***Carpe Diem Chorus***

**Who are we?**

Carpe Diem is a competitive performing four-part a cappella vocal group comprised of women who share a high level of musicality, focus, and professionalism. We strive for musical and performance excellence through education in the barbershop art form.

The chorus is a chapter of Sweet Adelines International -- “a worldwide organization of women singers committed to advancing the musical art form of barbershop harmony through education and performance.” To this end, we perfect our singing and performing skills throughout the year and compete each spring in the Sweet Adelines International Regional Competition.

Our ages range from 21 to 70+, but on average we’re a young 50-something crowd. What brings us all together is a love of singing and perfecting our craft for performances and competition.

Our director is Mary Ashford.

Mary Ashford is the chartering director of Carpe Diem Chorus, a Santa Barbara County four-part a cappella chorus that performs in barbershop-style harmony.

Mary grew up in a musical family and there was never a moment when the likes of Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughn, Mel Torme, Paul Desmond and other great jazz artists weren’t playing around the house. From a very young age, Mary began playing alto saxophone and singing in both school and church choirs. She continued both band and choir all through high school. Mary attended the University of Wisconsin majoring in instrumental jazz performance. She then enlisted in the United Stated Army Band stationed in Stuttgart, Germany.

Mary discovered Sweet Adelines in the fall of 1996 as a member of Region 11 ChannelAire Chorus. Shortly thereafter, Mary completed her Director Certification Program and went on to co-direct and direct the South Valley Sound Chorus for eleven years. Mary was also an Associate Director at ChannelAire. Mary has served on the Regional Management Team as the Directors' Coordinator and was the President of the Region 11 Quartet Champions’ Winners' Circle. Within months of joining ChannelAire, Mary was already in a quartet and has been quartetting ever since. She sang Bass with Shimmer! for eight years and during that time, she earned two blue ribbons on the regional stage and a 9th and a 10th on the international stage. Mary currently sings Bass with the internationally acclaimed, two-time Gold Medalist Harborlites Chorus. Mary is also an approved candidate in the Judging Program. By day, Mary works for Planmember Services, a financial planning firm in Carpinteria, CA. By night, she can be found singing, directing and coaching choruses and quartets.

With a strong background in jazz, Mary’s idea for a small ensemble of female singers seemed the perfect reason to start a chorus. With passion and a great love for her singers, Mary inspires, motivates, and directs chorus members in vocal production during fast-paced, once- a-week rehearsals. Her passion for teaching is reflected in the chorus members’ talents as they become refined as a unit to achieve performance excellence.

**What is barbershop singing?**

Singing *a cappella* means singing “without instrumental accompaniment.” Barbershop is a unique type of *a cappella* singing and is one of only a few forms of music that is native to the United States. It has evolved from a time when minstrel and vaudeville singers improvised harmonies, or “wood-shedded.” The Barbershop harmony of today is a highly stylized art form requiring the same high degree of singing skill as other types of choral music.

While the traditional concept of sentimental singing around the barbershop pole may be what comes to your mind, we have adapted this style of harmony singing to just about everything including pop, country, show tunes, gospel and more. We have an entire repertoire of Christmas and patriotic music to perform as well when the season calls for it.

The Barbershop style comes from the combination of chord structure, delivery and interpretation, which locks the chords to produce overtones. Unlike the typical soprano/alto/tenor/bass arrangements in choral singing, the four vocal parts in Barbershop are tenor, lead, baritone and bass.

**Lead** is the melody and is sung in the range between A below middle C, and C above middle C. One of the distinctive qualities of Barbershop harmony is that the melody, sung by the lead voice, is below the tenor harmony.

**Tenor** is sung consistently above the lead in the range between F above middle C and A, an octave and a sixth above middle C. Although tenor is the highest voice in Barbershop harmony, it should not be confused with soprano of conventional singing groups. The tenor should have a light, sweet, pure tone that will compliment but not overpower the lead voice.

**Baritone** covers approximately the same range as lead. The baritone harmony notes cross the lead notes; sometimes sung below and sometimes above. Baritones must constantly adjust their balance to accommodate their position in the chord. Baritone is sometimes called the “counter melody.”

**Bass** supports the barbershop sound. Bass singers should have rich, mellow voice**s** and be able to sing the E flat below middle C easily. Basses should not be confused with the alto of conventional groups. Many altos can sing the bass part, but others are much better suited to lead or baritone, depending on range and vocal quality.

There are many things that can be said about the Barbershop style but ultimately what we’re going for is called “Lock and Ring.” To achieve it requires excellence in all phases of singing -- a good musical arrangement, good vocal technique, well-balanced and blended voices and accurate tuning. In combination, these qualities can create an audible overtone that sends a chill up the spine of singers and listeners alike. We know we’re doing it right when the hair stands up on our arms!!

