

The Harmonizer

BRINGING BARBERSHOP HARMONY TO LIFE • SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2021



OUR HAPPINESS MACHINE

The science behind why singing barbershop harmony makes you happy—
And how one chapter grew 5X by living up to the motto “Make People Happy”



NOTEWORTHY

CAL YODER, 15 MONTHS LATER
PRIME TIME IN ARGENTINA

SPOTLIGHT

MELODY HINE: GROWING UP
IN—AND INTO—THE SOCIETY

TIP SHEET

WHY AND HOW TO RUN A
READY, SET, SING! PROGRAM



B Yo



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PHOTOS: LORIN MAY, KURT HEINECKE; GEARS: PEYEL S. MIGUEL-Á. PADRIÑÁN

BARBERSHOP

Our Happiness Machine

You know that singing barbershop makes you happy, but do you know why? Researchers know: Involvement in organized barbershop strongly contributes to each of the five major components of human happiness.

“It isn’t THE Gold Medal you need in your life; it is the gold medal MOMENTS. The little gold medals you win every time when you stand with your friends and master a new skill or ring that bear of a chord... or rejoice at the birth of one of our fellow chorus member’s children or weep at the death of their spouse or child.”

– Jim Henry, “Gold Medal Moments”

“When I was really serious and focused, singing barbershop brought me relief and joy. When I was lonely, it brought me companionship. When I felt low about myself, it raised my self-worth. I don’t think barbershop has ever been everything to me, but it has always, always raised the level of everything in my life.”

– BHS President John Donehower

It has been a tough day, and I force myself to go to the chorus rehearsal. As I get out of the car, I see my friend, Mark. “How are you, bud?” he asks me. “Tired, but excited for the night!” I reply. We walk in the door and say hello to more friends. We sneak in a short tag with a new guest before chorus starts. We have a good warmup and then we jump straight into the contest prep with one of our favorite coaches. It is a tender ballad. We are making lovely music, the softs are tugging at my heart and the louds are soaring with passion. As I

start getting into it, I feel my tiredness melt away. By the time we break, I feel like the balance of the universe has been restored and I am happy again.

This is a scene that gets played out over and over again across the globe. What is behind this magic of a barbershop chorus (or quartet) that creates such a repeating and predictable pattern of happiness?

I have been told by many people that I am the happiest man they know. I am not sure about that, but I *am* a student of happiness and a happiness coach.

And I know for a fact that singing, and singing barbershop in particular, have been—and continue to be—a big part of my happiness. The more reading I do, the more I realize that scientific research backs up what many of us readers of this magazine intuitively know: participating in organized barbershop harmony can be a powerful component of a happy life.

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

In the beginning, psychology’s main goal was to diagnose and mitigate men-



“ Unlike most of the choral world, the barbershop world strives not only for musical artistry but performance artistry. This often leads to deeper emotional connections with audiences, the music, and with our fellow performers. ”



Pick-up quartet Manoj Padki (Br), Ray Johnson (Bs), Mike Klein (L), Dan Washington (T) sing for food bank volunteer “Mary” in 2016.

tal dysfunctions—improving a patient from, say, from -6 up to 0. The relatively new field of Positive Psychology asks a different question: How can we get a functional person to flourish? To go from +4 to +10?

Positive Psychology research suggests that roughly 50% of the variation in our happiness between people is centered around a genetically determined set point, while another 10% or so depends on our circumstances, such as where we live and how much money we make. The remainder, a whopping 40%, is deter-

mined by our daily choices. Known as the Father of Positive Psychology, the University of Pennsylvania’s Dr. Martin Seligman says that feeling good is only the first of five key components of happiness:

1. Positive emotions, such as awe, gratitude, pride, love
2. Engagement (a.k.a. flow), being completely absorbed in an activity; or, in a barbershop context, “being one with the music”
3. Relationships or social network
4. Meaning (having a purpose in life), or being a part of something bigger than yourself
5. Achievements (striving for goals or milestones), or a sense of forward motion

Let us explore how singing in a barbershop chorus or quartet contributes to each.

1. Positive Emotions

We all have an intuitive sense of the uplifting emotions that include hope,

interest, joy, love, compassion, pride, amusement, awe, and gratitude. Positive Psychology researchers call them positive emotions, and they are a prime indicator of flourishing. The more positive emotions you experience on a regular basis, the better your life is.

The barbershop world differs from most of the choral world in that we strive not only for musical artistry but performance artistry. This often leads to deeper emotional connections with the music and with our fellow performers. I have had so many positive emotions while singing in quartets and choruses: spine-tingling awe when a chord is perfectly lined up, joy and pride in the middle of a glorious moment of choreography or an intricate musical passage, and gratitude that I got to be a part of a wonderful and artistic team!

Elise Kappelmann (left) performs in a pickup quartet, December 2019, about nine months after joining *Space City Sound*. She couldn’t compete with the men’s-only chorus at the 2019 International Chorus Contest, but the chorus is now officially mixed and Elise serves as chapter president. L-R Elise Kappelmann (T), Kyle Maninantan (L), Jacob Bankston (Br), Anthony Holder (Bs).



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“Barbershop is like magic -- it’s a mood enhancer, a mood lifter,” said 36-year Barbershopper Daniel Schwartz of Boston. “I come away from rehearsal feeling pumped every single time. Even if I’m down in the dumps and don’t feel like going, I will feel 200% better when it’s over.”

Elise Kapplemann, president of the Houston Metro Chapter (Space City Sound), discovered barbershop harmony in early 2019. “Sometimes, I show up only because there’s a commitment,” she echoes. “After 20 to 30 minutes I’m feeling better. By the end of the night, I couldn’t imagine being anywhere else.”

