

Chorus Chatter

News and Musings for Young at Heart Chorus Members

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Dallas Bowser grew up in the 1930s in a rural community near Warren, Ohio. He was named after his grandfather, Dallas Darwin Bowser, of Pennsylvania Dutch heritage. He started singing early, as a boy soprano in church and grade school. In high school he joined the glee club and was in high school plays and musicals. He joined the church choir and even took voice lesson for a short period. Dallas attended a small liberal arts college in Ohio, where he qualified for the A Capella Choir. He met his wife-to-be, Margery, in college and in the chorus. They have two children, four grandchildren and one great-granddaughter.

He started his career as an engineer with General Electric Co. in Cleveland, Ohio. While there, he joined a church choir (the only church choir that he's been in where you had to audition). After a few years, he transferred to Syracuse, NY with GE. There, he joined a church choir and a local theater group that produced amateur plays and musicals.

After Dallas retired in 1992, he and Margery bought a travel trailer and started roaming the West in the winters. They bought property in Albuquerque but decided not to move permanently. They then discovered Las Cruces and decided to become snow-birds. After buying a small condo here in 2007, they have been spending five months here every winter since then.

Vocal Care for Senior Singers

Staying active helps you sing more, and singing more helps you remain active. Here are some steps to maintain good vocal health throughout your life:

- Sing a little every day. Like all muscles, the ones you sing with become less flexible as you get older. Exercise them a bit every day.
- Warm up before you sing. Sing or hum to work your vocal muscles and do some breathing exercises as well.
- Use proper posture. Don't stoop as you walk or sit, work on your computer or watch TV. When you sing, stand tall with your feet parallel to your shoulders, our chest high and your shoulders relaxed. Keep your mouth and throat open so you don't hear any noise when you inhale or exhale.
- Sing deeply, with "warm" air. If you can't feel humidity when you place your hand in front of your mouth while singing, you aren't breathing deeply enough. When you breathe, your abdominal wall, sides and back should move, not your upper chest.
- Watch your speaking voice. Speak the same way you sing, and don't try to force your speaking voice into a lower pitch than normal. Change your pitch as you are speaking, and avoid monotones.
- Keep your body active. Sitting in front of the TV won't help you continue to sing at your best. Find an active hobby that helps your body combat age, such as swimming walking, cycling, golf or the gym.

The Harmonizer

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Phil Brooks was born in Omaha, Nebraska, while his parents were living in the nearby town of Blair. He lived in Nebraska through his college years at Nebraska Wesleyan University in Lincoln. He and his wife, Charlotte, have an adult daughter, Dawn, who lives in Kentucky. Their son died in 2016.

Phil says he owes most of his musical training to the public-school system of Geneva, Nebraska, a small farming community. He also credits various band and church choir directors, especially Dave Bunes, Director Emeritus of the St. Paul's United Methodist Church choir in Helena, Montana. He learned to play trombone in Geneva and continued to play through college. After storing the instrument in various residences for 43 years, Phil joined the Las Cruces New Horizons Band shortly after coming here in 2006. He also plays in the Helena, Montana New Horizons Band and the State Capital Band, a community summer band.

He has lived in Montana for more than 40 years, and Helena still is his permanent residence from May through October. He has spent winters in Las Cruces since January, 2006. While here, he sings with his church choir and also sung with the Good Time Singers before they disbanded.

His career was spent as a practicing economist, statistician and demographer, as well as teaching statistics and economics, principally at the Universities of Nevada and Kentucky. In addition to his musical interests, Phil enjoys family genealogical research and is a volunteer

income tax preparer, as well as serving on various church committees.

Once in Love with Amy, which the men will sing in April, is one of the great "lost song" stories in Broadway history. The song is actually from a 1948 Broadway musical, *Where's Charley*, which is based on the classic play, *Charley's Aunt*. When the show opened, its star, who gets to sing the song, was Ray Bolger, who played the "Scarecrow" in *Wizard of Oz*.

The show did quite well on Broadway with 792 performances in almost two years, but it's biggest hit was "Once in Love with Amy," written by Frank Loesser who also wrote the music for such classic musicals as *Guys & Dolls*. After the show closed, Warner Bros. made a movie of the musical in 1952, using most of the stars from the original cast. However, it was never released, other than an occasional airing on television. No original Broadway cast album was ever made. And so, most people have no idea this popular song was part of a Broadway musical.



Sue Schwenke is a relatively new resident at The Aristocrat, having moved there last May, but she has lived in Las Cruces since 1994. Sue has been singing her whole life, and you'll see her singing along with us when we are there.

Born in Berkeley, California, she lived there for the first 40 years of her life. She attended the University of California-Berkeley, where she

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majored in Psychology and also met her husband. He was a writer and wrote a book, "Backpacking Guide to the High Sierra," which the two of them spent a lot of time doing. He also started a company to publish the book. Tiring of city life, they moved across the country to Newbury, Vermont and bought a 50-acre farm. On it the two of them built a stone house themselves, leading her husband to write additional books, on small-scale farming and building a stone house.