**What do I have to do to join?**

The first step is to successfully audition by singing a song that you have learned from our current repertoire. If you decide to audition, you’ll receive a link to the learning track and the sheet music of the audition song.

The audition process:

**Week 1**

* Your vocal assessment will be held in a private room with members of the music staff. It will take place near the end of vocal warm-ups during the first part of rehearsal. We will work with a keyboard and you will be asked to sing back tones, scales, intervals and simple melodies. You will be asked to make up a harmony part to a simple song to be sung with one of the music staff members. The vocal assessment is used to determine your musical abilities and vocal skills, and to assign you to the proper part (tenor, lead, baritone, or bass), taking into account the needs of the chorus and the discretion of the director.
* Unless we are preparing for a show or competition, you will be assigned a temporary spot on the risers near someone singing your assigned voice part, and you are encouraged to look at the music in your guest book and sing along as much as you are able.
* Later in the week, we will provide you with a Dropbox link that will contain the sheet music and the part trax for our audition song. For your vocal audition, you will be auditioning on this song only. You will be expected to memorize the notes and words for the song. Membership will provide an overview pamphlet.

**Week 2**

* You will sing on the risers, with the chorus, and continue practicing your audition song on your own time. Membership will meet with you after rehearsal to address any questions & to provide further information.

**Week 3**

* You will sing on the risers, with the chorus, using a provided Guestbook of music. At the end of rehearsal, you will practice the audition song with a quartet. You may use sheet music for this practice. Membership will meet with you after rehearsal to address any questions & to provide further information.

**Week 4**

* Your vocal audition will be held this night. During rehearsal, you will sing and record the audition song on the risers, with the entire chorus, and in a private room with an audition quartet and the director. Please remember that you will not be allowed to use the sheet music. A member of the music staff will listen to both recordings (in the quartet and on the risers) during the same week and give you written feedback, including whether you need to redo the vocal audition in two weeks.
* Based on that feedback, if you have passed your vocal audition, you will be given an unlisted YouTube Link or a Dropbox link of the choreography for the audition song. You will be expected to memorize the moves and perform the song with visual expression at the next rehearsal.

**Week 5**

* If you passed your vocal audition, you will be expected to perform the visual audition. You will be working with members of the visual team and will perform the moves to the audition song. Additionally, you may be asked to perform the audition song without the planned choreography so that we can observe your movement and expression on a song with limited or no planned choreography. The visual team will give you written feedback and let you know if you need to redo the visual audition at the next rehearsal.
* If you did not pass your vocal audition in week 4, continue singing your assigned part with the chorus. Utilize the feedback you received from your audition and work to master the audition song.
* Your visual audition and it’s required choreography links will only take place if you have passed your vocal audition.

**Week 6**

* If you passed your vocal audition in Week 4, but did not pass your visual audition in week 5, you will be expected to perform the visual audition again. See above Week 5 for full description.
* If you did not pass your vocal audition in Week 4, your second vocal audition will take place in Week 6. See above Week 4 for full description.
* Your visual audition will only take place if you have passed your vocal audition.

**Week 7 and Week 8**

* These are visual audition weeks only. See above write-ups for Weeks 5 & 6

**Number of auditions**

* You will have two opportunities to pass the vocal and visual auditions. If you do not pass the vocal and visual auditions, you may return to the chorus in six months and try again. At that time, if you do not pass these vocal and visual auditions, you may return to the chorus in eighteen months and try again.

Auditions can sound scary to some people but it’s not that bad! We’re a friendly group and we aren’t expecting you to be a fabulous vocalist (although it doesn’t hurt!). Any woman of average singing ability, with or without previous vocal training, has the potential to succeed in our chorus. To pass the audition, you need to be able to sing your part while singing in a quartet for the entire song. You’ll be asked to demonstrate how well you can match pitch, sing in tune, and hold on to your notes while singing with the other parts. If you can smile during all of this, that’s a big plus, because once you join the chorus, you’ll be expected to smile every time you sing -- so you might as well start now!

Once you pass your audition, you will submit an application along with a check for the membership dues (more on that later in this document). Your application will be reviewed and approved by the Chorus’ management team. This may sound like a lot of hoops, but it isn't. We work with you, and root for you, throughout the process. Once the team has voted you in, we will have an official induction ceremony during a Wednesday rehearsal welcoming you into the chorus.

**What can I expect after I join?**

# *Regular rehearsals*

We rehearse every Wednesday night from 7:00 P.M. to 9:30 P.M. We try to remember that this is a hobby and people do have jobs, families and other life obligations that demand their attention. However, to get the most out of being a member of the Carpe Diem Chorus, you will want to attend rehearsal every Wednesday evening, life permitting. Not only do you miss out on what we have worked on at that rehearsal if you are absent, but the other chorus members don’t have the benefit of your voice singing with them on the risers.

