



They're in harmony

By Robin Gaines
special writer

THE DETROIT-Oakland Chapter of the Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Barbershop Quartet Singing in America has been preparing since September for its upcoming show at Detroit's Orchestra Hall.

The Detroit No. 1 and Oakland chapters, the two oldest barbershop choruses in Michigan, recently merged into a new chapter, which will present the 47th annual Parade of Harmony, a show titled "Sweet and Lovely," at 8 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 22.

"That was part of the idea of the merger, to bring the two good units together and build from 60 men up to 100," said Bill Fanfalone of Lincoln Park, chapter president. Our objective is to break a 100-man chorus. That's our long-term goal.

The chapter's 60-man chorus, the Gentlemen Songsters, will be featured in the show, along with the 1986 International Silver Medalist quartet, Center Stage; the Chicago Natural Gas; and the Crystal Classics, the Sweet Adeline regional medalists.

"BARBERSHOP singing is a unique sound," said Don McDaniel of Union Lake, assistant director of the chapter. "It's done totally unaccompanied."

Added Fanfalone, "It's the purest form of a cappella harmony."

Barbershop harmony is produced by four voices: the lead, tenor, bass and baritone, with the harmony built around a melody line.

"Barbershop singing goes all the way back to the middle ages," said Steve Sutherland of Canton, musical director of the Detroit-Oakland chapter. "Men used to gather at the



Bill Fanfalone of Lincoln Park (right), president of the Detroit-Oakland Chapter of the International Barbershoppers Society, sings with other members of the Gentlemen Songsters at rehearsal for a show at Orchestra Hall.

barber with their instruments, play their music and sing along with it.

"They (historians) feel that's where it originated, although it was formed here in this country. I guess it's one of the two or three original music styles that we have."

The barbershop quartet society has approximately 37,500 participants in more than 750 chapters all over the world. It is the largest all-male singing society in the world.

A percentage of the money the society generates is donated to the Institute of Logopedics, which helps people with speech handicaps. So

far, the society has contributed more than \$6 million to the institute. During the Christmas season, area chapters perform in local hospitals and nursing homes.

THE GENTLEMEN Songsters recently placed third in the state competition held in Flint in October, and that was with the recent merger of chapters and only 10 weeks to rehearse, according to Sutherland.

Most of the members of the Detroit-Oakland Chapter have been singing barbershop for several years, but they are always interested in new recruits.

If you love to sing, can carry a tune and are male, the chorus invites you to drop by its rehearsal at the Lathrup Village Hall at 8 p.m. Mondays. For further information, phone 259-2511.

"I think the biggest disappointment in my life is that I didn't discover it (barbershop singing) until I was 45 years old," said McDaniel. "I figure I wasted 20 years."

Tickets at \$7 and \$8 for the Orchestra Hall show may be purchased at the box office or by calling 568-5924 (days) or 549-0241 (evenings).



JERRY ZOLYNSKY/staff photographer

Bob Sage of Farmington is one of the chapter members, who meet each Monday at the Lathrup Village Hall. The Detroit No. 1 and the Oakland chapters combined to form the new chapter of the Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Barbershop Quartet Singing in America Inc.

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