



# International Medalist GREAT NORTHERN UNION CHORUS



HILLTOP CHAPTER • SPEBSQSA

10,000 LAKES DIVISION – LAND O' LAKES DISTRICT

Vol. 8 – Issue # 1

## GNU's NEWS

January 2003

### The Great Northern Union Annual Show, "The Best Ever!"



*The finale, "Great Day" reprise, GNU with guest quartets Excalibur, Michigan Jake and Bravo!*



*The College Set*



*All dressed up and goin' to Montreal!*

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**New Goals in Sight for GNU**

We call this a transitional year - having said goodbye in 2002 to a beloved long-time director, Roger Williams, the chorus has, after a nationwide search, found a new director, Peter Benson.

Lofty goals are on the horizon for the Great Northern Union, among them a trip to Montreal to compete in an International contest, having won this right for the 17th time in a row. This is a feat no other chorus in the SPEBSQSA Society has ever accomplished. This all has been possible because of a large contingent of members who freely give of their talents to coach and to manage the myriad of functions which make this a well oiled machine.

In the chorus, Pete is especially building the bass section and creating his unique full-bodied sound, which is already evident to the audience. The Great Northern Union Men's Chorus is having fun while creating perfection and providing high quality entertainment.

During 2003, the group will perform at other private and public functions, such as for large organization/club events, and special church services. In past years, GNU has had the thrill of several performances at the Vikings football games and the Twins baseball games, as well as joint fund-raisers with the Lions Club, joint school appearances; and various other out of town events. The group is currently in process of lining up additional appearances, and welcomes more leads.

**GNU Web Site Updated**

Check it out! Member efforts coordinated by **Jeff Aldrich** have updated the Great Northern Union web site. The site includes great new graphics, photos and articles plus a whole lot more.

It eventually will have a "members only" portion which will help to keep us up to the minute in all of our endeavors. Visit the site frequently to see what exciting new things they have in store.

Jeff's team includes:  
**Miles McDonald,**  
**Albin Peterson,**  
**Steve Nolte, Tom Semple,**  
**Miller, Dave Steve LaBissoniere,**  
**and Steve Aldrich.**



[www.gnunion.com](http://www.gnunion.com)

## Director's Cut

*"Nice job!" "Great Show", "The chorus is really improving." "The basses are awesome!" Etc. Etc.*

These encouraging comments heard in the lobby after our shows can be music to our ears. We like to hear these kinds of things because it is rewarding to be reinforced for hard work and meeting some of our goals, and because it feels good just to have our egos stroked once in awhile. On the other hand, given the type of musically inclined audiences we attract, we are likely to get some critical comments as well. So how do we sort through and make sense of them all? How much weight do we put on certain comments? Who do we believe?



If you're like me, when you hear positive comments, you tend to accept them as fact and assume that they represent the general consensus of the audience. Conversely, when others offer criticism, you may immediately question or discredit their musical knowledge (never out loud, of course). Sometimes, unfortunately, a few criticisms within a sea of praise are the things we may tend to dwell on the most. As the director, I am often bombarded with feedback of all kinds, and learning to sort through it all is an important skill. Here are a couple of things to keep in mind when evaluating feedback.

1. **Gauge your progress.** Make no mistake about it, we have made measurable improvements in certain areas over the past few months, and many of the positive comments I heard related directly to those areas. This is something you should all be proud of! Is it possible, though, to gain ground in some areas while neglecting others areas? Absolutely. Would you be surprised if someone said, "your choreography in 'That's a Plenty' was not together" or "MN Rouser needed more dynamics"? Of course not! Acknowledge that we've made great progress on targeted areas within a short time, but we have plenty more to do. Isn't that exciting?
2. **Consider the source.** This seems obvious, but not always easy to do. Is the critic trying to be helpful or show you how much he knows? Is he

someone whose musical/artistic sense you trust? Sometimes general audience members are much more intuitive than we give them credit for. I have learned that spouses are a great resource for constructive feedback because they are usually honest and are familiar with past performances.

3. **View criticisms as opportunities for growth.** It is impossible to honestly evaluate your performance when you are a part of it. Audiences get to experience your songs for the first time without any foreknowledge of all of the minute details you've been rehearsing for months. They see the "forest instead of the trees." As long as step 1 & 2 are understood, feedback can be a great tool and help to redirect priorities.