Our motto is “treat every rehearsal like a performance.” What you practice every week is what you’ll take on stage so it’s important to bring your smile and your energy every week. Our dynamic director always has something new and interesting to teach us. She is happiest when we give back as much energy as she gives us.

# *A commitment to learning the music*

One of the most important things you need to do is learn your music quickly. That lock and ring we’re going for starts with everyone singing the right notes at the right time. Musical accuracy is important and we need every member to be committed to that. Additionally, we perform without holding music, so the faster we learn the song and put down the paper, the sooner we can work on the performance. Our style of singing demands lots of physical energy, including choreographed moves. It’s just a lot more fun than standing in place holding music.

## On-going evaluations

You’ll need to have a recording device\* so that you can record yourself while singing with the chorus. You’ll want to do this often so you can evaluate your progress, but there is also a requirement to turn in a recording of selected songs to your section leader, who will listen and let you know what you need to work on. In order to perform with the chorus in competition as well as on paid performances and chorus shows, you’ll need to demonstrate to your section leader, through these recordings, that you meet the chorus’ minimum performance standards on the songs we plan to sing.

\* Smart phones are becoming the standard now and are what we recommend. Some of our members use small handheld digital recorders.

*Do I need to learn every song immediately?*

No. You’d probably be a little overwhelmed if you tried to learn every song in our current repertoire all at once. Your section leader will identify for you which ones you need to concentrate on first. This will depend on whether we are preparing for a show or getting ready for contest. It depends on when you join. Eventually, you will be expected to learn all the songs in the current repertoire.

# *Extra rehearsals and coaching*

We may have extra rehearsals when it’s close to a show or competition but we do try to keep these to a minimum.

We receive coaching from Barbershop experts throughout the year. These coaches specialize in different aspects of the craft. A coaching session, which usually occurs on a regular rehearsal night (but not always), is educational, inspirational and usually has a big impact on our performance. It takes a team effort to “kick it up a notch” so we expect all chorus members to make these rehearsals a priority.

# *Regional events and competition*

Sweet Adelines International is an educational organization and as members we are exposed to an amazing array of talented people who have a lot to teach us about being better singers and performers. The Carpe Diem Chorus is part of Sweet Adelines International Region 11, which sponsors three weekend events per year. Two are educational seminars (Summer and Fall), and the third is the Regional Competition for choruses and quartets, usually in March.

All members are encouraged to attend these events, held in Bakersfield, CA. The educational weekends are optional, but always worthwhile because of what we learn and bring back to our chorus. Competitions for novice quartets and double quartets take place on the educational seminar weekends. These are more informal than the Regional Competition, but exciting nonetheless and great experience for novice singers.

The Regional Competition is big for us. This is when we have a chance to perform for all the other choruses in our region to demonstrate what we have learned during the year. It’s an opportunity to be evaluated by a panel of experts and if we are honored with a medal for our achievements, it’s so much the better! We devote a lot of time and energy preparing for this competition, especially from January to March.

In addition to the chorus competition, there is also a quartet competition the same weekend. People who choose to sing in quartets devote additional time outside of chorus to this pursuit. The Carpe Diem Chorus is fortunate to have had members in several competing quartets. Quartet singing is definitely encouraged as it inevitably results in better chorus singing, too. We are proud to have had chorus quartets place in our regional competition. Our chorus quartet, “Cheers!,” placed as the regional champion quartet in 2011 and 2014, 3rd in 2013, 2016. Our chorus quartet, “Cachet” placed as the regional champion quartet in 2012, 2015, 2016, and placed 2nd in 2013. Our chorus quartet, “Makin’ Mischief” placed 4th in 2016 & 3rd in 2017. Our chorus quartet, “Chemistry” placed 4th in 2015.

## Annual Retreat

Every year the chorus spends a weekend together. The purpose of the retreat is to devote quality time to preparing our competition package. All members who are performing with the Chorus at Competition are expected to attend the retreat. We work all day Saturday and half of Sunday with a coach. On Saturday night, we come together for “fun and games.” Magical things often happen on these weekends. We have the opportunity to really dig into our performance and make many small adjustments that have a huge effect on the final product. It’s very exciting to experience this. We also have a chance to bond with our fellow singers whom we sometimes don’t get a chance to talk to on rehearsal night. We book our retreat coaches years in advance and often fly them in from other states or even other countries. These coaches are some of the best in the barbershop world.

# *Costumes and Makeup*

# A Competition costume, plus a variety of other costumes or accessories for shows and performances, stage makeup, including false eyelashes, and nail polish are all part of what we wear. You will need to purchase the Competition costume, in order to compete with the Chorus. We wear this outfit for several years in a row in order to keep the expenses down.

For shows and performances, we will wear costumes as prescribed by the show theme or script. These outfits usually come from our own wardrobes but sometimes you’ll have to purchase something if you don’t already own it or if it’s a special accessory (could be a scarf, a boa or a hat, for example) that everyone needs to have.