Meanwhile, Sue taught at the local school in Vermont for 25 years, where she was the only Kindergarten teacher. Eventually, the winters there felt longer and colder, so they decided to move to the Southwest, where her husband had been raised. After settling in Las Cruces in 1994, Sue sang with several vocal groups, including an *A cappella* chorus of about 25 people. For a few years, she also sang with Vos Vaqueros when they opened the group to women because men's enrollment had declined. For a while, she also sang with a Sweet Adeline's women's barbershop group here. Eventually, she joined the Mesilla Valley Chorale, where she was a member of the alto section for many years. Sue's mother was a music teacher and singer, so she came by her ability to hear and sing harmony naturally.

She also spent some time singing with a small local group called "Sacred Harp," which refers to the vocal chords. This is a shape-note singing group, a different kind of music notation with its roots in New England but more widely used in the deep South and Appalachia. It's a type of gospel music sung at full pitch and volume, usually with the four voice parts seated in a square. Sue says they still meet every other Thursday from 6:00 to 7:00 PM in the vestibule of the Unitarian-Universalist Church, although

she no longer sings with them. She played piano for a while but now has a ukulele, and plays with a group that meets at The Aristocrat on Monday afternoons.

My Old Kentucky Home will be part of our April program. This Stephen foster classic, began as an anti-slavery ballad originally known as *My Old Kentucky Home, Good Night!* When Foster composed it in about 1852, he was likely inspired by Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Foster originally entitled the song "Poor Uncle Tom, Good-Night."

The first verse is an enslaved person's description of the natural beauty and his feelings associated with the Kentucky landscape. Then the lyrics go on to acknowledge that the farm on which the subject is enslaved is experiencing financial hardship and suggests the narrator knows he will leave the Kentucky farm as a result of being sold to settle the debt. The chorus describes a longing to return to the beauty of the Kentucky landscape: "Weep no more my lady, O weep no more today. For we'll sing one song for my old Kentucky home, for my old Kentucky home far away."

The real reason Moses wandered in the desert for 40 years is that, even then, men wouldn't stop and ask for directions.

The Value of Singing Together

The staff of the Barbershop Harmony Society (SPEBSQSA), reviewed more than 170 scholarly articles and compiled the findings of 72 of them into a report. It shows that singers are happier, healthier and more connected to others.

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Singing with others has a profound effect on physical and emotional health. It leads to deeper friendships, emotional connections and a sense of belonging. Singing gives meaning to our lives and relieves anxiety and depression. Singing with others has well-established physiological effects, from an improved immune system to higher cognitive function later in life. Of all the arts and all forms of music, singing is the most accessible, convenient, democratic and universal. If you have a voice, you can sing. That is why singing is seen by many as a central part of human culture.

The Harmonizer

More Proof of Music's Brain-Healing Power

In her book *My Stroke of Insight*, brain scientist Jill Bolter Taylor, Ph.D. chronicles her eight-year journey to heal from a massive stroke she suffered at age 37. Along with an amazing first-hand picture of the workings and healing ability of the brain, Dr. Taylor notes that, since her recovery, she has heard of many stroke survivors who had lost the ability to speak but still were capable of singing their messages. When some of us have sung at the memory care facilities The Arbors and Desert Willows, we've seen first-hand how people who have lost some brain functions come alive when they hear us sing, joining in or even dancing.

Be yourself; everybody else is already taken.

Oscar Wilde.

Yes! We Have No Bananas is a novelty song by Frank Silver and Irving Cohn, published in 1923. We will be singing it on our May program. Silver, explaining the song's origin, said his band was playing at a Long Island hotel, and he often stopped on the way to and from there at a fruit stand owned by a Greek. The owner began every

sentence with "Yess!", which haunted him, so he wrote the verse, and Cohn fitted it with a tune. Silver also may have been influenced by a shortage of bananas in the early 20th century, caused by Panama disease.

The song was the subject of a column by Sigmund Spaeth, who became famous as "The Tune Detective" through his books, newspaper columns, radio and television programs. He suggested that the melody could have been derived from a combination of parts of other songs, including Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus," My Bonnie lies Over the Ocean," "I Dreamt I Dwelt in Marble Halls," "Aunt Dinah's Quilting Party," and Cole Porter's "An Old-Fashioned Garden."

Replacing the original lyrics, you get:

Hallelujah, Bananas! Oh, bring back my Bonnie to me

I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls—the kind that you seldom see

I was seeing Nellie home, to an old-fashioned garden: but,

Hallelujah, Bananas! Oh, bring back my Bonnie to me!



Be sure to open your mouth and let the sound out when you sing!