Well it seems that I'm having diarrhea of the word processor so I'll wrap this up. I must say that your efforts toward making this year's show a huge success have been outstanding. It was truly an honor to be called your new director. I look forward to the months ahead and hope that you're ready for the next phase of challenging excitement!!

Pete Benson, Director

## Guest Night: February 6

### ATTENTION NON-SINGING AND INACTIVE MEMBERS

Please attend this special evening and see what is in store for you as we step into high gear for a great July contest performance in Montreal. (Wouldn't you love to vacation in Canada!)

What a line-up for guest night this winter! Not only are we making it a big evening of musical fun for potentially new and re-activated members, but we are also entertaining dignitaries of the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra. It is hoped that this will lead to negotiations for a joint performance with the SPCO.



**Inactive members:** we miss you and appreciate your talents. Maybe you owe it to yourself to sing for Pete 3 or 4 times before you decide if the new GNU sound is for you.

Please join us for **Guest Night** and beyond! If you have a son of high school age or older, please encourage him to come and see what we are all about. And of course wives are welcome to listen in on any rehearsal!

## Great Northern Union Show is Best Ever

By all accounts, professional and amateur, the recent January 2003 show at Bethel College was the best ever.

The venue was the Benson Great Hall, a beautiful concert facility with great acoustics. People braved the cold and came great distances, in some cases hundreds of miles, to witness the results of the transitional year for the Great Northern Union Men's Chorus.

The crowd was treated to a variety of music such as New Orleans jazz, lively gospel, good old college songs, as well as well-honed barbershop music. The audience enthusiastically applauded for the electrifying performances of the championship quartets from the Great Northern Union: **BRAVO!** and **Excalibur**. **Michigan Jake**, the headliner quartet, was received in similar resounding fashion.

The show program:

Great Day  
There Goes My Heart  
Taking a Chance on Love

### **Bravo!**

Rouser  
Sweetheart of Sigma Chi  
All American Girl  
Halls of Ivy

### **Excalibur**

### **Michigan Jake**

Drunken Sailor  
That's A Plenty  
Mortal Flesh  
Lift Up My Head  
Great Day Reprise

## Show Buzz...

Here are some of the comments from the audience members after the annual show:

- ◆ "I was thinking that I have never heard them sing better, even the one song I did not like."
- ◆ "I was surprised to see the new guy up front already."
- ◆ "Over twenty of us came from Windom. This is great".
- ◆ "Oh good. I see that Judd Orff will emcee. He's that guy from Stillwater, you know...big in the District."
- ◆ "Where is that tall guy from that Happy quartet? I miss him. ..Oh there he is"
- ◆ "My little boy perked up when he heard Jake sing Bill Bailey to hip-hop."
- ◆ " The guy behind me kept 'ooo-ing' and aah-ing' all through the show."
- ◆ "All of those costume changes really added something. (Except a few guys forgot that they had gained twenty pounds since college.)"
- ◆ "Yah, I'll buy a new CD. This is great!"
- ◆ "I liked the platforms instead of risers but they should have had more different heights."
- ◆ "You guys rock!"
- ◆ "The bass sound was really big!"
- ◆ "Loved all of the outfits, and the colored shirts and dark pants were awesome."
- ◆ "More choreography please."
- ◆ WOW! We've been to every concert since 1993--- You guys have a totally new organ-like sound! You are definitely climbing to a new level!"
- ◆ "How can every show be better than the last one?"



## Presidents Corner

In my first article, I told you a little bit about my barbershopping career and myself. The second article reviewed some of my thoughts on strategy and planning.



This month I'm going to talk about a topic that applies to every aspect of our barbershopping career - preparation.

Preparation, he says! Just what is he talking about? I'd offer that preparation is the single most important item that can help you achieve your own singing goals and objectives.

