

Vocal Academy @ BABS Harmony College August 2006

Over the August 2006 Bank Holiday weekend, the three of us (Ron Moore, Bob Mason and John Austin) were among over 300 BABS members who attended the annual *Harmony College*, which was held once again at the Worcester University campus (with ideally co-located lecture and accommodation facilities that would otherwise lie empty in August).



VA members with Ken Hulme, Harmony College organiser

(left to right from Back: Ron Moore, Bob Mason, Frank Paice, John Austin.; Front: Ken Hulme, Derek Davies)

Also there from VA were Derek Davies, as a member of the (teaching) Faculty and Frank Paice with his other chorus, *Crescendo*, to assist with the Directing training package.

Arranged in "streams" by subject, the training sessions covered a number of topics and included the Chorus one we took part in; it was the most popular with over 100 people choosing it. (Full details of the subjects offered were described in the prospectus that was mailed to all BABS Members in around June)

Our first challenge, having signed up, was to learn the 4 College Songs from the music and CDs that were sent to each student - both words and notes had to be fully learned before the start.

The Chorus stream, lead by Mike Taylor, and his team of assistants consisted of Andy Funnel (Basses), Peter Kennedy (Tenors), Paul Cousins (Leads), and Jon Conway (Baritones). (With combined barbershop experience totalling over 120 years, they have gained more than 20 medals between them.) had the stated objectives of "Fun, Singing, and Learning". We also benefited from additional time with Rick Spencer, the brilliant American visitor who visited VA in Sawtry on Wednesday 23 August.

So, what did we gain from it all? Well, on the 'technical' side, we learnt some new warm-up techniques, including use of the interesting warm-air mirror, and the surprisingly effective 'bubble' technique. We did some silent breathing, and we looked again at the 'ooh' vowel sound, where our "pinkie" (little finger) had to fill our lips to stop the

sound. We learnt how to support our singing by use of our back muscles, and the part that can be played by ski sticks, and oranges under the arms to develop this!

And we were able to appreciate the added benefits of a greater range of dynamics in the interpretations of the songs we had learnt, as well as better tension and release. All of us feel that there is a lot to be gained from singing in smaller groupings and gained greater singing enjoyment when singing in a chorus with a 'scatter' stack (with voices distributed singly or in twos or threes) allowing you to more easily hear the other parts. Throughout the singing sessions we practised the pre-emptive movement on the risers when, on the signal given by the conductor, we collectively adopted the 'Phase 3 Singer' posture as defined and demonstrated by Rick.

The icing on the cake for all of us was the fantastic experience of singing in such a large chorus: even our Music Team was almost overwhelmed by the sound of over 100 singers who had only sung together for such a few hours. We were certainly proud of this thrilling and unique achievement.

All together, and despite the physical strain of the many hours we spent on the risers, we enjoyed 3 tremendously thrilling days. We met a lot of new people who all seemed very happy and friendly, and made a lot of new friends. We certainly learnt a lot, but most importantly we had a lot of fun and a really great time. Plus, we've got the tee shirt to prove it!



Ron Moore at final address

More pictures are available on the Harmony College website: <http://www.babs-education.info/harmonycollege/galleries/2006/>

Hopefully there will be some recordings available soon and possibly even some video footage of the Saturday Show.

In summary, we would strongly recommend that you give serious consideration to joining the 3 of us next year, which promises to be an even bigger and better event. Perhaps VA would even consider what could be done to encourage more of us to attend, especially the first-timers, because we are convinced that we gained tremendous value from this memorable experience.

**Ron Moore
Bob Mason
John Austin**



Saturday show

"Crescendo"

