

What is the Barbershop Harmony Society?

Putting a song in the heart of every person on earth just might be the key to harmony in international affairs, and “Keep the Whole World Singing” — the motto of the Barbershop Harmony Society, might be the key to peace in our time.

The Barbershop Harmony Society is committed to the cause of world harmony through song. Thanks in part to the outreach efforts of Society and other barbershop organisations, more than 70,000 people around the world are active in the barbershop movement today. Barbershop harmony is an American art form, dating back to the tonsorial parlours and minstrel shows of the late 1800’s.

The Barbershop Harmony Society was founded in 1938 by two men from Tulsa, Oklahoma, who were nostalgic for the days when four-part harmony was a natural part of contemporary popular music. The organisation quickly grew from coast to coast, and became international in stature in 1944, when a chapter was chartered in Windsor, Ontario. Today, the Barbershop Harmony Society has more than 30,000 members in North America. Another 4,000 men and women enjoy the hobby in eight affiliated organisations worldwide of which AAMBS (Australian Association of Men Barbershop Singers)

The pleasure of close-harmony singing is not restricted to men only; independent organisations for women in the United States, Canada and abroad number more than 30,000 active participants. All told, there are more than 70,000 aficionados of barbershop-style harmony in the various organizations that together make up the World Harmony Council.

Barbershop harmony was pretty much restricted to North America until the late 1950’s, when Harry Danser of Sussex, England, vacationed in New York City and heard the famous Buffalo Bills perform in Meredith Willson’s hit musical, *The Music Man*. On his return to England, filled with an infectious enthusiasm and an armload of recordings, he formed a barbershop quartet.

In 1964, he founded the Crawley Barbershop Harmony Club. Subsequent visits to England by Barbershoppers encouraged the formation of more clubs, and in 1974, the British Association of Barbershop Singers (BABS) was established.

Other national organisations formed throughout the world in the years that followed, and have established affiliation agreements with the Society, and the movement continues to grow. Reports of barbershop activity continue to come in from all parts of the world. Barbershop is found wherever there are American expatriate communities, including Japan, Saudi Arabia, Korea, Brazil, Italy, Israel and elsewhere. In 1988, the spirit of glasnost gave rise to the formation of the Quiet Don Quartet, a Russian barbershop group from the city of Rostov, located on the Don River near the Black Sea. The Quiet Dons toured the United States in 1990, making a number of appearances, including performances at Carnegie Hall in New York and at Disneyland in California.