Let me give some examples:

- ◆ Do you prepare for every performance by dressing in the appropriate uniform wearing appropriate stage make-up? Of course you do. But do you do the same level of preparation for each rehearsal each Thursday night?
- ◆ Do you review the evening's published plan and organize your music for that plan?
- ◆ Do you mark your music with areas that need special help or special personal reminders?
- ◆ Do you organize your recording equipment and know what you're going to record?
- ◆ Do you carefully review each evening's performance the next day and make notes on areas needing attention?
- ◆ Do you have your badge in a place so that you have it every Thursday evening?
- ◆ Do you practice singing your music with learning tapes and your own recorded tapes? Etcetera, etcetera, etcetera.

Same sort of questions can be asked about the chorus chapter business. Asking those types of questions and answering them is the job of your Board of Directors. In fact, they meet quarterly to address these types of planning and preparation questions.

In conclusion, prepare, prepare, and prepare! Apply this simple idea and I'll guarantee you'll **enjoy** everything about this wonderful hobby even more than you do now.

Remember, prepare.

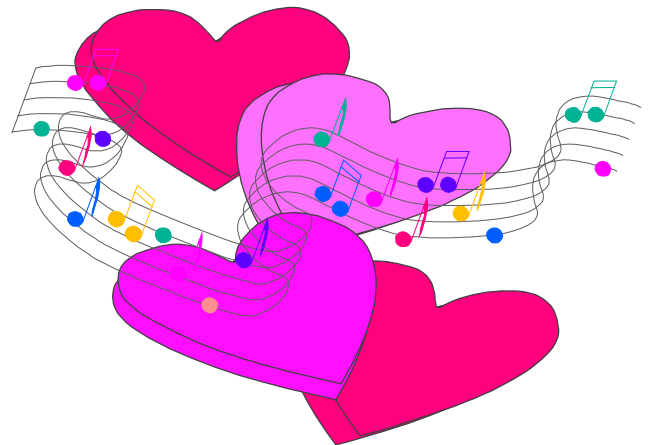
Roger Meyer, President GNU

## Send a Singing Valentine!

*A Valentine's Day Gift They Will Never Forget*

How would you like to send a special valentine to a friend or loved one? How about a valentine that sings?

The Great Northern Union participates with other barbershop choruses in a Twin-Cities wide Valentines Day extravaganza designed to touch the heart and flush the face.



Imagine a barbershop quartet showing up to sing to your valentine at a restaurant, or at work in front of all of her or his co-workers, or at a private in-home serenade. Your Valentine will receive a photo of the event, a rose, and a couple of great barbershop love songs sung by a barbershop quartet. Mostly, your valentine will get a memory that will last forever, and will be talked about dozens or even hundreds of times.

Singing Valentines start at only \$49.

To order a confidential singing valentine, Please call 651-869-1093 or 651-459-8767. You can also contact the singing valentine coordinator by email at [svcoordinator@gnunion.com](mailto:svcoordinator@gnunion.com). More information can be found on the GNU website at [www.gnunion.org](http://www.gnunion.org) and hit the SV link.

For Valentines delivered outside of the Twin Cities area, call the International Office at 1-800-876-SING (7464) or visit the website [www.singingvalentines.com](http://www.singingvalentines.com).

Singing Valentines by a women's quartet can be arranged by calling Sue at 651-882-2279 or Donna at 612-781-4667.

On to Montreal! For tourist information, visit

[www.tourisme-montreal.org](http://www.tourisme-montreal.org)

## Treasurer's Report

The new board has established detailed budgets for the current fiscal year (August through July). We have converted our banking and financial management onto Quicken. And, thanks to **Erik Dove**, we are in the process of establishing a new banking arrangement with US Bank.

So just how are we doing financially? Good question - and the answer is "pretty well". We currently maintain a savings account of a little over \$5,000. We did not have to dip into that at the end of the year, as ticket sale revenues began coming in to keep us above zero in checking.

Our revenue to date is almost \$60,000 while our expenses are just over \$50,000. (for a more detailed breakdown of those numbers, contact me directly) so we're fiscally sound. If you combine the ticket and ad sales from our annual show, you will see that this single event accounts for 48% of our total income for the year! That is how important that event is to us. The Show of Champions in June contributes another 10% of our income.

