

Kurt Vogel Testimonial offered 01/07/10

In addition to being a charter member of the Indiana Harmony Brigade, I have the pleasure to be the Director for a chorus that is going through a period of “rebirth”. Two years ago, the Bloomington Indiana chapter nearly folded. They were down to 5 members, when a group of visionaries got together and decided to save this chapter. They went on a recruiting campaign; brought me in to be the new director and to take them in a new direction.

Fast forward a year and the chorus has seen moderate growth to 16 and we have the occasional visitor. The chorus goes to convention and competes for the first time in over 8 years. Now it is time to put on the first show in the community in over 11 years. Two major hurdles confront the leadership team. First and foremost, the chorus is not ready to put on a full show on their own while maintaining the higher standard of performance expected. Second and nearly as important is that Barbershop singing had obtained a poor reputation in the community because of the size and quality of the chorus prior to its rebirth. The big question...”how do we overcome these hurdles?”

Indiana Harmony Brigade to the rescue. By scheduling the IHB, the Sounds of Indiana could focus on making our 30 minutes of the show the absolute best it could be. There were so many positive results from this venture that it becomes difficult for me to articulate because of the exhilaration I feel every time I think about it. I have to start by saying that while this may not have been the absolute best barbershop show I have seen or been a part of, it was certainly one of the best. The Sounds of Indiana (SOI) opened the show and we closed the first half with a high school group. A quartet opened the second half of the show and the IHB closed it out with the SOI joining on the finale.

How did it turn out...well shortly after the show, we had four new members join the chorus. All of them had been audience members. We have two more men who are still attending “part time” but have not joined the chorus...yet! Two of these six men had been guests to a couple of our rehearsals prior to the show. I had a little chat with them and they both were honest and said that seeing what we were capable of on the show and seeing what the IHB was able to do, excited them...they could see where the chorus could go and wanted to be a part of it.

Men who were already a part of the chorus got to see what it was like to sing with a large chorus. Their family and friends were so positive about their performance and the overall entertainment of the show that every man in the chorus was uplifted. There was a new energy and focus within the chorus rehearsals following this show. What effect did that have? We went back to the next convention and competed in the chorus competition...our scores improved by an average of 10 points per judge per category. As a Director...I’ll take that!

Earlier, I mentioned two hurdles. I’ve described how the brigade was able to help us over the first hurdle and the positive aftereffects. What about that second elephant? Well we are eating that one with one bite at a time. Advertising the Brigade as a featured guest on

our show didn't help us sell more tickets because nobody in the community knows what IHB is; however by putting on a really good show, we saw a large number of guests return for our Christmas show. We have had three paid "corporate" shows as a result of our performance. We have built a cordial working relationship with the high school. In large part, due to the Brigade being a part of our annual show.

We have started our planning for the second annual show and the first comments made by the show committee...how do we beat last year? But the really exciting part for me is that the chorus as a whole believes they can put on a better show. How? They just keep working harder. There is a fire in the belly to be better than last year and to give greater entertainment to our audience. By the looks of it right now, we will probably put about 25 men on the risers for that show. That doesn't sound like a lot but that is close to 60% growth.

We have good leadership in the chorus and I give them credit for doing good work. But I credit the Indiana Harmony Brigade for putting the fire in the belly of the chorus. For showing what is possible and giving our audience something to look forward to seeing again.

If I had to sum it all up in one word.....Phenomenal.

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Yours in Song,  
Kurt

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