

# THE PERFECT GENTLEMEN

**Art Form: Music**

**Style: Early 20th Century to Contemporary**

**Culture: Western European and American**

## MEET THE ARTIST:

**The Perfect Gentlemen** have been entertaining audiences since 1998, from Los Angeles to London, and just about every place in between. Their unique brand of harmony and humor sets them apart from other vocal groups. Quartet members *Phil Gold, Tim Reeder, Dan Jordan* and *Jim Campbell* have put together a carefully designed repertoire of vocal music, sure to entertain all ages. It also educates those who witness their live performances with music covering 100 years of musical styles. Their "Salute to the 20th Century" has been twice awarded "Best Arrangement" at the Harmony Sweepstakes National A Cappella Competition. The Perfect Gentlemen have shared the stage with other award-winning a cappella groups such as The Persuasions, The Bobs, and Rockapella, and performed with the Pacific Symphony and the South Coast Symphony. Major corporate clients include Disney Entertainment Productions, the L.A. Economic Development Corporation, the Rose Bowl Foundation, and the Make-A-Wish Foundation. In addition, they gave voice to four animated bioluminescent fish in the film attraction *Deepo's 3-D Undersea Wonder Show* at the Georgia Aquarium in downtown Atlanta, Georgia.

## ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE:

The Perfect Gentlemen's show "One Hundred Years of Harmony" takes the listener on a musical and historical journey from the early 1900s to today. The Gents - as they are often known - perform many different songs in this show, but "Shine on Harvest Moon" takes center stage. The Gents perform the song in a myriad of styles. From barbershop to the blues and doo-wop to disco, students will get a taste of many musical styles. In addition, the Gents give the students insight into the evolution of music dissemination, both written and recorded. The Gents sing in the traditional *a cappella* (voices unaccompanied by instruments) barbershop style. They also sometimes employ a Tenor guitar for some minimal accompaniment.



## PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

Barbershop Quartets *"Barbershop quartets often are characterized as four dandies, perhaps bedecked with straw hats, striped vests and handlebar mustaches. These caricatures of the barbershop tradition are not only a quaint symbol of small-town Americana, but have some historical foundation. Barbershop music was indeed borne out of informal gatherings of amateur singers in such unpretentious settings as the local barber shop. And therein lies barbershop music's greatest enigma: it is associated with and practiced today mostly by whites, yet it is primarily a product of the African-American culture."* - Dr. Jim Henry, barbershopper.

The barbershop sound is due to the close harmonies. Sound waves that are close together in pitch reinforce each other, giving the illusion that the chords are louder and richer in timbre than usual. Barbershop aficionados refer to this phenomenon as 'ringing.' Another aspect that sets the barbershop sound apart is that unlike most sung music, the melody is not in the highest voice. Instead, it is typically in one of the middle voices. Barbershop music is a well-organized musical form. The Barbershop Harmony Society is a blanket organization covering the US and Canada. A worldwide organization called the Sweet Adelines provides a forum for female barbershop quartets.

Music Transmission In the mid-1400s, not long after Johannes Gutenberg's printing press made books more widely available, Johann Fust printed the first book to include music: the Mainz Psalter. By the early 1500s, Europe had access to printed music as never before. In the 19th century, every middle class family had a piano and music study. Casual performance of sheet music became the entertainment of the day. It was not until the rise of radio that music recording overtook sheet music as the dominant form of music dissemination.

In 1877, Thomas Edison produced the first viable sound-recording device: a tinfoil cylinder phonograph. However, tinfoil was quickly replaced by wax as the standard for recording cylinders. Cylinders were replaced by flat discs (commonly called records or 78s) in the early 20th century. Records held sway until the advent of magnetic tape recording technology, leading to reel-to-reel recording, audio cassette tape and 8-track tapes. The 8-track players were the first to be truly mobile, allowing for use in cars. In 1979, Sony gave the world the Walkman cassette player making music truly personal and portable. Digital recording technology became mainstream with Compact Discs. In the mid-1990s, the MP3 digital format for computers opened whole new realms. Now with the iPod and similar players, people can carry around recordings of up to 10,000 songs in their pockets.

