

4/3/07

**“Belle Chords”  
b y  
Tom Holbrook**

**This past Thursday evening, March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2007 was another great evening for those who love music and who attended The Belle Chords Ladies’ Barbershop Chorus’ Spring Show at Church on the Square. Forty-five glimmering, shimmering lovely ladies pooled their talents and put on a show that kept those of us in the audience laughing and clapping for three quarters of an hour. The chorus wore black dresses with iridescent capes that magically reflected the stage lights, surrounding each singer with a sparkling aura, enhancing the beautiful sound they produced. Their director Jan Haley wore an elegant black pant suit and a radiant smile that reflected her pride and joy in the group that performed so wonderfully.**

**Quartets, “Sevenettes”, and Octets consisting of chorus members performed individual comical numbers which delighted the audience and this show of talented ladies even allowed a quartet of men, “The Re-treads,” to entertain the audience with song and dance... truly a generous act of inclusiveness.**

**As we listened we were transported down memory lane visiting the 30s, 40s and 50s, with such songs as “Diamonds Are a Girl’s Best Friend”; “Red, Red Robin”; “Shaboom-Shaboom”; “Nothin’ Could Be Finer” (Than to be in Carolina,) and my favorite “Somewhere Over the Rainbow,” which highlighted the group’s bass section. You know... there’s something very special about ladies singing bass... shades of Marlene Dietrich.**

**The Belle Chords concluded their fine program with four songs designed to stir the soul and honor our military men and women who are serving now and have served so bravely throughout our country’s history. The songs were “I Believe,” “What a Wonderful World,” “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” and a stirring rendition of “God Bless America” that brought the audience to their feet singing and applauding. Jan and ladies, your hard work and preparation showed and were worth all your efforts... thank you so much for a superb performance and hopefully we’ll see many more in the future.**

**Those attending the show were treated to a bonus of an additional forty-five minutes of beautiful music, which I would classify as the pie`ce de` ri`sis`tance, presented by Kent State University’s Men’s Chorus under the direction of Dr. Ben Ayling. Sponsored by the Heart of Florida Barbershop Chorus the group of 35 young men included The Villages as one of their nine performance venues while on Spring Tour throughout the southeast United States.**

They entered through the rear of the auditorium and marched two by two down the aisle to the stage while singing “Sing Alleluia” and proceeded to sing selections from Broadway, Hollywood, the Classical era, Gilbert and Sullivan, and Spirituals from the 1800s. Mozart, Gershwin, Whalum, Clokey, and Barber were composers of note whose musical pieces were performed by these traveling troubadours. Most of what they sang was a Capella but other pieces were beautifully accompanied by Yu-Ching Chin a Kent State Senior from Taiwan. She was diminutive in size but huge in talent. Another young lady, Mezzo-Soprano Shaina Vencil, sang the Gershwin favorite “Someone to Watch Over Me” also accompanied by Ms. Chin.

In keeping with the Barbershop theme of the Belle Chords’ show, a Barbershop quartet of Kent State students more than adequately performed two Barbershop numbers to the delight and enjoyment of the audience. (Can there actually be young people who sing Barbershop music?) Their name was “Harmony Grits,” which inspired laughter when they were introduced and even more laughter when the audience was informed that audiences up north didn’t get the humor their name deserved. They did a fantastic job representing the Barbershop genre of music.

Every piece of music the chorus performed was beautifully done with crisp, immaculate phrasing, full harmonic tones and wonderful dynamics which manipulated our emotions. Two comedic pieces really captured the audience’s fancy and received thunderous applause from all of us in attendance. An old early American folk song, “Blue Tail Fly” was extremely funny with the entire chorus collapsing on the floor and risers, as if dead, at the song’s climax... a wonderful, surprising touch that got the desired response.

Their final piece was “directed” by one of the students and entitled “Johnny Schmoker,” an Old Dutch folk song. To begin the piece the chorus turned their backs to the audience while they donned white gloves, and then turned back around facing us... threw their music folders to the floor... and proceeded at a impossible speed to repeat, time after time, each instrument “Johnny” could play while emulating the instruments with their gloved hands. It reminded one of the Christmas song, “Partridge in a Pear Tree,” with its ad infinitum repetitions, gaining speed with each one. It was truly a hilarious performance of the chorus, and its student “director,” that had the audience laughing through tears.

Many thanks to the Belle Chords and to the Kent State Men’s Chorus for another rousing, uplifting musical show, and to the Heart of Florida Men’s Barbershop Chorus for their sponsorship of it. Ho-hum... just another boring day in The Villages.

See you next week.