Barbara Fredrickson, the premiere researcher of positive emotions, concludes that happiness is not only the result of success and high-functioning behavior, but also a precondition for making better decisions and acting with greater confidence.

2. Engagement or “Flow”

Have you ever been so engrossed in what you were doing that you lost complete sense of time? That is the basic definition of “flow” or engagement: when we are engaged in a task that is in the Goldilocks zone of “not too challenging” and “not too boring,” dancing at the edge of our comfort zone.

“My 2.5-hour drive to quartet practice seems to last forever,” said John. “The singing is a blink of an eye. But on the drive home, the energy I’ve gotten from that blink of an eye -- a lot of the times I wonder how I got home.”

Few people have the privilege to



Fireside quartet holding Emmaline, Grace, and Jessica, daughters of lead Dave Adams. After singing at the church service, the girls decided to be a part of the church luncheon performance.

become so engrossed in an activity they love to do for its own sake! This is a key component of what the Greek philosophers called “eudaimonia,” or flourishing. It comes with another reward: The more we play in our Goldilocks zone, the more our zone expands.

3. Relationships

Perhaps the key finding of Positive Psychology, based on the landmark 80-year Harvard study of adult development and corroborated by much other research, can be summed up by this formula: Happiness = relationships.

Barbershoppers enjoy a relationship advantage few others in the choral world experience. We share a common repertoire with singers from across the globe. Beyond our own choruses or quartets, we have regular opportunities to spend thrilling hours with friends old and new as we sing Barberpole Cats, Harmony Brigade repertoire, teach and learn tags, or woodshed new harmonies. Such cultural gems make it easy to instantly connect with Barbershoppers in any gathering, enjoying a breadth and depth of friendships that is increasingly rare in this world.

Elise was both intrigued and anxious when she was exposed to tagging at her first rehearsal. Although she had been singing for most of her life, she found the prospect of learning a tag “totally new and totally terrifying. That’s not something classical musicians go into!” As she quickly grew to enjoy the musical rewards of this fun new skill, Elise also began to grasp the social rewards that had kept many of

Fireside quartet, featuring author Manoj Padki (Br), Daniel Schwartz (Bs), Dave Adams (L), and Jesse Heines (T).



“Don’t underestimate what we do. We touch people’s lives—and we do this by doing what we do for fun!”



her fellow singers harmonizing for decades. “It’s one of the amazing things about barbershop harmony,” she said.

I have heard countless Barbershoppers say, “I came in for the music, I stayed for the people.” But for some, the music isn’t the major draw. Nine-year Barbershopper Mark Schuldenfrei’s first exposure to barbershop harmony came after his wife showed him an ad for free voice lessons. Mark showed up at “Ready, Set, Sing!” hosted by the **Vocal Revolution Chorus** to improve his singing and was sold



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on the chapter members even before warmed up to four-part harmony.

"I wasn't attracted to the music per se, but the gang was so encouraging, and they were such fun people to sing with," Mark said. "I hoped I could figure out barbershop eventually."

4. Meaning or Purpose

"Singing in a quartet is one place in my life where I don't doubt my importance," said John. "I always know I matter when I'm singing close harmony. And I know the other people matter."

Having a sense of mission or purpose in life can come from religion and spirituality, raising children—and being a part of a barbershop chorus. Barbershop is a team sport. Each of us brings in the best parts of ourselves to build this living cathedral of sound. Working together as a team and pulling toward a common goal is one of the most meaningful human experiences. It makes us feel a part of something grander than our individual selves.



"No one can be a barbershop chorus by themselves," said Elise. "There's a sense of accountability to something outside of, and bigger than, yourself."

Daniel strongly believes that singing for others brings a deeper brand of happiness than, say, playing golf with cherished friends. "Have you ever sung and brought people to tears? Most Barbershoppers would say yes," he observed. "Don't underestimate what we do. We touch people's lives, and we do this by doing what we do for fun!"

5. Achievement

Achievement does not necessarily mean championships, but it can also mean the psychological rewards of a show that goes well or a gig that gets rave reviews.

"For me, the big part of barbershop is the rehearsing, because I don't want to defer the reward," said John. He believes that most Barbershoppers want rehearsals to be more than progress toward a future reward, but also a reward in its own right. "If we spend 10 hours singing and one hour performing, those 10 hours are where I want my victory."

We humans need a sense of moving forward toward something. Barbershop rehearsals, chorus or quartet, are

Dr. Jim Henry's landmark 2007 Harmony University Keynote address, "Gold Medal Moments," can be found in the Nov/Dec 2007 issue of *The Harmonizer* (access archive at barbershop.org/harmonizer) or view at [YouTube.com/BarbershopHarmony38](https://www.youtube.com/BarbershopHarmony38).



The League of Ordinary Gentlemen, 2018 NED Fall Contest Manoj Padki (T), Ray Johnson (L), Mark Schuldenfrei (Bs), Daniel Schwartz (Br)

always about getting better, and we are always rehearsing for upcoming events, shows, and competitions. After these events are done, there is often a sense of completion and achievement.

"Very few things are more satisfying than putting in effort and practice and making palpable improvement," said Mark. While he has many great memories from performances, more great memories come from great rehearsals and Harmony Brigade weekends. "I'm always about 'What can I work on now?' Progress is not winning; progress is improving. It's a fundamental source of happiness to say, 'We did the best we could do today.'"

Conclusion

As Jim Henry puts it in his keynote address, "Several of us chuckle because we know that the word 'hobby' doesn't begin to describe our obsession." I have experienced high levels of happiness in all five dimensions throughout my 30 years as a Barbershopper, from plentiful positive emotions to winning medals with my choruses and quartets, and, of course, lifelong close friends. Barbershop has not been a mere "hobby." It has been a magical happiness machine. ■

— By Manoj Padki
Interviews by Lorin May