

The Forgotten Legacy: Unraveling the Social History of American Barbershop Harmony - Exploring the Rich American Musicspheres

When the melodious harmonies of barbershop quartets fill the air, a sense of nostalgia sweeps over us. There's something special about this unique style of music that takes us back to a bygone era, evoking the spirit of community and camaraderie. In this article, we delve deep into the social history of American barbershop harmony, unraveling its roots, cultural significance, and its impact on the American musicspheres of different eras.

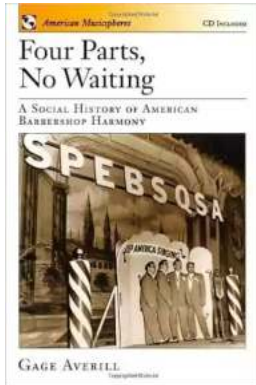
Origins of Barbershop Harmony

The history of barbershop harmony can be traced back to the African American communities in the late 19th century. It emerged as a form of social expression and entertainment, with African American men gathering in barbershops to sing a cappella harmonies. These harmonies had distinct parlor quartet-style arrangements with close harmonies, reminiscent of the earlier minstrel shows.

The barbershop quartet tradition spread and gained popularity among various ethnic groups throughout America. It became a symbol of unity and provided a platform for diverse voices to coalesce into a unique musical phenomenon.

Singing in harmony brought people together, bridging gaps and fostering a sense of belonging.

**Four Parts, No Waiting: A Social History of
American Barbershop Quartet: A Social History of
American Barbershop Harmony (American**



Musicspheres Book 1)

by Gage Averill(1st Edition, Kindle Edition)

★★★★☆ 4.4 out of 5

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Screen Reader: Supported

Word Wise : Enabled

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Lending : Enabled



The Rise of Barbershop Harmony in the American Culture

As the 20th century unfolded, barbershop harmony solidified its presence in the American culture. It became an integral part of community gatherings, celebrations, and entertainment events across the nation. The vocal harmonies resonated with people from all walks of life, creating a shared experience that transcended social, economic, and racial boundaries.

The charm of barbershop harmony also found its way into mainstream popular music during the early 20th century. Renowned artists such as Bing Crosby, The Mills Brothers, Al Jolson, and The Ink Spots incorporated barbershop influences into their repertoire, influencing the wider music landscape.

The Cultural Significance of Barbershop Harmony

Barbershop harmony is not just about melodious chords and catchy tunes; it represents a slice of American history and cultural diversity. It played a crucial role in fostering social connections and providing an outlet for marginalized communities to express themselves in harmony.

During times of social and political unrest, barbershop harmony offered solace and unity. In the early 1900s, barbershop quartets would frequently perform at social events, fundraisers, and even for soldiers during wartime. It became a way to uplift spirits and boost morale, reminding people of their shared experiences and the power of music to heal.

The popularity of barbershop harmony waned during the mid-20th century with the rise of rock and roll and other popular genres. However, the tradition persisted through dedicated barbershop societies and enthusiasts who kept the flame alive.

A Revival and Modern Evolution

In the late 20th century, a resurgence of interest in barbershop harmony reignited its popularity. The Barbershop Harmony Society, founded in 1938, played a pivotal role in preserving and promoting this unique American musical style.

The organization focused on outreach and education initiatives, attracting a new generation of singers and enthusiasts. They aimed to break stereotypes and rejuvenate the barbershop tradition, making it more inclusive and accessible to all.

The modern barbershop scene incorporates various musical influences and styles, ranging from traditional barbershop quartets to contemporary a cappella groups. Performances often blend old classics and modern hits, showcasing the versatility and adaptability of barbershop harmony.

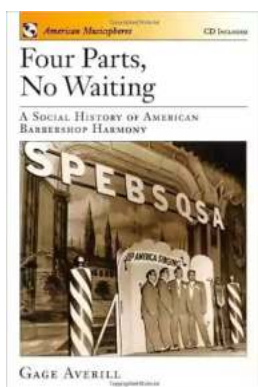
The Barbershop Community Today

Barbershop harmony continues to thrive today, with thousands of active members worldwide. Aside from the Barbershop Harmony Society, numerous independent organizations and festivals celebrate this unique musical genre.

These communities provide platforms for aspiring singers, arrangers, and enthusiasts to connect, showcase their talent, and keep the tradition alive. Barbershop competitions and events attract dedicated practitioners who strive for mastery and push the boundaries of the art form.

Barbershop harmony stands as a testament to the power of music to bring people together, creating a harmonious bond that transcends time and social barriers. Its rich social history intertwines with the cultural fabric of America, showcasing the diverse voices and experiences that make up the nation's musical legacy.

As we embrace the vivid tapestry of American musicspheres, let us not forget the forgotten legacy of barbershop harmony. Its timeless melodies are a reminder of our shared past, present, and the potential for a harmonious future.



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Four Parts, No Waiting investigates the role that vernacular, barbershop-style close harmony has played in American musical history, in American life, and in the American imagination. Starting with a discussion of the first craze for Austrian four-part close harmony in the 1830s, Averill traces the popularity of this musical form in minstrel shows, black recreational singing, vaudeville, early recordings, and in the barbershop revival of the 1930s. In his exploration of barbershop, Averill uncovers a rich musical tradition--a hybrid of black and white cultural forms, practiced by amateurs, and part of a mythologized vision of small-town American life. Barbershop harmony played a central -- and overlooked -- role in the panorama of American music. Averill demonstrates that the barbershop revival was part of a depression-era neo-Victorian revival, spurred on by insecurities of economic and social change. Contemporary barbershop singing turns this nostalgic vision into lived experience. Arguing that the "old songs" function as repositories of idealized social memory, Averill reveals ideologies of gender, race, and class. This engagingly-written, often funny book critiques the nostalgic myths (especially racial myths) that have surrounded the barbershop revival, but also celebrates the civic-minded, participatory spirit of barbershop harmony. The contents of the CD have been replaced by a companion website with helpful links, resources, and audio examples.



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