Although we are managing our budget well, there are still many things we would like to do but cannot afford. These include capital expenses such as risers with guardrails, CD duplication equipment, uniforms, and video equipment. They also include operating expenses such as music, coaching, and contributing towards costs of events like our annual boot camp in Duluth, competition travel-related expenses, and charitable contributions to Make-A-Wish Foundation, Harmony Foundation, etc.



I also want to note two more specific items. First, **Mike DeMay**, with the help of several others, has already sold over \$3,000 worth of tapes and CD's in the current fiscal year. Last year, with no new CD to offer, he accounted for over 7% of our income. While his raw numbers should be way up this year, we also hope to increase our overall income through grants and gifts.



That is point # 2. This year, the board established a new board position, Vice-President of Fund Development. **Harvey Berwin** is filling

that role and chairing the various teams related to fund-raising. So far, Harvey has reigned in \$9000 in grants, \$8000 of which is committed to new risers and rails. You have already seen hints of the aggressive coaching schedule and new music we are learning. Both of which will be significantly higher this year from the expense perspective. Finally, the costs of producing a new CD are very high, especially the ASCAP and royalty fees.

Conclusion: We are doing fine, but we could be doing a lot more. If you really want to make a great impact on the future of the GNU, sign up to help on one of the marketing teams (see or contact **Steve Aldrich**) or fund-raising teams (see or contact **Harvey Berwin**).

John Babbs, Treasurer

## GNU Thanks Theresa

**Theresa Meyer** was surprised with the presentation of a special name badge from Immediate Past President John Babbs for all the contributions she makes to the GNU. The badge identifies her name and title as "Wife". Badge hangers included the titles of "First Lady" and "Photographer".



Theresa is active in a wide variety of activities. She takes most of the photos that you see of the GNU or its members. In fact, she took the picture of the chorus used in this year's Annual Show program. She writes articles for the monthly newsletter. She helped to organize the food and refreshments at the Annual Show afterglow. She worked with our supplier in selecting the new GNU women's purple shirts. She attends many rehearsals and almost all performances. I hear she even writes some of the President's items in the GNU's Notes.

She believes more wives could be invited to chapter activities, not as an auxiliary, but as an extension to the men's' committees. She has certainly demonstrated that position by her example.

The chorus gave her a standing ovation in recognition of her many contributions.

### Getting ready to go to Montreal.

To enter Canada and re-enter US, you will need a photo ID and proof of citizenship (birth certificate). A passport is not necessary but it is preferred.

## From the Judges Pit

**The Great northern Union is very fortunate to count 9 judges and 2 candidate judges among our members. Through this column, we will get advice from these experts on how to improve our individual performance.**

### The Singing Category

Jim Emery, Society Singing Judge

Over the next few GNU'S NEWS issues, I'd like to relate what the GNU is doing as it relates to the Singing-judging category.

All the great new stuff Pete is doing with "Paul Bunyan" sound, full word sounds, more legato, singing on the air, touch-and-press, and more effective and frequent soft singing are having wonderfully positive impacts on what gets judged in the Singing category. But before we can understand just how, it's probably a good idea to describe just what gets judged in Singing. So I'll do that in this short article.

Perhaps the best introduction to the Singing category is taken directly from the introduction to the category in the contest and judging rules. That introduction reads as follows.

*"One ingredient that clearly identifies barbershop music is its unique sound. It is the sound of barbershop that allows the transforming of a song into an emotional experience for the performer and audience. The best barbershop singing combines elements of technique and emotion to create an artistic result.*



*"Barbershop singing shares elements of good singing with other forms of ensemble vocal music. Primarily, the listener expects to hear the pleasing effect of in-tune singing from voices that are free and*

*resonant and that exhibit no signs of difficulties. The listener expects to hear the ensemble as a unit, free from distractions by individual differences of quality or delivery.*

*"The style of barbershop singing adds a distinctive element to these basics. Enhanced by the choice of*

*harmonies, voicings, and voice relationships characteristic to barbershop, the ensemble sound can achieve a sound that feels greater than the sum of the parts. This reinforced sound has been described as "lock and ring" or the feeling of "expanded sound."*

