the amount of music the composer put between two bar lines, which are the vertical lines that intersect the staff lines, which run horizontally. This same amount of music is also called a "measure" which can be subdivided into strong and weak beats. Usually the first beat in a measure, otherwise known as the downbeat, is the strongest beat, in other words, the rhythmic pulsation requires that that beat receive more dynamic stress than the other three beats that follow, with the third beat receiving a stress that is stronger than on beats two and four, but not quite as much dynamic stress as the stress found on the downbeat.

When common time music speeds up to a point where there are really only two beats in a measure we call that "Cut-Time," this will hopefully be explained later to your satisfaction.

(lesson 4 - page 2)

—By using Capital letters to denote dynamic stress, we can write out the counts of two measures of common time music like this: ONE, two, THree, four, ONE, two, THree, four...

—Metronome markings at the beginning of a song or section of a song denote the number of beats per minute that the composer or arranger wishes that the singers try to actualize in performance; "M.M. $qn = 120$ " would mean that there should be two beats per second...

—Remember that the quarter note, as all notes are relative. The speed of the beats are determined by the performer(s) and can change or stop at any moment. The following musical terms are used for this purpose: *Accelerando*, *meno mosso*, *più mosso*, *rallentando*, *ritardando*, *ritenuto*, *smorzando*, *morendo*, *caesura*, *formata*, *a tempo*, *tenuto*, *molto allegro*, *prestissimo*...

—Chord changes do not have to occur every time there is a new beat; chord changes can and do occur more often or less often than beat counts, and so there is a natural notational need to have note values that take up more time, and less time, than what the quarter note receives.

—A whole note takes up a whole measure, and if a measure only has three beats in it, then the whole note receives three beats, and in "six-eight" the whole note would receive the time value of six eighth notes "tied together," in common time it would receive the same amount of time as four quarter notes tied together. Two half notes "tied together" would equal a whole note. Two quarter notes tied together equal a half note. There are no third notes, fifth notes, sixth notes, seventh notes or ninth notes; see the chart below to see what is out there...

Whole note: think of this as a dollar. Half note: think of this as a somewhat rare 50¢ piece.

Quarter note: think of this as a 25¢ piece. Eighth note: this is worth half a quarter note.

Sixteenth note: this is worth half an eighth note -- or a quarter of a quarter note.

There are also 32nd, 64th and for computer music, 128th notes -- which are blazingly quick - and beyond the ability of human performers, even beyond the ability of Steve Moody, esq...

At this point I would like to mention "dots" when referring to music notation. If the dot is placed above or below a note head, then the note is to be performed "staccato" -- which would mean to sing the pitch short and pointedly; like the way you would touch a hot stove with your index finger; you would get off of the heat/note as quickly as possible. Some would question at this point, "Why wouldn't the composer instead just use a shorter valued note followed by an appropriate valued rest?" This is a legitimate question for which there is no easy answer. The invention of the staccato is probably partially due to the innate laziness of the person writing down the music, but it does have a psychological effect on the performer, and in the centuries previous to the last two, people in general were not so mathematically minded.

A dot to the right of a notehead is a completely different matter. When you encounter one of these you must hold the note value (or the previous dot value if more than one are placed there,) an extra 50% -- Example: A triple-dotted half-note would be $2+1+.5+.25 = 3.75$ beats; there would be no need to ever equal 4 beats since a whole note already does that for you...

If you find a dot anywhere else in the score, it's probably because you're reading from a crappy photocopy which is probably also an infringement of copyright laws. To be continued...