Music printing technology has also entered the computer age. Anyone can use computer programs to write, set and print their own sheet music.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What were your first impressions of this style of singing?
- What was your favorite song from the show? Explain why it was your favorite.
- Can you define the term, “Harmony?” Can you give an example of how harmony was used in the show?
- A cappella means singing without music. Can you think of other groups you have heard that sing a cappella? Name them and tell how they are similar to this group.
- How did the addition of the Tenor guitar add or detract from the singing? Explain your answer.
- What was one important thing that you remember from the show?

## FRAMEWORK FOCUS - LANG. ARTS/SCIENCE:

One of the featured songs in the show is *Shine on Harvest Moon*. A harvest moon is a full moon that is closest to the fall or autumn equinox (September 20-22). An equinox occurs two times a year. They happen when the day and night are equal in length. There is another equinox in the spring that occurs somewhere around March 20-22. Look up the following words – *harvest moon*, *equinox* and see if you can get more information about them. Are there any festivals that occur on either the fall or spring equinox? If so, describe them and their meanings.

Songwriters often get ideas or inspiration from the seasons. Look at the words of the chorus in *Harvest Moon*. Say or sing them together, until you can do it in perfect unison. Speak or sing the words rhythmically.

“Oh, shine on, shine on harvest moon up in the sky.  
I ain’t had no lovin’ since January, February, June or July  
Snowtime ain’t no time to stay outdoors and spoon,  
So, shine on, shine on harvest moon – for me and my gal!”

Then, discuss all of the ideas that relate to the equinox and harvest moon, using additional research. Why did the songwriter choose the specific months of January, February, June and July to include in his lyrics? Select one thing about the moon and any of its phases and write a two line poem or chorus that captures that characteristic or mood. Work to make the last word of the first line rhyme with the last word of the second line. Share your 2-line poems in small groups or with a partner.

Legend:

- ☉ Artistic perception
- ❖ Creative expression
- ▶ Historical & cultural context
- ⇒ Aesthetic valuing
- \* Connections, Relations, Applications

## ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

☉ Learn to sing the chorus of *Shine on Harvest Moon*. Then, think of the musical element of dynamics (loud and soft qualities). Discuss the words of the chorus and then decide which phrases to sing loudly, which to sing softly and which to sing at a medium volume (dynamic). Sing the chorus again and see how it changes the expression of the lyrics. Try a different way of changing the dynamics of the chorus and sing it again. Decide which one worked best and discuss the reasons for your choice.

▶ Do some research on barbershop quartets and what makes their singing unique. List all of the characteristics that describe this style of singing. You can also look up “Sweet Adelines” which is the name given to women singing in this style. Share your research.

\*▶ The 1900s were the beginning of the 20th century and it was a time of change. However, there were no big wars occurring during this time. Here are some facts about America.

- 76,000,000 Americans in 46 states
- \$46,000,000+ in the U.S. treasury
- 8,000 cars - 10 miles of paved roads
- 1900 - Auto deaths 96; lynchings 115
- San Francisco Earthquake took 700 lives and cost over \$4,000,000 in damage.
- Average worker made \$12.98/week for 59 hours
- Average life expectancy: 47.3 female, 46.3 male

Select one or two of these ideas and discuss how they differ from the statistics in America today. Are there some things that remain the same?

❖ Take a song that can be sung in a round, such as *Row, Row, Row Your Boat* or *Make New Friends*. Practice singing it as a group, then divide into two groups and sing as a round. Listen for the difference when harmony is created during the round. Try it in three or four parts. Discuss how the round form changes the song. Try changing the tempo (fast to slow) and see how that sounds.

⇒ Read about how Barbershop quartet-singing grew out of African-American gospel singing. Read the characteristics listed on the front page under “Preparing for the Experience.” Then, listen to a gospel song and compare it to the Barbershop singing you heard in the show using the characteristics to frame your discussion.

## SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

Ammer, Christine. *Harper Collins Dictionary of Music*. Harper Perennial, New York, NY: 1991.

*Four Parts, No Waiting: A Social History of American Barbershop Harmony*. 2003: Oxford UP.

<http://www.sweetadelineintl.org/>

<http://www.barbershop.org/>

Free Music Notation Program:

<http://www.finalemusic.com/notepad/>