*"The "ring" of a barbershop chord will always be the hallmark of the style. Any listener to a barbershop performance expects to be thrilled by the sound of a ringing climax, or awed by the purity and beauty of a soft and elegant expression of a song. Great opera singing is achieved by magnificent vocal technique used to create musical artistry. In the same sense, great barbershop singing demands mastery of vocal and ensemble skills to create the breathtaking effects of barbershop musical artistry.*

*"The Singing judge evaluates the degree to which the performer achieves artistic singing in the barbershop style. This is accomplished through precise intonation, a high degree of vocal skill, and a high level of unity and consistency within the ensemble. Mastering these elements also creates a feeling of fullness, ring, and expansion of sound throughout the performance. When artistry is present, these elements are natural, unmanufactured, and free from apparent effort, allowing the performer to fully communicate and express the theme of the song."*

So, the basics of judging and, consequently, scoring in the Singing category revolve around how well each group does in five major areas: (1) intonation, (2) vocal quality, (3) unity, (4) expansion, and (5) artistry.

In future GNU's NEWS articles, I'll expand on each of these areas and relate how what the GNU is focusing in helps to maximize our effectiveness (and score) in each of them.

### Wear your GNU Pride

Now available: several clothing items with embroidered Great Northern Union Chorus logo: Among them, caps, men's denim shirts, sweatshirts, ladies purple shirts, and CD cases.



These can be worn by any of our members, families, friends or fans. If you missed them on sale at the show, please e-mail Meyer's at [roger.theresa@meyer.net](mailto:roger.theresa@meyer.net) for details.

### Anyone under 19 going to Montreal?

Kids under 19 will need proof of identity as well as a letter from a parent or guardian granting permission to travel into Canada. For more information contact your travel professional.



### COTS

Over the weekend of January 11-12, the LOL District held **Chapter Officers Training School (COTS)**. This year it was held at Menominee, Wisconsin on the campus of the University of Wisconsin - Stout.

Many members from Hilltop chapter attended, either as students or as facilitators for the various classes. It was a good time to learn how to better do our jobs, to enjoy some good food and conversation with some of our barbershop brothers from across the district, and to listen to some fun quartets.

Hilltop chapter officers attending include: **Roger Meyer, John Babbs, Bill Lydecker, Dave Miller, Jim Higgins, Steve Aldrich, and Dan Vander Ploeg.** Hilltop members on the COTS faculty included **Scott Kvigne, Judd Orff, Don Challman, and Duane Hutton.** And GNUer **Ken Gilmore** attended as a St. Croix Valley chapter officer.



*Judd Orff*



*Don Challman*



*COTS Attendees*



*Duane Hutton*



*Scott Kvigne*



# Caught in the Act



*An animated Pete Benson in a recent rehearsal, seeking the most from the chorus.*



*Bob Dowma – leading a song*



*Above – Jim Emery at a recent rehearsal*

*Below - Practice, practice and practice*



*Roger Stanfield – “Show me what you feel”.*



*Friends and family are always welcome. Guests of Bob Dowma (his mom), Mark Jurgensen, and Tony Blackwood at a recent rehearsal:*

## Members; Get to know 'em

### This is Albin Peterson

Albin sings lead and bari and has lived all of his life at Turtle Lake Wisconsin. Together with his father and other family members, they have always been active church singers. He has also sung in high school and college choirs and has participated in community band. He has music minor.



Currently he sings with Daryl Morteck, Tom Semple, and Brad Berget in a quartet called "Mood Swing"; and previously he sang with his dad and 2 brothers in a group called Monona Echoes.

He has been in barbershopping for 17 years, (Were you FIVE when you started? - Ed.) the last 4 years with Great Northern Union. Previously he sang with Barron and Polk County choruses.

Albin was attracted to GNU because he felt that it would be a growth experience to perform where a high caliber of singing is maintained. In addition to singing, Albin is currently part of the updated GNU web site team.

For a living, Albin is a carpenter; and he goes to college part time.

### Who is Don Knecht?

We live in the Linden Hills neighborhood of Minneapolis. My wife Mary and I have two children and 4 grandchildren.

As a Lutheran parish pastor, we have lived in Wisconsin in Appleton, Sheboygan and near Chippewa Falls. For the last 21 years, I have been a chaplain at Fairview Southdale Hospital in Edina.