The makeup for competition and performances is prescribed and you will need to purchase a specific list of items. We also wear some of our own makeup for performances that don’t involve stage lighting.

Expenses for these items are outlined on page 6.

# *We are a volunteer organization*

An elected management team administers the Chorus. Their job is to keep the chorus running smoothly but they can’t do it alone. They depend on a large number of committees to do the work that keeps the chorus afloat. Every member is expected to participate on a committee or perform some kind of job during the year. This can include anything from decorating for a show to directing a show. We’re a lot like a small business so every kind of talent is required and utilized. No matter what you’re good at, we probably need it!

Because we are non-profit and self-funding, we all chip in on a variety of fund-raisers throughout the year. When we put on a show, everyone needs to sell tickets. Otherwise, we don’t have an audience and we don’t make any money! Other fundraisers include singing telegrams for Mother’s Day, and the like. We also take on outside performances to earn extra money.

The money we raise is used for a number of chorus expenses including director’s stipend, music arranger fees, coaching fees, CD/music duplication, and more.

# *Communications*

# Our chorus communicates via email; we also utilize Dropbox, which allows us to keep our chorus calendar, learning tracks and music, membership roster, and other vital information available for our members to access online. Although having a computer is not a requirement for joining, it is the main communication tool we use to keep in touch with what’s going on in the chorus. You’ll hear most often from the Chorus Management Team Coordinator, usually weekly, but committee Chairs will also communicate with the chorus via email. We encourage our members to have any information they need to share with chorus members go through these committee chairs and through the Team Coordinator so we aren’t all inundated with chorus emails every week. If you don’t have access to email, you’ll want to find an “email buddy,” someone in the chorus whom you can call each week on a regular basis to find out what the news is.

# *A chance to grow as an individual and have a lot of fun!*

As a member of the Carpe Diem Chorus, you will, at the least, become a better singer and performer. In addition to that, you can develop new skills in many other areas besides singing. It can be other musical endeavors like musical arranging or directing, creative endeavors like writing or staging a show, or designing flyers. There are any number of ways to grow in chorus management and leadership, marketing, public relations – you name it! And last but not least, you will have a ton of fun and make some great new friends!

***What kind of expenses can I expect to have as a member of the Carpe Diem Chorus?***

Being an active member of the Carpe Diem Chorus is not unlike many other hobbies. It doesn’t really matter if you enjoy skiing, golf, scrapbooking or even knitting; it seems to cost money. We do our best to keep expenses down but this section is here to give you an honest look at what you can expect if you decide to take up the wonderful and rewarding hobby of Barbershop singing.

Current annual dues are $520.00 for Regular Members. You can pay them all at once, semiannually, quarterly, or monthly. If you are under 26 years old, you are eligible for a reduced Youth Member rate, which is $404/year. If you have been a Sweet Adeline for 50+ years, you are eligible for a reduced rate of $354/year. The breakdown of the annual dues is:

a. International per capita fee for adults of one hundred dollars ($100); for youth of fifty dollars ($50); for 50+year members of zero dollars ($0).

b. Regional Assessment fee for adults of one hundred thirty-two dollars ($132); for youth and 50+year members of sixty-six dollars ($66).

c. Chapter fee, for all, of two hundred eighty-eight dollars ($288).

In addition to the annual dues, there are other expenses that active members incur. These vary from member to member depending on how much they participate. We anticipate that every member will want to go to the Regional Competition with the Chorus, so here is what you can expect to pay\*:

1. Competition outfit: $200
2. Black character shoes: $35-$50
3. Competition makeup: $50
4. Carpe Diem Chorus Retreat- January $155

(this includes meals; assumes two people per room)

1. Housing, Competition weekend – March: $170

(this assumes two people per room; some people share with more people to reduce costs)

1. Meals and transportation, Competition weekend: $85

This is an estimate and can vary a lot from one person to another.

To summarize, the cost to join and compete is about $1000 the first year ($750 for youth members). It’s less in subsequent years once you have purchased the competition shoes and make-up kit. These expenses will come due at various times during the year, depending on when you join. There are other expenses to consider for any items that you may or may not already own such as black pants, a digital recorder and other performance outfits/accessories that may be required for different performances.

We encourage our members to attend the other Regional events during the year whenever possible. Registration and housing expenses for these weekends are slightly less than for Competition weekend.

\*Please note that these expenses are estimated based on previous years. This year’s expenses may be different.

**Any questions?**

We’ve tried to anticipate all that someone might want to know about membership in the Carpe Diem Chorus and what to expect after joining, but if we missed something that’s important to you, please don’t hesitate to ask. Please talk to our Chorus Team Coordinator or our Membership Chair. If you have musical questions, these should be addressed by the Director, Mary Ashford.