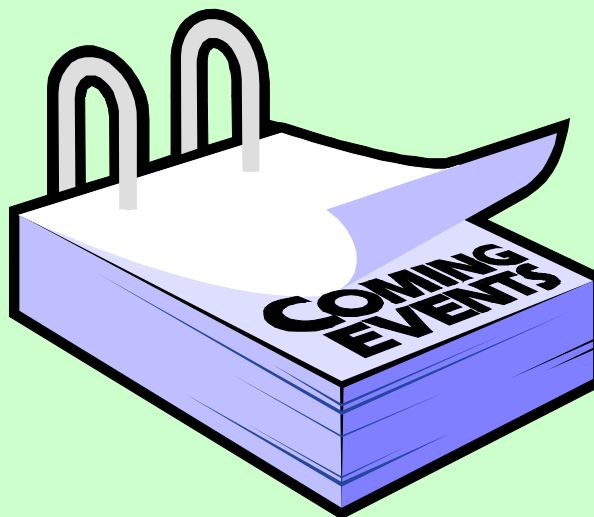
I started barbershopping with the Minneapolis Commodores 7 years ago. While there, I sang in Crosstown Revue with Dan Smith, Bill Ashley, and Chuck McKown. Two highlights for us were being Division Novice Champs and attending Harmony College together.

Two years ago, I sang in the chorus of the Minnesota Opera for two shows and then decided to return to barbershopping with GNU where I sing bass.

I wanted the challenge of always trying to sing better each week. I enjoy the commitment of each member of the chorus to give his very best. Of course, the two trips to Nashville and Portland were a big thrill. But I also got a heartfelt lift out of singing for the men at the Vet's Hospital and doing singing valentines.


## Coming Events

- ◆ **Guest Night** – February 6
- ◆ **Singing Valentines** – February 14
- ◆ **Mason's Performance** – February 15
- ◆ **David Harrington coaching** – February 27
- ◆ **Dwain Brobst coaching** – March 8
- ◆ **Mark Hale coaching** – April 19
- ◆ **10,000 Lakes Div. Contest** – May 3
- ◆ **Garage Sale** – May 3
- ◆ **Duluth Retreat** – May 16-18
- ◆ **Joe Connelly coaching** – May 29
- ◆ **On to Fame show** – June 14



# GNU Chapter Quartets

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952 894-9030


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SPEBSQSA / 2003



**MONTREAL**

**Barbershop: La joie de vivre**



**The Roadrunners**  
(20 Years Ago)

Contact: Rich Slind, P.O. Box 25257, St. Paul, MN 55125  
E-mail: roadrunners72@juno.com  
Web Site: http://theroadrunners.home.mindspring.com

## Before we go....

The annual show afterglow was at the New Brighton Family Service Center, just a short distance from the concert hall. Attended by our members, families and special friends, a good time was had by all. Among our many friends was a contingent from Midwest Vocal Express from Greendale, Coach Tony DeRosa and dozens of family members who came to hear the headliner quartet, **Michigan Jake**. Also singing for us at that causal "expanded cast party" event were chapter quartets: **Excalibur**, **BRAVO!**, **LiveWire** and **Mood Swing**.

This year, a bigger spread of sandwiches and home made baked goods was featured and got rave reviews. Thanks to the members and wives for sharing such delicious cookies and bars and a special thanks to Barb and Sarah DeMay for putting together the sandwiches and veggies along with preparing the tables.



*Michigan Jake*



*BRAVO!*



*Excalibur*



*Mood Swing*

The Great Northern Union Chorus meets every Thursday from 7:00pm to 10:00pm, at the Greater Minneapolis Jewish Community Center, 4330 Cedar Lake Road in St. Louis Park. Diving North on Hwy. 100 take Cedar Lake Rd. exit and follow to end; driving south, take 394 W, exit on Park Place, which runs in to Cedar Lake Rd. The telephone number at rehearsals is 952-377-8330. "Early-Bird" rehearsals are held at 6:00pm for practicing S.P. moves. Members are urged to call the GNU Hotline at 763-476-7383 weekly for the latest word on rehearsals, performances, and other pertinent information. Also find us on the web at [www.gnunion.com](http://www.gnunion.com)



*Live Wire*